Project Rock Island

by JustAnotherAnn

Summary

Another parallel universe, in which both Bea and Allie are alive and well, true to their original characters and fighting for their chance of happiness. That's all of the plot I plan to reveal, cause I'm a big opponent of spoilers and a lover of pleasant surprises.

Notes

Meeting the last quarter of the season 6, here's my first attempt at fan fiction. Yes, season 6 is well off, but I'm still hung up on season 4. I've been reading all Ballie fan fiction for a year now, and I can tell you, there is some crazy talent here in Wentworth section, which has helped me a lot in dealing with Bea's death and also with some personal emotional turbulence. So here's my contribution to the Wentworth community: I hope it will be a pleasant reading for you. I'm planning on uploading app. once a week, I'm looking forward to your comments and opinions and just hope that you'll like it, even if it will be at times a little different.
Prologue

Tess O’Brien was having a particularly difficult morning. Knowing what is awaiting her, she came to the office early, not later than seven thirty in fact, prepared her own coffee and tried to shake her grumpiness by sipping it slowly while going through her emails. That’s how she eased her Monday into four meetings before eleven o'clock.

Eleven twenty one and she still haven't made the decision who will be in charge of the Rock Island Project. Of course, Elaine is her most experienced event organizer and Tess knows she can rely on her to handle the matter professionally and within designated budget and deadline. However, Elaine can be very difficult at times, treating her co-workers like subordinates, eager to get the job done. Usually it is not a problem, her fierce personality dominating the others in a manner that they turn into workaholics who don’t even remember to complain. This particular time she would have to work closely with a brilliant, but very stubborn designer, and Tess could see a catastrophe rolling down the hill, if those two should work in the same office day after day, month after month. No, Elaine was not the person for this job, Tess shook her head with fear, foreseeing the storm which will come down to her head once Elaine finds out she was skipped over. After all, Elaine was a senior partner, and Rock Island Project was worth a lot of money and a real career boost. Yes, she will go to the Board to complain, and I will have to be brave enough to face them, Tess said aloud. They were a small branch of a huge company, and if the project of this magnitude underdelivers or disagreements were shown in public or in front of the client, she knew that the mother company would sell the rights to the project in a heartbeat, and shut the marketing branch down, rather than risking tarnishing company’s good name, which took decades to build.

She sighed approaching the window. She opened the Mars bar she was playing with in the last couple of minutes, hoping that few bites will help her regain her mental strength. No, not Richard, she thought her further options through. He was several times on a border to be reported for sexual harassment and no way she was gunna let him anywhere near that beautiful redhead.

Her assistant came in: 'Ma’am', he said apprehensively, 'I don’t mean to intrude, but it’s one minute past. Did you make a decision?'

'No, not yet. Did you call Mary?'

'Yes, ma’am, to put it mildly… it didn’t go well.'

Tess sighed in frustration. She felt angry with herself for being so desperate to try to convince Mary to come back early from her maternity leave. She called her herself yesterday, blabbing about this great opportunity, whereas she felt inside that she hit the rock bottom. Mary just wanted more time with her baby, but she was so desperate that she asked Todd to ring her one more time this morning.

'Argh' she cried with frustration, pushing the window open. 'Bloody Elaine, Todd! Bloody Elaine! This should be her pitch, her responsibility. But no, she cannot control her bloody temper and who am I stuck now with?! Swing-my-dick-Richard', she yelled as her assistant hurried to close the door behind him, 'or six hundred years old Jane Brickmann, who can’t login into Facebook on her own, let alone promote her project on social networks?! She is doing country fairs for God sake, and counting minutes to her retirement.'

Tess pulled her chair back, throwing herself into it, and taking her heavy head into her nervous hands. Couple of minutes passed in silence. Then she braved herself into raising her head: 'Please call Elaine and let her know that I have a project for her. And God help us all', she whispered.
'Ma’am, if you allow, you have Allie.’

'Don’t be silly', Tess had to smile, looking up at that inexperienced youngster’s face. 'Allie is a baby.'

'You may see her as a baby, Mrs O’Brien, but she is four years older than me and I am already a graduate. Three years since I’m allowed to drink, and all', he joked, seeing his boss’s look brighten up a bit. Being a mother of a nineteen year old son, she had a soft spot for his boyish attitude, and Todd used it abundantly to his everyday convenience. 'Really', he pushed while he was ahead, 'she has some great ideas, you should only hear her out, she could excel at Rock Island Project.'

'She told you so last Friday at happy hour?’ Tess laughed from her heart. 'You know she is engaged, right?’

'This is not how I like her’, Todd replied firmly, not wanting to be taken as not serious about business. 'I admire what she has achieved so far, what she has learnt, her approach to business.’ Then he almost whispered, blushing because revealing his deep personal ambitions: 'Ma’am, she is my role model. She is where I see myself in four years, if I’m lucky.'

Tess examined his young, genuine face. She stood up, walking once again to the big window on her right. She looked couple of minutes at grey clouds upon grey looking city. The window glass was still full of raindrops, left from this morning. So what did she know about young Miss Novak? Graduated with honours from Melbourne University, got her master degree in Marketing at Melbourne Business School on a local graduate merit scholarship. Those facts, together with her eloquence and friendly attitude, which are very useful traits in their line of business, convinced her enough into employing her as junior public relations manager, but was it enough to trust her with this kind of solo project? Sure, Allie was resourceful and creative, and after she’d done well assisting on few of Elaine’s and Richard’s projects, Tess entrusted her with several small projects of her own. She didn’t let her down on those, in fact she was more than satisfied. But to entrust a twenty-five-old with fourteen months’ work experience with such a big project, even thinking about it, surely would mean that she lost her mind.

She dialled a number: 'Oh hi Tess', she heard down the line. 'Hi Elaine, listen…', she started warily but was soon interrupted by Elaine speaking to someone in her office. 'Look, Tess is on the line and I do not have time to waste on fruitless discussions, ok? It is my way or highway, simple as that. Yes, Tess’, she continued into the microphone, 'what can I do for you?'

'Actually, Elaine, I have to apologise for interrupting. I meant to call Richard and must have dialled your number in error.'

'Never mind, Tess', she heard from the speaker and as she was about to press the end button also: 'Do we understand each other now…’, Tess raised her eyebrows in disapproval, then looked over to that fine young man who was her assistant and pride and joy of his parents. After all, she thought to herself, young should inherit this Earth.

'Todd’, she said to his hopeful face, 'would you be so kind to inform Miss Novak that I would like to have a meeting with her in my office, right after lunch?’

'Yes, ma’am!’ he almost jumped happily through the door, but his boss’s voice stopped him for a second in his tracks: 'And tell Miss Novak that she owes you a drink.’
Hello again! Thank you for the first feedbacks, here's Chapter 2.

Allie Novak was holding onto restroom sink by her underarms, breathing heavily, her head sunk low. She was fighting for air, sure, yet that was not a panic attack, but a reaction to a surprise. She held herself together, so confident in front of Tess O’Brien, then first moment alone, her legs turned into jelly. She lifted her head and examined her pale face. 'Make it or break it, Allie', she told the face in the mirror, 'now is your time'.

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'Is Bea always short for Beatrice?' Allie asked Paul during dinner. 'You think that’s possible that her parents simply named her Bea?'

'Please stop talking about her already.'

'I thought that we’re celebrating my big break at work. So why does it bother you when I talk about work?'

'I support you one hundred per cent, Allie, I am thrilled for you. But we’re sitting in this romantic restaurant and you can’t shut up about your co-worker, and it has seriously started to make me uncomfortable.'

'I think that she would make any man uncomfortable…'

'Jeez, do you hear yourself? You sound obsessed, like totally weird. Just stop it, alright? Let's talk about something else.'

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Allie Novak was staring at her ceiling long after Paul fell asleep.

'Hi, I’m Allie Novak', she was reminiscing January 11th 2016 - her first day in her new office, on her big project.

'Bea Smith', she said in a raspy voice.

Bea Smith, Allie repeated inwardly. She stretched her hand out towards the older woman, shaken by those raspy tones. And when Bea took her hand into hers, she felt suddenly ill. It was like her whole world went black in that second and she completely lost awareness for her surroundings.
She was trying to see her co-worker once she sat down opposite her, but as she spoke afresh, Allie’s head went heavy again and all that she could differentiate was red mist around a blur that should be her face.

'You know, Allie, that they will be laying the foundation stone for the hotel in twelve days from now. We don’t have much time to prepare. This is mainly your area of expertise, but given the little time that we have I am willing to help out any way that I’m capable of.'

'I was thinking rather a fancy picnic on the site, covered by a local TV, than two separate events, you know, save the client and honoured guests the trouble of returning from building site to town, in order to attend yet another boring business cocktail.'

'Sounds interesting. Go on.'

'I was also thinking, since it will be Sunday, that our business partners will be annoyed enough having to spend their day off away from their families, so why not making it a family day? A picnic for the whole family, imagine playing frisbees, badminton, dogs running around, children laughing, clients happy, news crew filming it all. You know, happy faces, family place, easy the best marketing there is.'

'And all for the cheap price of catering service. Bloody brilliant, Allie. I can see why Tess chose to send you down here.'

'Well, thank you, Bea', Allie shivered as she spoke her name for the first time.

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The following morning Allie was feeling slightly exhausted from the lack of sleep and also a little feverish from her dream, when she finally drifted off. She was walking in a blur in her dream, feeling warm and taken care of. She was almost blind, but still strolling around happily, as she was feeling protected and loved. Then someone told her that Bea had died. You are all by yourself now, they told her. So she screamed into this grey blurriness that surrounded her, as she felt the ground slipping away from her feet. Sudden sadness was tearing her apart, she cried, being parted in two.

She was shaken wake by Paul, who was touching her gently at first, but then with more firmness, as she failed to respond and continued to kick around the bed. She looked into her fiancé’s blue eyes, slowly becoming aware that she was home, in her bed.

'What happened, Paul?' she asked. 'I feel like I had a nightmare.'

'No, Allie. I am having a nightmare in which my fiancée is shouting “Don’t leave me, Bea” into my very heart.'

Feeling guilty, Allie turned her back to Paul, settling down into bed and reaching back for his arm to wrap it around her. She couldn’t quite figure out what was her exact transgression, but she knew deep down that she betrayed Paul so she did not dare to fall asleep again, out of fear of what she might dream of, and end up hurting Paul again.

So here she was, sitting in a public parking lot in front of her office building, in her car, since seven a.m., trying to make sense of it all. She struggled with her headache, yet she was still wide awake. Maybe it’s a chemical thing, she talked with herself, like Bea is producing some pheromones, which
don’t sit well with my organism, causing me temporary blindness. She was dreaming about such opportunity, ever since her first year in college, and she didn’t expect it to arise for couple of more years. But this was it, her big break, and whatever this thing with Bea was, it had to stop. Allie has pulled herself together, thanks to her sudden outburst of anger towards herself, jumped out of her car, and slammed the door violently. Even better, she said to herself, I will make an early start.

Approaching her office building, she stopped for a second, as she felt her stomach growling. She didn’t eat much during dinner last night, and she fled her home in a rush this morning, wanting to escape before having to face Paul.

She walked into a small diner next to her office building, and soon ordered a roast chicken sandwich, with lettuce sticking abundantly out of it. She also ordered a big cup of black coffee, and as the smell of it started filling her nostrils, she relaxed to her usual grinning self, being known and loved as a person who needed so little to be happy.

She looked around, the waitress was cleaning diligently one table on her left, and a mother was sitting across the room, nudging her sleepy daughter gently. Turning her head towards the sky, she noticed the day was starting to warm up, with morning sun shining through scarce white clouds, not showing any trace of rain that plagued them in the last week. What was I thinking about, Allie laughed at herself. If any girl ever had reasons to be happy, that should be me. I am in a stable relationship with this handsome, clever man, I have only the best mother ever, good education, an inherited house, no worries in the world except how to pull off this amazing hotel promotion project. I am sharing my office with this super friendly co-worker, for which I should be grateful. But no, I am going around sulking and causing myself nightmares. I should be ashamed to look her in the eye this morning, given the thoughts I had, ‘cause she has been nothing but pleasant to me. Good thing that I came to my senses now. I will make it right with Paul and continue enjoying my life.

Allie took the first bite, looking up at the clock in front of her, on the wall behind the counter. It was almost twenty to eight as clock hands were overlapping, forming one perfect black line. In that moment the front door opened and Allie’s eyes dropped slightly from the clock to the door beneath it, letting a slender female figure pass through.

Allie took in the sight in front of her. The woman looked her in the eye and smiled slightly before she approached the counter. This can easily be the most beautiful woman that I have ever seen, crossed Allie’s mind, as she was sizing up the stranger’s figure rationally. Long dark red curls were cascading over her shoulders, covering her upper arms even below the short sleeves of her white circle dress. That dress made her somewhat look like a cloud, business dress for sure, with that crew neck and below knee length, but more casual than formal looking, hugging her backside in feminine waves of the soft fabric. Not only dress and curls look smoothly on her, thought Allie, appreciating her smooth approach towards the cashier. The woman was too far away for Allie to overhear, but she understood how this woman displayed a certain form of a reserved charm, that seemed to have thrown the young cashier into an instant girl crush.

Sitting far from the counter, Allie felt safe enough not to try to look away. The woman half turned showing her smiley eyes and a strong jawline. Ray of sunshine went through her wild hair, and as she raised her hand to push one of the locks back, it was like her hand captured that sunshine in her palm. Allie felt trouble breathing. An unfamiliar feeling of throbbing between her legs arose and she turned her head in panic towards the sky in her window. Maybe I should see a doctor, she thought, as I am clearly having some sort of anxiety attacks.

She tried to compose herself repeating the names of the people she ought to contact for the upcoming laying stone foundation ceremony: Goldstein Catering Service, Flora’s Flowers, Mr. Jack Davis from the Local Council, client’s CEO Mrs…
Cut off by approaching footsteps, Allie looked up to see the woman in white dress walking her way with a food tray in her hands, surprised when she halted next to her booth and smiled broadly. Her dark brown eyes smiled together with her full lips and Allie felt warmth rising up her chest.

'Do we know each other?' a very much confused Allie asked.

The woman threw her head back, laughing at the top of her lungs.

'You doofus', she managed to spit out playfully. 'Do you mind if I join you?'

And there it was. Few words in that raw, husky contralto were enough to spin Allie’s head into dizziness.

'Bea', she whispered as the redhead placed herself across her seat. Her vision went blurry again, and she could feel tears forming along with tightness in her chest. Her dream came back to her fully, hitting her like a truck, of Bea dying, Bea leaving her… She didn’t know where it could be coming from but it felt so real, being left alone in the world.

'Are you alright, Allie? You look so pale this morning.'

Allie tried to reply, but her words froze in her throat.

She spent her working hours yesterday blinded by this woman, so much, that she couldn’t distinct her features. And now, she was trying so hard to squint, to sharpen her sight, but the picture kept doubling and smudging and spinning, oh my God, spinning so quickly.

'Allie, love, breathe, look at me, Allie', said the older woman in panic. But Allie only felt slipping further away into darkness that came over her senses, and it wasn’t until the other woman leant in over the table in concern and raised her chin that she felt release from the grip in her chest.

As she sensed Bea’s fingers lifting her head, Allie felt comfort washing over her, leaving her calm and composed, as her vision finally sharpened and she took in the face in front of her.

Allie felt like she has just landed, back home into those deep brown eyes, and smiled to them.

'I am just fine now, thank you.'

'Are you sure, do you want me to take you to the doctor?'

'I am absolutely sure. It was a temporary rush into my head, all gone now.'

Feeling Bea was still hesitant to drop it, Allie took her hand off her chin and squeezed it between her palms.

So Bea sat down again and turned her attention to blueberry pancakes in her plate.
Awakening

Chapter Notes

From Bea's perspective. This chapter will be the shortest in the whole novel, because Bea has to remain a little mysterious...

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Bea breezed into her usual breakfast place, feeling particularly light-footed that morning. With her dark blue eyes, in her dark blue suit, I’m Allie Novak she said. Semi-long blond hair, an open and honest face. Allie Novak.

Bea had terrible dreams that night. She was lying on her back, squirming on the hot concrete, with blood spreading around her belly, as she parted from life. But somehow it wasn’t important, she didn’t feel any pain, only a heartache because she was parting from Allie. She was looking at white clouds, as her soul was leaving her, and she could feel Allie's love for her coming in waves over her head, drowning her with so much happiness that she let go.

Five a.m. and Bea woke up to that feeling of happiness, so abundant, that she couldn’t rationally question either the bizarreness of the content of her dream or why the woman she only met yesterday was a part of it.

She got up and stretched her hands above her head, in a very good mood.

She took a long shower afterwards, seeing blue eyes staring back at her as she closed her eyelids under the water stream.

Rather than drying herself with a towel, Bea walked out from the shower naked, being only six a.m. and feeling like she had all the time in the world before work. She sat in the cosy window seat in her bedroom, padded in white eco-leather, and stretched her legs happily, letting her skin dry on its own. She read a book for an hour, gazing from time to time into distance, taking in the sunrise over the bay. When she sold her late parents’ house in order to buy her own, she made sure to secure one near the ocean, and then decorated every corner of it herself, so that she now felt each piece of furniture as a part of her own being. This house was only her own, as in eight and a half years of being its owner, Bea never allowed guests over.

Bea finally stood up at seven, yawning as she opened her closet. Due to her silly mood that morning, and knowing there was only planning with Allie and designing in their office awaiting her for the day, leaving face to face meetings for tomorrow, she chose a rather casual white dress to match her unusual, lazy feelings. She put a very light makeup on, and somewhat tamed her wild curls with coconut-smelling hair mousse.

As she was driving to work, she was led by this feeling of being drawn into blue-eyed pools, nearer and nearer with every kilometre. So when she entered the diner and looked right into them, she smiled, not at least surprised. It felt so natural, like a solid promise fulfilled.

But her happiness was soon washed away with concern, as Allie was looking ill.

She couldn’t shake the sudden worry, despite the young woman’s reassurances, until Allie took her
hand into hers, squeezing the life of her through her mouth.

Bea choked, feeling her heart beating out of her chest, as she was slipping down, back into her seat. She looked confused into her plate, hearing nothing but drumming in her ears.

She looked up into that gentle smile, and out of the blue, she felt like being grounded, her head suddenly clear, as she landed back home.

Chapter End Notes

See you next Saturday.
First Meal Together

They were eating breakfast mostly in friendly silence, but as they moved to their drinks, Bea started making small talk.

God, this woman has it so easy in life, Allie thought while watching Bea, she breezes her way into mesmerising people until opportunities are laid at her feet. How she talks to everybody, as if she was their queen, ruling lovingly upon them for hundreds of years now. And they happily submit, Allie concluded, the image causing throbbing between her legs again.

'Allie, you’re still here, righto?'

Allie startled from her thoughts, not realising that she has lifted a desire filled look to Bea’s face, but as Bea saw it, she understood, and blushed heavily.

Just when you think that she couldn’t get any more beautiful, Allie thought and the throbbing between her legs turned into pain.

'I asked were you from Melbourne.'

'Oh, yes', Allie woke up, 'born and raised. Never really left it much, except for my summer internship in England. You?'

'I’m from Sydney actually, moved here after post-graduation.'

'So you got a job here then?'

'No, not really. I was freelancing from home at the time.'

'So why abruptly leaving your hometown?'

Allie could hear Bea almost inaudibly sigh and regretted her inappropriate question.

But Bea didn’t take offence.

'Few months after I’d finished my masters, my parents died in a car accident. I moved as soon as I sold their house, ‘cause I needed a fresh start.'

'Oh Bea, I’m so sorry', Allie burst out and placed her hand briefly over Bea’s. 'I shouldn’t have asked.’

'It’s alright, Allie. You couldn’t have known. So, speaking of parents, yours must be proud since you landed your first big project?’ she smiled.

'Kaz, my adoptive mother, is over the moon. She swears she can’t stop smiling', Allie smiled herself.

'And your biological parents, Allie?’

Allie shrugged her shoulders dismissively:

'They also died young.'

After Allie had removed her hand from Bea’s, their hands remained on the table, slightly touching with their fingertips. Suddenly moved by Allie’s pain, badly hidden in her too dismissive words, Bea
reached for her hand and intertwined their fingers.

Feeling comfort, Allie also felt a shock rushing through her body. She held onto Bea’s fingers tighter, looking straight into her eyes.

They sat in silence for couple of minutes, not breaking eye contact, not parting hands.

'So, do you visit Sydney often?' Allie asked as her thumb started caressing Bea’s palm.

'In almost nine years that I’m here, I never visited once.'

'Nine years?' Allie raised her eyebrows. 'How old are you then?'

'Thirty four', Bea whispered, somewhat self-conscious in front of this young beauty.

'You could have fooled me into twenty four', Allie winked and there was that blush in Bea’s face again. I could make a sport out of it, Allie thought, realising in the same time that she’s been flirting, with a woman nonetheless. But somehow, she didn’t care. She gazed at Bea’s reddened cheekbones, as she swiped her thumb gently over Bea’s, and she didn’t care. It was like nothing and no one in the world existed anymore, except the two of them.

'It’s quarter to nine, Allie', Bea said after few minutes of silence, looking down on her wristwatch. Allie looked down at her wrist bones, noticing how delicate they are. 'Yeah', Allie said, 'the hands of the clock are overlapping again.'

Neither of them wanted to move first, so they sat another five minutes there, holding hands.

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'I am not disturbing you, am I?' Allie blurted out, as she looked over to Bea, who was sketching in her drawing pad.

Bea shook her head in denial, slightly smiling.

'How am I not disturbing you then?!!' Allie cried out in wonder, making Bea’s smile even broader.

Allie was in awe of this woman’s working attitude, who was designing so composedly during Allie’s non-stop and pretty loud phone calls.

It was four in the afternoon and Allie has managed to accomplish all the groundwork tasks for the upcoming ceremony next week. She applied for permission at Local Council website, spoke to environmental department wanting to check whether all of her ideas are legally allowed to organise in an untouched nature environment such as Rock Island. She hired the catering company she worked with several times already, the Goldsteins, and also arranged the flower delivery after letting Bea pick out the flowers to go with her design. And now, she just finished the calls with Little Rock town’s local TV and several important people in client’s company, who she wanted to personally invite to the event. How Bea could work so concentrated through that whole day’s rumble was beyond her comprehension.

'I guess I am in my own little world when I work', Bea replied. 'I actually find it difficult to work in the privacy of my own home. I find the silence so … uninspiring.'
'So how did you work when you were a freelancer?'

'I used to bring my laptop to the beach, or a park. With people laughing all around me, I could phase out into my work, but still feel their presence.'

'Wow, you are something else, Bea Smith! So what did you make me today, in this noise which I’ve generously provided for you?'

Bea smiled as Allie winked jokingly at her.

'Come have a look, Allie. I’m almost done.'

At those words, Allie stood up and crossed the room, stopping to look over into Bea’s sketching pad. As she was leaning over her shoulder, she felt a little dizziness from the smell of her hair, coconut being one of her favourite flavours. She looked at Bea’s face. Actually, ever since the fog in her head cleared this morning, she couldn’t stop looking into this woman’s features. This was the closest she’d approached her, her own cheeks so close to Bea’s. Her olive coloured skin was smooth from her cheekbones over her neck to her collarbones. And her eyelashes were black and long, covering Allie like a tent as she turned her face back to hers. Tent… Allie could swear that Bea read her mind, as she heard the word tent falling from Bea’s lips. She looked at the pad in confusion, seeing a clear drawing of a tent, and, embarrassed, she understood that she didn’t catch a word of what Bea was presenting.

Bringing a chair over, Allie sat in the safe distance from Bea, and concentrated on what Bea was showing her.

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Bea had made dozen of drawings of a white tent, which she was planning on building near the construction site. The first picture she’s shown Allie was of the fairy-tale looking tent exterior. The tent had a white fabric roof and on each of four corners it had white fabric too, tied to the corner pillar like a theatre drape. It was an open concept tent so that you could see from the outside what was going inside of the tent. And with each drape being tied with a big dark purple bow, along with one dark purple bow who’s long ends were flapping in the wind from the rooftop, the tent reminded of a present that you cannot wait to unwrap.

'It's beautiful, Bea', Allie smiled in satisfaction. 'But why are the pillars so large in girth?'

'Not only large in girth, but also made from steel.'

'They certainly could be a lot thinner, as the roof they will be holding is merely a cloth over our heads.'

'Maybe you should take a look at this picture then…', Bea smiled, picking out a drawing of the interior.

On the central side of the tent Allie saw a small stage, surrounded by couple of round tables and continuing into a 6x6m dance podium, as Bea wrote on the margin. On the left and right side was one additional steel pillar in the middle and between each pillar there was a four-seater swing hanged on them.
'Oh Bea’, Allie said, 'it's a lovely idea, it really is. But the client is expecting us to keep the costs low, as this is only an initial event, and I can't even begin to think what those pillars should cost, and then the swings…'

'Zero dollars.'

'... I am so sorry but we have to go with something more modest. But we can keep the tent idea though… What did you just say?!

'I said it won't cost us anything, as I have the pillars and the swings in the shed in my yard.'

'You have steel pillars in the shed in your yard?!

'Well, together with some friends I organised an activist gathering last year and I'm left with pillars and swings.'

'She has steel pillars in her shed. Oh my God. OK. But we have to lose the band.'

'I knew you were gunna say that', Bea turned her monitor towards Allie. 'They're called “The Rockets”, 'cause, you know, they are from Little Rock.'

'Shouldn't they be called “Little Rockets” then?'

Bea playfully slapped the top of Allie's head: 'Ya doofus. Anyhow, they charge only 900 if you hire them for a whole day's event, 1200 if they bring and set up their own equipment.'

'So… Finding equipment, hiring bands...You're going after my work, admit it?! You want to get rid of me, right?'

Bea threw her head back and laughed.

'No, your job is sooo tiring. I said I was gunna help, and that's enough of me. Besides, why would I wanna get rid of you? I think I've never met a person who has made me laugh more often. It will be a pleasure working with you on this project, Allie Novak.'

Now it was Allie's turn to blush.
Hello everyone! Another Saturday, another chapter! Looking forward to your impressions...

Allie made herself scarce of her house on her tiptoes, in order not to wake Paul, who had returned home after midnight following his sixteen hours shift at the hospital, but even more because she was haunted by the feeling that she was doing something improper, something prohibited.

What she was the most afraid of was him waking and coming down to have a breakfast with her. That was a sweet habit of his unless he’s had a particularly tough shift, and while Allie normally appreciated that he sacrificed his sleep in order to spend an hour with her, in the last three days she acted anything but normal.

After she had applied makeup and put on one of the most elegant business suits she possessed, having a scheduled meeting with clients at 10.30 and wanting to make an impression, she sneaked through her front door with her briefcase in one hand and her shoes in the other. Closing the door, she put her shoes on and ran towards the garage.

Entering the diner, Allie was surprised to see it’s packed.

'Busier than yesterday, huh?' she smiled at the young waitress who was standing near the entrance.

'Actually, this is a normal picture around this time. Yesterday being a slow day was a miracle.'

Yes, yesterday was a miracle, Allie thought and smirked at the youngster, who was carrying a name tag 'Molly'.

She was just about to stand at the end of the queue to place her order, when she spotted Bea, standing up from her seat and waving her to come over.

Allie's heart got stuck in her throat as their eyes locked. She approached the redhead as if she was walking in a dream.

'Hi', she smiled.

'Hi yourself', Bea smiled back. 'I took a liberty of ordering for you.'

'Blueberry pancakes, your favourite. How thoughtful of you', Allie laughed.

'Well, I still don't know what's your favourite and I thought that you would appreciate it, given the queue.'

Allie looked at her plate placed opposite Bea's seat and slid it across the table to Bea's plate, sitting down next to Bea.

She looked into her dark brown eyes.
'I appreciate it,' she said earnestly.

'Something wrong with your seat?' Bea asked. She has ordered herself an orange juice, but black coffee and a glass of milk for Allie, and was now amused watching how Allie was downing the milk pretty much as soon as she set down. Her lips on the glass rim, Allie couldn't respond right away, watching her instead with her blue, smiley eyes. There was a hint of mischief in those eyes and her busy lips started forming a smile too, which caused her to almost choke on the milk.

'Ya doofus', Bea smiled back and ruffled her hair.

'What?' Allie said, the picture of innocence. 'It's noisy and I just wanna hear you. We have eighty minutes until nine and I want to use them well. I've been dying to ask you stuff.'

'What do you wanna ask?' Bea's serious eyes locked with hers.

Quite serious herself now, Allie tucked a stray lock behind Bea's ear.

'Everything', she replied.

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Fifteen minutes later Allie was already informed that Bea's favourite colour was red, that she preferred cats over dogs, seafood over veggies, liked working out and running on Sunday mornings and was generally into sports.

'And what's your favourite sport to watch on telly?'

'Soccer', Bea replied.

'Really?' Allie raised her eyebrows slightly. 'We suck at that.'

Bea smiled: 'Not so much anymore. And do you watch some sports?'

'Only tennis', Allie said, 'kind of passionate about that, but that's about it for me.'

'I like tennis too.'

Allie put another piece of pancake in her mouth.

'These are really good', she said with a full mouth. 'Okay, the next question is really easy: What did you study?'

'I took courses of interior design and landscaping, as well as some drawing and art history. In my postgraduate education, I turned to graphic and web design, afterwards completed a Microsoft course in web development and obtained their certificate. My idea was to cover all the bases, as I don't want to spend my life working on the same kind of project. That's what I like about this job: it's a huge company and designing jobs they have for me could not vary more, from decorating an office to illustrating a book cover to setting up a website to landscaping a garden or decorating a hotel, in this case. We also have a sports magazine among our daughter companies - by the way, it's the floor under ours, my friend works there - and they often consult me to choose a page layout and decide between photographs to use. It's pretty challenging, this job, each time something new. When I used to work on my own, one customer recommends you to another and they all want "the same as you
'Well, I'm glad that you enjoy your job. So how long do you work for “Hagurson Conglomerate Companies”?

'Eight years now. You?'

'Like fourteen months', Allie smiled.

'So, how is it there, the atmosphere in your regular office building?'

'Pretty much the same, friendly. We have four senior managers, and eight junior managers, of juniors me being the longest there, the others are only couple of months out of uni, some are still enrolled in their graduate studies. Then there's Tess, you know her, she's our operations manager, and Todd, he's her assistant and kind of a friend to me.'

'Sounds like you have a fun lot over there. You must be bored, stuck in an office with only me for a year.'

Allie lifted her head quickly to meet now somewhat insecure dark orbs. She put down her fork and cupped Bea's cheek briefly.

'But not at all', Allie said, losing herself in that dark glare.

***

It was five to ten when they locked their office and headed for 'Hagurson Public Relations'. It was only few blocks away, but they didn't want to risk being late for the most important meeting in Allie's life. Both agreeing that it would be stupid to drive separately to the same place, they headed to the public parking lot in front of their building, where Allie had parked her car earlier.

'Did you put in a request to be assigned own parking space in our building's garage?' Bea asked.

'Yes, I did, yesterday. However, that guy from HR said it could take weeks.'

'No sweat', Bea said as she buckled up, 'I know who to talk with. The trick is to bring the garage manager to find you a place and then make him call HR. If you leave it to HR alone, it will drag forever.'

'And you're cosy with that garage manager guy?' Allie asked as she started the engine.

'I repaired his bike last year, for free. I'd say he owes me a favour. Besides, there is no reason for him to drag it out - the spot next to mine has been empty for ages.'

'Repaired his bike? Are you serious?'

'Why wouldn't I be serious? You think a woman can't do it?' Bea's voice came across feisty.

'No, of course not. Just didn't expect it, with you being so elegant all the time, y'know. So you're a bikie or something?'

'I was born on a bike I think', Bea smiled. 'My parents had their own company - a Harley dealership and workshop, so I did my first repair before I started school.'
‘Do you still ride a bike?’

‘Of course. Almost every day. Saturdays me and my crew do races outside city, it really clears your head, y’know, gives you an energy boost for the whole office week ahead.’

‘Your crew?’

‘I ride with “Burnt Angels”. About thirty people, we are a very close-knit group, careful about letting new people in.’

‘Wow! I’m floored. I will have so many questions later. Anyway, thanks for the parking space, Bea’.

‘You’re welcome. Now let’s go over your presentation again.’

***

Being the only one already acquainted with all present parties, Tess made the necessary introductions.

‘Bea Smith, our designer; Allie Novak, public relations and marketing manager. This is our client, Mr Jack Johnson, the owner of “South Star Hotels”.’

Both women shook his stretched out hand and smiled:

‘How do you do? Nice to meet you.’

‘Allie, Bea, this is Mrs Rodgers, the CEO of “South Star Hotels”, Tess continued.

‘Oh, yes, we spoke on the phone yesterday, Miss Novak. Nice to put a face to a voice’, Mrs Rodgers smiled pleasantly.

Allie smiled back:

‘Nice to meet you in person, Mrs Rodgers.’

‘And last but not least’, Tess continued, ‘Ms Ann Hagurson, owner of “HCC”.’

Allie gasped in surprise. In fourteen months that she’s worked there she never met the big boss. She felt her palms getting sweaty, not that she would ever let it show.

Ann, a wrinkled woman pushing seventy, with feeble body but sharp mind, turned first to the redhead:

‘How are you, Bea?’ she kissed the younger woman’s cheek. ‘It’s been ages. Pleased to see you looking well as always.’

When she turned to face Allie, Ann’s smile stiffened, her green eyes piercing into her face, sizing her up and down, as if to make sure that the youngster can pull this project off.

Allie felt her tongue going dry and her heartbeat increase. I can pull it off, she said to herself, can’t I?

‘Welcome to big players, Allie’, Ann stretched out her hand, her look still cold as ice.

For a moment there, Allie froze. Then she felt a gentle touch along her spine, Bea instantly calming
her down, while in the same time pushing her towards the old woman. Allie shook the offered hand and said in a firm voice:

'Thank you for the opportunity, Ms Hagurson. I will not let you down.'

The old woman's eyes still lingered on that baby face, as they all took a seat. Given the size of the project she surely hoped that Allie would come up with the goods. She noticed the quick squeeze Bea gave to Allie's shoulder as she sat down next to her and sighed, in her mind making temporary peace with the youngster. At least they get along well, Ann observed two women exchanging understanding looks as they were all settling down, packing out their documents. Bea certainly seems to respect the blonde, Ann thought, and that speaks a lot.

Mr Johnson was the one who took the first word:

'First of all, I would like to state how happy we are that we get to be represented by HCC on the Rock Island Project. HCC is a company known for its reliability and good business practice and we have no doubts that you will manage to put our new hotel on Australia tourist map.'

Allie felt her mouth going dry a bit again, knowing that the representation part will be mostly lying on her shoulders.

'Rock Island is a 20km² island in Tasman Sea, three hours ferry ride from Melbourne or much faster reachable by chopper. There are no direct flights or ferry rides to the Rock Island itself, but there are several daily departures from Melbourne to Little Rock, which is a nearby island and ironically much bigger, despite what its name suggests. Little Rock has a population of thirty thousand and an area of 305km². We intend to keep the transportation routes as they are. Little Rock is easily reached from Melbourne and from Little Rock to Rock Island it's only ten minutes boat drive. There are plenty of motorboats to rent in Little Rock, but we certainly intend to transport hotel guests with our own ferry, as they arrive in Little Rock.'

Mr Johnson took a sip of water and soon continued:

'Rock Island was in private property for centuries. The last family members moved out a while ago and when they decided to sell, we made the highest bid. The island is intact, apart from the uninhabitable old mansion that we are currently tearing down. There are no dangerous animals there and no shark was spotted for a decade. However, we intend to establish a regular shark patrol once the hotel is built. On the place of the old mansion we will lay foundations for our new hotel, and on the same side of the island we plan to build two dozens of bungalows, cottage-style, a spa centre and children's daily care with children swimming pools. The rest of the island we intend to keep intact, apart from the walking and hiking trails we will establish and adequately mark. That means 95% of the island will be wild nature: forests, grassland and free beaches, home to small animals and resort to anyone seeking break from a busy city life. That's why we don't want any direct traffic connection to Melbourne - we consider we found an isolated piece of paradise and intend to keep it that way. There will only be a small chopper, parked at all times on the hotel roof, in case of emergencies. Upon arrival, all guests who intend to explore the island beyond hotel premises will be given a lecture about the topography of the island and how to respect nature.'

Watching Mr Johnson speak earnestly, Bea felt warmth spreading through her chest, ecological issues always being close to her heart. She was suddenly looking forward to next weekend, when she can explore this paradise herself.

'Now I would like to ask Mrs Rodgers to explain our expectations from HCC and your individual tasks', Mr Johnson concluded.
'Right', the pleasant brunette took over, her voice still kind but tone all-business. 'I will be your direct contact for this project, feel free to call me or email me as often as you need to. We will make Wednesdays 10.30 our regular weekly appointment, for the matters of updating me on your progress and me giving you good-to-go on your ideas and approving the necessary budget. Ms Smith, your part is very straightforward: Rock Island hotel will have 224 guest rooms and apartments and we would like you to design each room as differently as possible. Here is the Blu-ray with hotel blueprints from our architect.'

Mrs Rodgers paused until the Blu-ray was passed from person to person and into Bea's hands, then continued:

'The hotel building itself was our first priority hence the bungalow plans are not drawn yet. Our architect will send you blueprints for bungalows in a few weeks' time. While we want the rooms in the hotel to be quite diverse, we would need only one bungalow design - we want all twenty four bungalows to be uniform, as we want to charge them the same price. We expect you to spend ten months doing drawings in your office, presenting me with new ones each weekly meeting, and to spend the last two months on the field, making sure the furnishing goes according to your design and forming the landscape on the hotel premises. Our assessment is that it is a doable amount of work for an expert with your experience, but you will see how things go. If you'll be needing an assistant designer, please let us know. We are reluctant to hire them right away, because we love your work and as diverse as we want the rooms to be, we would still like them all to share the same recognisable style, carry your own aesthetic stamp.'

Bea nodded:

'I feel confident that I will manage to finish the drawings in ten months' time on my own, it is certainly good to hear that assistance is offered if needed.'

'Bea is temporarily released of her normal duties in HCC', Tess cut in. 'She helped us hire her one-year replacement so that she can solely focus on Rock Island Project.'

'That is good to hear, Mrs O'Brien', Mr Johnson replied, 'we certainly do appreciate your dedication to our project.'

'Miss Novak, your role will require a bit more of an improvisation, I'm afraid. We hope that you will manage to make our hotel known to general public before the grand opening on December 20th. As we established on the phone yesterday, you've already started the ball rolling on your first task, the cocktail party following the foundation laying ceremony next Sunday. We will come back to that later. Afterwards we expect you to first cover the basics with social network promotion: you will set up and administrate Rock Island’s Facebook, Twitter and Instagram account. Bea has already set up a basic website so you will write the contents for it and she will combine texts with photographs. We will soon shoot couple of commercials so we hope that you will be able to distribute them accordingly on TV and radio. Other than that, we expect live promotions in Melbourne and other big cities, taking part in tourist conventions, organising promotion parties', Mrs Rodgers concluded.

'Mrs Rodgers filled me in on your plans for next Sunday, Miss Novak', Mr Johnson took over, 'but now I would like to go into details, if you don't mind', he showed Allie to video beam projector.

Allie had scanned Bea's drawings yesterday and put up a small PowerPoint presentation. As she was standing up to take the stand in front of everyone, she noticed the lines Bea has just scribbled in her diary: 'Just walk and talk like you own the room, Allie.'

She smiled warmly at the redhead and approached the video beam with a new boost of confidence.
Bea’s eyes were fixed on the slender blonde figure in the centre of the room. She held herself self-confident and came across knowledgeable and versed in her line of business, Bea finding it hard to believe that this was the first big meeting in blonde's professional career.

Bea leant in more comfortably in her chair so that she can fully take in the sight of a woman in front of her. Her eyes glistened towards the young woman and she barely held in a smirk. She was proud of how Allie succeeded to take control over her nerves earlier, she didn't believe anyone even noticed her initial anxiety. Well, anyone but her. What was it about the blonde, Bea asked herself, that made it seem like Bea knew her already, like she could read her from her face and look into her soul. Bea usually didn't have much patience or interest to go into people's sublayers, but with Allie she was already inside, without even trying. Yes, everything with Allie seemed different, so natural, and Bea realised she has already opened up to the young woman more than to anyone in years. Yet she wasn't convinced that that was necessarily a good thing.

After obtaining a green light on their idea of a whole day picnic next to the building site for the next Sunday, Bea and Allie nipped over to Allie's old office to say hello to her colleagues. Elaine didn't want to give anyone the satisfaction to see her hurt feelings for being skipped over so she greeted Allie friendly, even if reservedly. Junior managers, all twenty-two-year-olds, hugged her out cordially, saying they already miss her wit around the office. Bea was pleased to see Allie was so popular, but all of a sudden felt hundred years old. Tess wanted to have a word too, establishing that she will drop by every Tuesday morning to their office to have a tune up, while Wednesday meetings with her and Mrs Rodgers will be held in the conference room they just occupied.

Five to twelve, Allie parked out of the garage, asking Bea where would she like to take their lunch.

'A quick stop at building's canteen would be just fine today', Bea replied, 'we're stuffed with work and already lost the whole morning.'

Allie nodded in agreement. Light rain was dripping on the windscreen and she was hoping they would manage to get into their building before it escalates.

The rain was getting heavier with each passing moment and in five minutes' drive to their office, the heavens made it seem like the end of the world was near. The heavy rain turned into a storm, minimising visibility, and Allie was relieved when she managed to park her Mini on the parking lot in front of their office building.

They were trapped inside the small car though, world crashing down on them. It got real dark in there and nothing could be seen but a curtain of a heavy pouring rain.

'There goes our lunch', Bea unbuckled and threw herself back into her seat in frustration.

'Just be happy we made it until here in one piece', Allie replied, her eyes still wide, 'or didn't you see that giant ripped off branch we nearly missed?'
'You're right, I guess. We'll just order in later. Pizza or Chinese?'

'Pizza please.'

'Okay.'

They sat quietly for ten minutes, checking their phones. As they finally put their phones down, they both turned in their seats to relax on their sides, facing each other, their knees touching.

'You were impressive back there', Bea gushed out, with a huge smile on her face.

'Thanks to you.'

Bea raised her eyebrow questioningly.

'I could only pull it off because you gave me support', Allie elaborated. 'Thank you for all the gestical encouragement and especially for your note - it gave me wings.'

Bea blushed profoundly:

'You're giving me too much credit. It was nothing much and you would also have done it well without me.'

Allie took one of Bea's unruly curls off her face and kept playing with it, while looking Bea straight in the eye:

'Perhaps well but not exceptionally well like we did it today. Every time I look at you it dawns on me how exceptional you are, Bea, and how lucky I am that you entered my life.'

Bea didn't know what to say back. She felt like the car sides are coming nearer and threat to smash her. She would like nothing more than to jump out of that car and run away, alas the stormy rain wasn't abating.

Feeling the need to break the terrifying momentum, Bea leant forward to the dash panel, thus forcing Allie to let go of her curl, and turned the radio on. She wanted to play some talk show to silence Allie, however only noise came through, the storm obviously severing transmissions.

'Then it's a perfect opportunity to hear what music you store on your phone', Allie chirped out and leant forward herself to grab Bea's phone. Her fingers colliding with Bea's, who reached towards her phone in attempt to stop her, she noticed how Bea quickly pulled away and back into her seat. Allie pressed play on the widget on Bea's home screen and after putting the phone down on the dashboard, she leant back into her seat.

Rock music, sung in a deep female voice, filled the air. It was not familiar to Allie, but she quite liked it, which didn't stop her to chat through first two songs, managing to get only one syllable responses out of the redhead.

Eventually trying of being the only one keeping the conversation alive, Allie went silent too, while her eyes switched from Bea's pensive face to heavy rain curtain surrounding their car.

The weather was raging outside, but inside it was peaceful and secure. A new song started, with a strong opening melody, and Allie took instant liking to it.
Oh I want to swallow the moon
Give a smile back to you
Lighting your way…

Upon hearing those lyrics, Allie's eyes shot straight back to Bea's, the feeling they evoked reminding her of Bea, and Bea alone. Their eyes were glued to each other's as the song went on powerfully:

Tell the angels they'll just have to wait
Cause I want to stay here in this moment
Can I quietly slip into you
You and I can stay here in this moment
Let the world fade away
I just want to stay with you.

Allie felt like she was melting into the other woman, whose eyes got darker and wider, not leaving hers for a second. Her hand couldn't refrain from stroking the red hair, her pulse quickened, and warmth dispersed throughout her chest. Bea has become so precious to her that it hurt.

The song was in its middle as lightning stroked near, Allie jumping from shock, a second later finding her frightened self holding with shaking arms around Bea's neck. As thunder followed, she shut her eyes into Bea's neck.

'Don't be frightened', Bea reassured her, as her hand soothed the blonde's shivering back, 'car tyres act like protection against lightning strike, we are perfectly safe in here.'

'I know, I know, but I can't stop my own stupidity. The fear is an instinctive thing.'

Another lightning and thunder followed, Allie keeping her grip firm throughout.

After the second stroke, the heaven seemed spent though.

'Look, the rain almost stopped', Bea said softly like she was consoling a child.

So Allie lifted her head from Bea's neck, but not at all interested to look through the window at whatever Bea was showing her.

Instead her gaze wandered once again to chiselled cheekbones, full lips, straight nose, smart forehead, and those currently so distant, beautiful brown eyes. Wanting to gain their attention again, Allie's hand cupped Bea's chin, causing her to look at her again.

Having finally touched that smooth skin, Allie's hand took a life of its own, unable to refrain from further exploring. Her fingertips followed the arch of her eyebrows, the back of her hand caressed olive cheeks.

Bea was scared of the outpour Allie didn't even seem aware she was showing, but she felt powerless against the touch that seemed to turn her into jelly. She wanted to press a kiss into that soft palm, but that desire scared her more than anything. Mesmerised like by a snake she remained frozen, forced to enjoy the caresses she was afraid of, until a cold metal grazed her cheek, shaking her awake. She pulled back from Allie’s touch and her look dropped to the diamond ring on Allie's finger, as it did many times since she met her.
'You speak about everything', her bitter voiced rasped out, 'except the most obvious thing'.

Bea's finger tapped on the icy rock then in one sudden movement she opened the car door and just like that, in mere seconds, she was running across the parking lot towards their building, trying to avoid getting wet under the last remaining raindrops, falling lightly from above.

Stunned Allie was left alone in her car to collect herself. She took Bea's phone into her hands and stopped the music, making sure she remembered the artist's name. She put Bea's phone into her purse, and hers into her briefcase, hanged both on her underarm and got out the car.

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Two hours later, as they were finishing off their capricciosa, Allie uttered:

'His name is Paul. We met at campus, when I was in my first year of grad school and he was in his last year of medical school. We were best mates for two years, then started dating about year and a half ago. He is a very good man and treats me right. When he entered his registrarship in Royal Melbourne Hospital last fall, he started making a more decent income and proposed to me. I accepted, but we don't plan the wedding for a few more years. I don't know how it slipped my mind to tell you, he is so long an inseparable part of my life that I subconsciously assume our relationship is known to everyone. But you will meet him at the picnic next weekend and you'll see for yourself that he is really good for me so you can stop worrying', Allie smiled in oblivion to true motives behind Bea getting upset earlier in the car. 'Are you bringing a date?' she added.

'No, I'm single', Bea replied, 'and besides, it's only a regular business day to me, something to get it over with before I'm allowed to return to my drawing pad. However, I can't seem to stop my neighbours, and best friends at the same time, to come with me. They have been married for ten years and apparently want to sparkle up their romance with a getaway weekend to an exotic island. So they will be coming with us next Friday and stay for the weekend in the same hotel. You mind?'

'No, no, quite the opposite, I'm looking forward to meet your friends. Paul can't join me for so long though', Allie sighed, 'he will be on roster and had only managed to get most of Sunday off, so he will come to picnic on Sunday morning and return with a 4 p.m. ferry to make it to his night shift.'

'It is very nice of him to go through such trouble on his one day off, just to support your picnic', Bea was surprised.

'I didn't want him to tire himself so but he insisted. I told you he treats me right. Sometimes I think it's more than I deserve', she sighed again.

Bea's head sprung up quickly:

'Don't you ever think that again. I haven't known you long, but I know you enough to understand that you are a woman who deserves everything good and pure. He understands that too and obviously cherishes what he has.'

Allie felt warmth in her chest rising under that darkened gaze from across the room, and spreading from her insides all the way into her cheeks. Not knowing how to respond, she lowered her head into her monitor and they both started working.
The rain picked up again after six p.m. so Allie decided to stay in after work and do some chores around the house. She was dusting and cleaning, waiting on Paul to finish his shift so they can have a dinner together. She sang to a tune coming from her laptop while dusting the top book shelf, as Paul walked in, his muscular arms winding themselves around her waist and lifting her up into an embrace and kiss.

'How come you're listening to Melissa Etheridge all of a sudden?' he asked as he put her down.

'Oh it's just some music I heard today and then decided to buy online.'

'And where did you hear it exactly, if I may ask?' he persisted.

'Bea's phone', Allie uttered, her gaze low on the ground.

'Bea's phone', Paul repeated contemplatively. 'I knew she was a lesbian. Something about the way you were describing her just screamed gay to me from the start.'

'Bea's not a lesbian! Why would she be a lesbian?'

'Well, Melissa certainly is, and also an icon of LGBT community. You would actually know that if you’ve ever paid any attention to the music I love. I told you several times she is one of my favourite singer-songwriters, but you never remembered.'

Allie felt ashamed a bit, but scrapped back:

'She is? Oh, I reckon that makes you gay too, aye?'

Paul wanted to chuckle but found the sound stuck in his throat.

'Whatever you say', he muttered eventually, 'but you are so taken with that woman you need to be careful not to turn gay for her'.

He ducked quickly when a revolted Allie threw a dusting mop at him.

Chapter End Notes

Lyrics belong to the song "This Moment" by Melissa Etheridge.
'Big plans for the weekend?' Bea asked only half interested, as they were leaving their office on Friday afternoon.

'Double date with my friend Regan and her new boyfriend. We have dinner reservations for tonight and then we'll just head off to some club to dance. You?'

'Hitting the gym tonight then meeting "Burnt Angels" in the morning.'

'Paul is off work tomorrow so we plan to stay up all night and not even see the morning’, Allie giggled. Then a thought crossed her mind:

'Hey, Bea, could I join you on your running routine on Sunday? Paul is on roster since six a.m. and I sooo don't want to spend another Sunday going for lone strolls or playing on my piano in an empty house.’

Bea thought it through for a second:

'I usually prefer running alone, but sure, we could give it a try this once.’

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Sunday nine a.m., Allie got off the tram at the junction of Clyde Street and Raleigh Road and took a turn right, just like Bea had told her to. She was expecting to have to wander around until she finds the right trail, but Bea's simple instructions were actually very accurate and only after a three hundred metres’ walk she could already see the redhead in a close distance, one leg lifted on the bench, stretching out.

Bea still haven't seen her coming, but Allie has already started smiling at her. The joy she felt upon her eyes merely falling on the other woman was uncontrollable. Every working day that first glimpse of Bea always brought her the same euphoria - it was a promise that her daily portion of pleasure has only just begun and that the best is yet to follow.

She snuck up behind Bea, announcing her presence with a light tickle on Bea's ribs and a peck to her cheek.

'You look like a model!’ Bea smirked when she turned around and took in the sight of her young friend.

'You don't mean that in a good way, do you?' Allie was gauging by the light spottish curve of Bea's mouthline.
Allie was wearing rather posh olive joggers with camo print, patch pockets on the sides and fake zippers on her ass, combined with a pink t-shirt with tinsels. Bea swallowed her amusement, wanting to remain polite to the other woman, but when Allie lifted her leg on the bench to start on her stretching, Bea spotted a black satin bow on the rim above Allie's ankle and bent over with laughter.

'I'm sorry, I'm sorry', she laughed, holding onto her belly.

'What? If I cark it here today, I wanna go down in style!'

'Come, you doofus!' Bea tugged on her hand, dragging her to the narrow footpath. 'You're not gunna die! I picked out one of the easiest tracks in town’, Bea raised her chin to point out a pair of kids that were jogging in front of them.

Allie couldn't quite agree, because after a kilometre of her fair effort along the Maribyrnong River, she hugged around a palm tree, calling after Bea:

'Time out, time out, recess!'

Bea was jogging at a slow pace so that Allie could follow and not tire much, and was pretty surprised to see that she was exhausted already. When she ran back to her, Allie breathed out in embarrassment:

'You know what? You go. I've had enough for one day.'

'No way.'

'I'm just holding you back’, Allie said with a sad expression on her face. 'I'm just gunna go back, sit in a café, order a flat white. I'm good really, you go.'

Bea lifted her chin and looked directly into her eyes:

'Hey, hey, Allie I know is not a quitter.'

'You've known me, like, for a week!' 

Bea wouldn't budge. Her chocolate eyes lingered persistently on hers and she said in a serious tone:

'But I know you.'

Again she tugged on Allie's hand and led her to the footpath.

'You're just in a little worse shape than I thought, judging by your appearance. How 'bout we take a little walk until you cool off and then we can ease you into some basic exercises?'

Allie couldn't resist the invite coming in that sweet tone so she inhaled deeply and followed the redhead.

Watching Bea side bending and lunging was probably the most difficult part of Allie's Sunday ordeal. She was already so used to that annoying feeling of throbbing between her legs whenever she was around Bea that she's learnt how to ignore it and not dwell upon it later. However, her current challenge was a whole new level of strain. Bea told her to copy what she does so she at least had an excuse for her eyes to remain glued to the redhead's firm backside and muscular calves. Sweat dripping down her face and neck, for which she knew it couldn't be the product of a few basic exercises she has just performed, Allie couldn't help but wonder what has gotten into her. Feeling a pressure rising up to combustion, she suddenly broke away from Bea, calling out:
'Let’s go! I'm ready!’

She felt the need to burn out all the frustrating energy so she gave up their small jogging steps and started taking the path in long strides.

'I'll race you to the bridge!’ she called out to Bea and couldn't believe when she actually reached the bridge and Bea hasn't outpaced her. 'I won!’ she exclaimed, raising her hands up in the air, only to turn around to see Bea sitting on the ground, her head thrown back in laughter.

'You’re so cute, you run like a duck!’ she threw at the blonde.

'I do not run like a duck!'

'Okay, okay, like a duckling!'

Allie had come back to her to give her a hand and was just about to pull her up when Bea fell into another fit, so instead she let go of her hand and wrestled her down in the dirt.

'I still won, y'know!'

'Righto, now let go!'

After another hour and a half of alternating between walking, jogging and resting on the grass, Bea asked Allie if she would race her the five hundred metres left till the end of the running loop. Allie was too proud to say no, but her muscles were so sore that she couldn't keep up even close.

Almost reaching the imaginary finish line and seeing Allie long behind, Bea ran back to her. She stretched out her hands and grabbed Allie's. Holding her by the hands, she kept running backwards, tugging the tired blonde until they stepped over their goal together.

'I so proud of you, Allie’, she said to the young woman, and the hug that she gave her was in Allie's eyes worth all of her troubles.

Half an hour later they were dining in a nearby tavern, their table sat outside by the river, the water behind her head accentuating the blueness of Allie's eyes. Bea's gaze unnoticeably melted into hers, and on an instinct, her hand went for the blue. Reaching the corner of her eye, Bea realised what she was doing, and pretended to be removing the stray eyelash that wasn't even there.

'Meet you for a run next Sunday at the same time?’ she asked as she was saying her goodbye later on.

'You don’t need to put yourself out for me’, Allie sighed, disappointed with herself. 'I completely ruined your exercise today.’

'Don't talk like that, I moved around, it did me good. Besides, I work out at least two times a week already, and I wanna help out.’

'Next Sunday we'll be on Rock Island anyway.’

'So what?’ Bea asked. 'No ground there to run on?’

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Tuesday at noon Allie and Bea went to lunch separately, that is Allie went first, to the canteen on the ground floor of their building, to grab them a portion each and a table, because Bea was just about to finish the decoration of a particular room and said to the blonde, 'Couldn't stop now if you shot me'.

After waiting in a queue, she took them both a chicken soup and lettuce, as well as some mashed potatoes, as per Bea's request. She was sitting at the table for another ten minutes, waiting for the redhead to show up, not being able to bring herself to start eating without her. I'm acting like I don't know how to feed on my own, she scolded herself with a dose of irony, Jeez, I wonder how I survived all these years dining without her.

She was killing time texting back and forth with Paul, when she heard one of the two guys at the table next to hers commenting:

'Look who's coming!

Allie picked her head up on a reflex, only to set eyes on Bea, gliding her way through the tables. 'You know her?' Allie heard the other guy asking. 'Sure, that's Bea Smith. A most charming woman.'

'Cool, so maybe you could introduce me? I've been seeing her around, been wanting to ask her out, but it's so awkward when you don't know each other, y'know.'

Allie's eyes shot up to size the guy up and down, as if to appraise whether he could be good enough for Bea. 'Good luck with that, mate! I've heard rumours that she's a dyke. Still never hurts to see such a pretty face around the office.'

Allie's stare turned to the other guy now, her brows furrowed, her look churlish and sinister. The guy noticed it and shifted on his chair uncomfortably.

What is it with everyone yapping around that Bea was a lesbian? Allie didn't know why the prospect of it may being true was upsetting her so much.

She was still staring at the guy when Bea arrived and put her purse on the table. 'Didn’t mean to offend’, the guy uttered when he saw Bea taking a seat opposite Allie, so Allie nodded and averted her gaze. 'What was that about?’ Bea asked in a low voice. 'Nothing’, Allie muttered through her teeth and started on her lunch, her brows still furrowed.

***

Wednesday five p.m. sharp there was a knock on their office door and, not waiting on an answer, a large brunette burst in. 'G’day!’ she shouted out to Bea, then turned her head to Allie: 'Now, come on, Novak! Haven't got all day!'
Having had a previous agreement with her impatient friend, Allie had already been all set up and good to go, but decided to stop her, pulling on her arm:

‘Wait, Booms, there's someone I want you to meet.’

She tugged the brunette to Bea's desk, who stood up for a proper introduction.

‘This is my new friend Bea’, then turning to the redhead she continued, ‘and this is my very old and dear friend Susan’.

‘Oh please, everybody calls me Boomer’, the brunette shook Bea's stretched out hand in such an eager manner that Bea thought she was gunna crash her bones.

‘Nice to meet you, Boomer’, Bea smiled to her childish face and big brown eyes.

‘Alright, I’m all yours now’, Allie turned to Boomer, picking up her purse, ‘where did you want us to go?’

‘I’m feeling a little peckish so I thought, y’know, the best if we went to mine, I've got snacks and all.’

‘Sure, Booms’, Allie smirked, not at least surprised. Boomer never went to a place that didn't include snacks.

They headed for the door, when Boomer suddenly turned around to Bea:

‘Hey, you wanna come?’

‘No’, the redhead refused politely, not wanting to get in the way, ‘I've had a pleasure of Allie's company the whole day, so I'll leave you girls to catch up.’

But in her simplicity Boomer took her politeness in a wrong way.

‘Don't say it like that about Allie!’ she exclaimed, completely confusing Bea. ‘She’s a lot of fun, once you get to know her outside the office.’

Bea's smile broadened, ‘She’s a lot of fun around the office too.’

‘Oh really?’ Boomer was taken by surprise. ‘Cause in school, y'know, she was a stuck-up geek.’

‘I wasn't a geek, Boomer!’

‘Oh yeah, Miss Teachers' Pet?’

Bea threw her head back, laughing at their playful banter.

‘Come on, Red! You seem like a cool chick!’ Boomer patted her on the shoulder.

‘I don't know’, Bea hesitated, not sure whether Allie wanted her to join them or not.

‘Ya know why they call me Boomer? ‘Cause you can't get rid of me. I keep coming at ya like a boomerang.’

Bea laughed. What the hell, she thought. Allie has been a little strange since yesterday and maybe if she went with them, she could find out what was that all about.

‘ Alright then, Boomer, lead the way’, she grabbed her purse and followed the girls to the corridor,
locking the door behind them.

'Allie knows where I live, obviously', Bummer chatted along their way to the elevator. 'We’ll drive in a sandwich, Allie and me, we will be the bread, and you, Bea, will be the salami.’

***

Bea couldn't believe how much fun she had in the company of the friendly brunette. Her house was as welcoming as her convivial manners, and two hours later she found herself completely relaxed, having joined the girls on the rug around Boomer's coffee table.

She could easily see why the blonde loved her high school friend, she herself always a fan of a direct approach and wearing one's heart on his sleeve. Her back pressed on the sofa, she sipped on her beer, quite enjoying the embarrassment of her blonde friend. It turned out, young Allie was both goofy and scrappy, and Bea made sure to keep Boomer’s interest in retelling funny teenage stories up and alive by carefully placing her questions.

Allie knew what she was doing, throwing from time to time an odd look or two. She made sure to stuff her face on Boomer’s Monte Carlos so that she had an excuse to only nod when Boomer expected her to join her story.

'Oh, you will pay for this’, her eyes spoke silently to Bea's brown ones, who only smiled at her, not at least phased out. Boomer went on how her, Regan and Allie were known in high school as 'three musketeers', they were inseparable then and, in a way, they are still inseparable today, for no matter how crazy life gets with adults' obligations and stress, the three of them always make sure to find time for each other.

When they finished off their beers, Boomer went to kitchen for a refill, but instead returned with a bottle of vodka and three shot glasses.

'Alright, bitches’, she whooped, 'it’s “Swallow down or put out” time!'

'Oh no, Booms!’ Allie covered her face.

'Gross, Booms’, Bea pulled her face in a gag.

Boomer knelt at the table filling the glasses.

'That’s a game she made up in high school’, Allie looked at Bea apologetically, 'it’s called like that because when one asks you a question, you either reply truthfully or drink up.’

'I don't know, Booms’, Bea tried to find a way out, 'we all have work tomorrow’.

'You don't have to drink, Red, as long as you come up with goods.’

Bea suspired, wondering to what it will all come out to.

'Okay, Bea, you ask us the questions first’, Boomer said as she put another cookie in her mouth.

'Okay’, the redhead sighed, 'what is your worst habit, Booms?’

'You’re looking at it’, Booms shrugged, grabbing another Monte Carlo.

Both other women laughed.
'And what is your guilty pleasure, Allie?' Bea smiled, taking one cookie herself.

'Binge watching romcoms', Allie shrugged her shoulders.

'Yeah, she does that', Boomer nodded. 'Okay, your turn.'

Allie thought a bit, 'Christmas Eve at my home, a turkey leg went missing, so I had to bring a handicapped turkey out on the table…'

'Yeah, yeah, that was me!' Boomer giggled.

'Not funny, Booms! Paul's parents were there.'

'Well, next time you'll know better than to make us wait three hours for dinner, would ya?'

'If I went through your browser history, Bea’, Allie turned her attention to the older woman, 'what would be the most embarrassing thing that I would find?'

'“Talk Like TED” ', Bea blushed. When Allie raised her eyebrow, she added: 'Yesterday at breakfast I only pretended I’d heard about the book you’re so thrilled about. I didn't want to come across stupid.'

Allie squeezed her hand, 'Don't worry, Bea, I happen to think you're very smart.'

'Cut out the sentimental crap, it's time for some real questions or we will come out of this room with dry throats', Boomer rubbed her hands, turning herself to Bea. 'What colour is the underwear you're wearing right now?'

'Red', Bea stated simply, but it made the blonde flustered.

'Al, what don't you like about me?'

Allie reached for her drink, but Boomer stopped her hand: 'Now I wanna know.'

'I don't like how you check out Paul's arse when you think no one's watching, Booms.'

'I do not check out Paul!' Boomer yelled back.

It was Bea’s turn.

'Did you just lie to Allie, Boomer?’ she asked, to what Boomer drank up a shot.

'I only did it, because I wanted a drink’, she stretched out her tongue.

After couple of more rounds, their bellies hurt from laughter, Booms having had three drinks and the other two women none so far.

'The weirdest place you and Paul did it, Al’, Boomer giggled.

'Oh, you just ask that so that you can include us in your fantasies, you perv’, Allie hit her shoulder.

'Whatever, Blondie, swallow down or put out.’

'There was no weird place, we do it in our bed, Booms. Disappointed much?’

'Plenty. So, Bea, your first time, who was the lucky guy and when?’
Bea didn’t reach for the drink. Comfortably leant on her elbow, she smiled when she answered:

‘Kate Taylor. When we were seventeen. It was pretty great.’

Allie felt like something froze her on the spot.

‘Kate, like in a girl?’ Boomer widened her eyes.

‘Yup’, Bea nodded, ‘out and proud since I was fifteen’.

Allie kept playing like in a trance. She asked and replied and smiled, but never really registered anything anymore yet.

‘Any man you currently see, Booms?’ she heard Bea asking when she came to her senses a little bit.

‘I’m seeing Daz’, the brunette grinned.

‘You’re not seeing Daz, Booms. You never even met him. That’s just some creep she “dates” online’, Allie explained to Bea.

‘Alright, it’s been fun, but I got to go. It's quarter to nine already’, Bea got up on her feet.

‘You’re not leaving when I was just about to ask you the same thing’, Boomer whined. ’Any woman you currently fancy, Bea?’

To that, Bea bent down to grab her glass from the table.

‘I only did that because I wanted a drink’, she smirked at Boomer. 'Goodnight, Allie’, she wished to the blonde, as Boomer went with her to see her out.

Being left alone, Allie reached out for her vodka and drank up, while her hands trembled. It didn’t bug her what Bea's sexual identity meant in Bea's life, or in the eyes of the world; what she needed to know was what it meant for her.

The one time that Allie has questioned herself whether she could be lesbian or not, it all came to nothing, so she was convinced this too will boil down to having been a delusion.
Allie arrived on Bea's address sometime shortly before eight that Friday morning when they were due leaving for Little Rock. They had tickets to 10 a.m. ferry and before that pillars, swings and tent had to be loaded into the tipper truck that would take them to the pier.

Bea was planning on having a breakfast and coffee with her neighbours before they all leave together, so she invited Allie to come around eight and meet them before the tipper arrives.

There were only two houses in this dead end street. Allie drove slowly by the hedge fence that surrounded the first one, reaching the gate she saw the house number plaque said 'one' so she carried on another thirty metres until she parked in front of the gate with plaque number 'two'.

She got out of the car and took a look at Bea's place. The house and garden were enclosed by a three-metre-high wall, which provided the owner a complete isolation. The only thing you could see from the street was the roof and the first floor, but even that was partially hidden behind the tall trees in the garden.

Allie raised her eyebrows in wonder. She couldn't remember when was the last time she saw domestic privacy so guarded. She turned around to take in the neighbourhood: on the other side of the road there was a shallow drainage ditch, followed by a row of not too closely planted gum trees. Behind them she could see people in the distance, taking their morning walk on the beach promenade, and catch a glimpse of the ocean.

It's nice here, peaceful, she concluded. Certainly much more quiet than her busy downtown street, where cars never seized to drive by.

Not finding any gate bell, Allie took out her phone and texted Bea that she had arrived.

'It's open, I set up the garden table for breakfast, you make yourself comfortable, I'll be right out.'

Allie opened the gate and stepped into one of the most beautifully landscaped gardens that she has ever seen. A red brick paver driveway that led from the gate to the garage divided the garden in two. Along the wall on the left side there was a long wooden shed and in its adjunction a lovely glade, secluded by four silver birches. Birches were Allie's favourite trees and her heart buzzed at the sight of how tall and elegant they looked. The wall on the right side was partly covered in ivy and climbing roses. Allie noticed rose bushes in several other places too. Never knew she liked them so, crossed Allie's mind. The house itself was on the right side, at the deep end of the garden. It was painted in white, with maroon window frames, front door and roof tiles. On each side of the front door stairs there was a lilac tree, providing shades for the veranda that ran along the ground floor. The house seemed to have two garages, one on the each side of the veranda, and both garage doors were also painted in maroon. The driveway bent in front of the left garage and led along the house front till it reached the other one. The interesting thing was that both garages ran as an extension...
alongside house sides and Allie had to wonder what all the extra parking space served for.

Allie kept sauntering around, curious to get a hang of all things Bea, when the front door opened and Bea came out, holding a large tray with pancakes and nutella.

'You definitely eat too much of that stuff', Allie blurted out, to what Bea shook her head and laughed. Allie followed her to the right side of the garden into a wooden gazebo under the old elm tree. Plates and coffee mugs were already laid out on the table and Bea asked Allie to sit in one of the chairs.

'I bought you some milk’, the redhead said as she poured it into a glass. Allie's heart melted at the sight of Bea, her eyes still a bit puffy and her locks tousled from sleep. Not wanting to be caught staring she turned her gaze to the gazebo fence, admiring the floral pattern of the trellis. It was painted white, with maroon elements, just like the house.

'It's a beautiful gazebo’, she complimented.

'Thanks, I designed it.’

'The garden is lovely too. I see why you built up a wall to hide it.’

'Actually, the wall came with the house’, Bea said as she started to smear the pancakes with nutella, 'but I must admit, once I saw it, it was the pivotal factor why I decided to buy this place. Well that, and the nearness of the ocean. I didn't have much to repair on the outside - I repainted the house and built up the gazebo and that was about it. I did a complete inner redecoration, of course, yet that was not out of necessity, but because I wanted to make the place my own.'

At that moment Bea's phone rang, her neighbours letting her know they will be few minutes late.

'What else is new?' Bea shrugged her shoulders, 'Let's start without them. Please help yourself.’

'We can park in my car until they arrive?’ Allie suggested.

They agreed yesterday on leaving Allie's car in Bea’s garage for the weekend so that she can use her own ride when they come back on Monday. Bea opened the door of the garage on the left so Allie parked in her Mini Countryman next to Bea's Jeep. She was eager to check out Bea's bike, but couldn't find it in there. When she asked about it, Bea replied it was in the other garage, which was also her bike workshop.

'The only thing I don't like about this place is that old shed over there. I wanted to tear it down, but it's full of stuff which belong to the previous owner. His son sold me this house when he passed away, but I never got to meet him, only his lawyer. He’s been living for twenty years now in New Zealand and has asked me to keep the stuff until he is able to come and take them.’

'Wow, that's a lot of years you're doing him the favour.’

'He actually called to apologise couple of times, offering to rent a storage in town, but I didn't want to put him out - his wife got sick and after two years she lost the battle and passed away. Now he's a single parent and has his plate full already. What's it to me to hang on his memorabilia, when I have all this space here.’

Most people wouldn't be so kind, Allie thought, but then, she already knew Bea wasn't most people.

At that moment the gate opened and two women came in, dragging a suitcase behind them.
This one here overslept again’, the shorter of them called to Bea. She looked around forty two and had a petite figure with dark blonde hair, pulled up in a French twist. The black suit that she wore made her seem sophisticated and reserved. They can't be more different, Allie thought sizing up the tall brunette that followed close behind. She was around Bea's age, with a pixie haircut and a body language which smelled of cheekiness. She was wearing black ripped off jeans and a sleeveless turtleneck, that showed her tattooed arms and whose light blue colour exactly matched her eyes. An arm around her wife's waist, they really seemed to fit together in spite of their differences, and as they were approaching them, Allie could see a similar appraising look in their both sets of blue eyes. When Bea introduced her, their attitude changed into two disparate reactions.

'Hi, I'm Franky’, the brunette shook her hand, undressing her with her eyes. 'You didn't mention you're working with a hot stuff, Red!’

'Thanks… I guess…’, Allie uttered, rightly sensing that with the tattooed brunette it was all for show and that she had no interest whatsoever in either getting to know Bea's co-workers body or her character. For Franky she was clearly just someone who'll tag along that weekend and disappear from her life afterwards.

'You never mind my wife’, the petite blonde stretched out her hand, 'she just likes to scare people off. I'm Bridget, by the way.'

'Nice to meet you, Bridget’, Allie shook her hand, relieved to see that at least one of them wasn't high-maintenance. She had enough work on her plate this weekend as it is.

On the contrary to her wife, Bridget didn't have the need to constantly chat up Allie during breakfast, but whenever her eyes lingered upon the young blonde, Allie had a feeling she was looking at her as a person and was trying to get to know her.

It didn't take Allie long to pick up on the affection and loyalty they were showing to Bea, and in Allie's opinion that was enough for her heart to warm up to them. Apparently, they were married for a decade and in their second year of marriage they decided to sell Bridget's apartment downtown and move to a more family-suited suburb.

'They moved in six months after me’, Bea disclosed, ‘and have been my best friends ever since.’

'You got it, Red’, Franky patted her shoulder, 'reliable like death and taxes, us.’

Allie was surprised to hear that Franky was actually a Crown prosecutor, and not a lumberjack, as one might think.

'My Franky was in the foster system and has paid her way through uni by holding a full-time job as a cook. She was the head chef for four years down at the “Agostinho's”,’ Bridget declared proudly and kissed her wife's hand.

'Wow’, Allie was floored. 'As a student, I had a part-time job at a grocery store twelve hours a week and it was a stretch to juggle between courses and work.’

'One’s gotta do what one's gotta do’, Franky shrugged her shoulders, never comfortable when being praised.

Allie asked Bridget what she did for living, and it turned out she was a psychiatrist in a mental institution. She used to have her own practice back in the day, but after she married Franky, she closed down the office and got herself a nine-to-five job at the sanatorium for mental health.

'Business hours were too irregular when you have private practice, and I didn't want Franky to come
home to an empty house each day. We promised in our vows to always make each other our priority.’

'She does have an office at home though, where she loves to lock herself in every time she’s pissed at me’, Franky laughed.

'At least I don't slam the door behind me, like you do, baby, when you storm off to your study room’, Bridget bit back playfully.

'I hope that my fiancé will get to have more regular work hours one day’, Allie sighed, ‘but now as a junior doctor he doesn't have a choice’.

'I remember the torment’, Bridget let out a sigh too. 'It will all depend on what speciality he'll choose later.’

Allie nodded.

At that moment the gate opened, as two large guys let themselves in. Bea went to show them where to park their truck in and unlocked the shed for them to take the pillars and swings out.

She returned to grab the dishes and bring them into the house while the guys load the truck. Allie was quick on her feet to help her take the dishes in, but Bea stopped her in her tracks, when she politely but firmly refused.

Taking in Allie's hurt and confused expression as her eyes followed the overloaded redhead, Franky explained:

'In case she hasn't already told you, Bea doesn't allow people into her house.’

'What?!' Allie was thrown off balance.

'Righto. You heard me correctly. No visitors, no exceptions. Never set a foot in there myself.’

'But you are her best friend’, Allie uttered in shock.

'Still, never been in there. For all I know she could be running an unicorn sweatshop in her kitchen.’

‘Franky!’ Bridget slapped her wife on her wrist then turned to face Allie, 'Bea is a complicated woman, but worth each second you spend on getting to know her. Besides, she has a lounge room within her bike workshop and everyone is always welcome in there. Isn't that right, Franky? You certainly barge in any time you please.’

Franky shrugged her shoulders indifferently, 'I guess.’

Fifteen minutes later, Bea had washed the dishes and came out, dragging her suitcase down the front stairs.

Bridget and Franky had a taxi ride scheduled for nine thirty so when it showed up, they put all three suitcases in, two in the boot and one sharing a backseat with Franky. Bridget got on the passenger seat and they left first, leaving Bea and Allie to drive in the cab of the tipper truck, while one of the guys got on the back with the pillars, swings and tent.

They arrived at the pier at quarter to ten, Allie paying the guys with company's credit card and arranging at what time on Monday they will meet up on the same place.
They docked at Little Rock just before one. They sea was tranquil and the sky was clear. They waited on the dock until their cargo was unloaded by construction workers of the “South Star Hotels” and shipped off to Rock Island. Allie and Bea were due on Rock Island tomorrow morning and today they had a scheduled appointment at the local TV station at three o’clock.

The walk to their hotel didn’t take more than five minutes. The part of the island where the main piers were built was the heart of the town’s business and social life and as they walked the street that led to their hotel, they passed by busy shops, tourist groups, cafés.

After checking in, four women parted their ways. Bridget and Franky had a two nights reservation for the suite on the top floor, while Allie and Bea were to stay until Monday in single rooms on the floor under theirs. The couple was to join them tomorrow for the excursion to Rock Island so they arranged to meet for breakfast. Allie was expecting them to join them for dinner, but apparently the lovebirds preferred to have some alone time. After all, it was their romantic getaway weekend.

Rested and changed into suitable business outfits, Bea and Allie headed down to the lobby, where they were supposed to meet Mr Tanner, an executive of “South Star Hotels”, who has just moved to Little Rock two weeks ago to act as a supervisor on building site and a representative of his company’s interests in town. That very hotel was to be his home for the next ten months, until the resort was built and furnished, then he would return to Melbourne.

He accompanied them to the TV station, where all three of them sat for an live interview in the afternoon show. The aim was to present Rock Island Retreat to the local population and to invite tourists currently present in town to join the picnic on Sunday. They were hoping some of those tourists might want to visit Rock Island on their vacation next year.

The interview was the fun part, but not so much the negotiations that followed, regarding picnic coverage. Around six p.m. Mr Tanner and the station director finally agreed on all the details and signed the contract. When they got out in the open, Allie took couple of deep breaths. The salty air did her good, after her head started spinning in there.

Mr Tanner offered to take them to dinner that evening so they arranged to meet at eight in the lobby. After a short nap and a shower, Allie changed into a dark green long summer dress and put some light makeup on. She knocked on Bea’s door and shortly after the redhead appeared, mumbling, ‘Don’t you just want to stay in and gorge ourselves on takeaway’.

Allie smiled and tugged her by her hand towards elevator. ‘We won’t stay long’, she promised. The restaurant Mr Tanner suggested was two blocks away and they had a relaxed walk in the crowded but pleasantly lazy and cheerful streets.

Mr Tanner turned out to be a rather dull conversationalist. He was a thirty six years old bachelor who had no other interests in life but work and meaningless fun. The food was excellent though, Bea devouring her deep-fried King George whiting with tartare and crisped potato puffs, and forgetting all about her takeaway-and-hideaway wishes. Allie enjoyed watching the colour slowly return to her friend’s fatigued face, a glass of red wine lifting all of their spirits.

After dinner, Mr Tanner headed to a nightclub. ‘My biorhythm is used to this pace’, he offered the women an apologetic smile when they declined to join him, wondering how he would manage to get himself out of bed at six, considering his working days on Rock Island always started at seven. Weekends were usually off days for him and construction workers but some of them were paid overtime wages to help out build the tent, make ground preparations and participate in laying the foundation stone ceremony. Up until now they have torn down the old owner’s mansion and shipped
off demolition waste. They were all local people, from Little Rock, so they preferred to work four hours in the morning, from seven until eleven, when sun is not too strong, then to head off home for lunch and rest, and return to finish their shift from three to seven, when the heat drops down.

‘Still tired?’ Allie asked warily when they were left alone in front of the restaurant.

Bea shook her head, ‘No, I just didn’t want to go clubbing with him. He’s just so overbearing.’

‘I hear ya’, Allie agreed. ‘Up for a walk then?’

When Bea nodded, Allie took her by the arm for a stroll down the waterfront. The summer evenings in Little Rock were even warmer than in Melbourne, it was ten o’clock and still twenty six degrees outside, but the constant sea breeze was making the atmosphere enjoyable. Allie threw side glances at Bea, admiring her long hair as the wind blew her locks back. At the end of the promenade they saw an ice cream parlour and bought two cones filled with vanilla flavour, deciding they’d rather continue walking down the beach then sit in a closed space again. They wore their sandals in one hand and the ice cream in the other, as they headed across the sand and towards the edge of the sea.

They sat there for more than an hour, their feet bathing in shallow waters, chatting with such an ease that none of them noticed how the time flew. There was rarely a moment when they left each other’s gaze, something in the other set of eyes drawing them both like a magnet.

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The next morning Franky and Bridget looked even more in love, if that was even possible. Allie felt a sting of jealousy, because in spite of the strong bond she shared with Paul, they never looked at each other like that. Tanner came to the lobby at quarter past six, just like they agreed last night, his face not showing the slightest bit of enervation. He took them to a breakfast diner down at the pier, which opened each morning at five, due to many locals having a job in Melbourne and catching a ferry ride at six.

Bridget and Franky had rented two mini coolers the previous day, filling them with enough sodas and food for the four of them to not have to return to the town the whole day long. Tanner and the workers ought to be there only until the tent was build and secured so Tanner really hoped that he would be off and free by noon. He showed them several boats berthed next to each other at the harbour: two powerboats, an inflatable, two jets, a dual boat, three PWCs, as well as one walkabout, two centre consoles boats and a twenty metres long catamaran ferry. ‘They belong to “South Star”,’ he explained, ‘Mr Johnson purchased them to transport cargo and guests to Rock Island. You’re free to use any of the small ones whenever you visit the site, keys are at harbour master's office, I put both of your names down on the allowed drivers’ list so you can take them twenty four seven. You know how to drive, right?’

‘I drove boats on couple of occasions, but I’m not a particularly confident driver’, Allie said.

‘That’s alright, I’ve got you’, Bea’s eyes were glistening like a kid’s in a toy store, as she walked from boat to boat.

Tanner got on a PWC, while Bea chose the dual boat for herself and her friends. Even though they had a navigation, it was easier for her just to follow Tanner - she stood behind the steering wheel, her dress and hair blown back, a broad smile on her lips. She looks so fearless, like she could do
anything, Allie dreamily contemplated the expression on Bea’s face.

Rock Island was visible from afar, and Allie gasped when they approached enough to have a clear look at forest and the beach. Bridget let out a small, exited cry, her eyes filled with joy. That picture itself was enough for Franky to lose her morning grumpiness and be happy they came along. They arrived there in just under ten minutes, parking their boats next to several already present there. The sand was so white under their feet that Allie had to grab and let some of it through her fingers.

‘Magnificent, isn’t it?’ Tanner smirked at her. “Alright, let me show you the construction site.’

Allie and Bea spent their morning working themselves down, while Franky and Bridget went straight to a nearby bay. They spent their time swimming and sunbathing. Hidden from all eyes, alone in the bay, they freely exchanged kisses and sweet caresses.

Once Bea decided on a venue where tent would be built, the workers started digging holes to put the pillars in. Swings were fastened relatively quickly after that and around eleven tent fabric was spread out above the construction. All the while they worked, Bea was landscaping bushes at the venue, making beautiful shapes with her hedge trimmer and shears. Allie was helping out by collecting the cut-off waste and taking it into the forest. Bea even let her shape one small bush herself, using regular garden shears, and complimented her work afterwards although it looked nothing like puppy figure Allie wanted to create.

At noon guys were gone, and after tying purple satin ribbons into big bows around each pillar to hold drapes in place, Allie and Bea took a long, satisfied look onto their achievement, then went to find Franky and Bridget.

They found them on top of each other, making out, and Allie couldn’t explain why she was the only one blushing, when no one else seemed to be phased out. They were all adults, but she felt so guilty, as if their actions were reflexions of her own thoughts.

Bridget spread a tablecloth on the sand under a tree, and Franky took out the sandwiches and fruit. The sandwiches were huge but they were all so exhausted and hungry that none ate less than two. Allie was perhaps worst than all and Bea laughed at her voraciousness, cleaning her smudged face with her finger. Franky raised her eyebrows at the act, surprised how neither of two women found the deed too intimate between just co-workers, especially when considering the fact that Bea has wetted her thumb in her mouth before she put it on Allie’s cheek. Even in her befuddled state Franky could see that that meant trouble and remained on high alert, wanting to find out more.

For the first time since they met, Franky took a real interest in the blonde, remaining with her on the towels while Bea and Bridget went for a walk. She watched her blue eyes glued at Bea’s distant figure, her expression so dreamy and lost like she wasn’t aware what she was doing. Franky started asking Allie questions, about her life and interests and whether she found working with Bea interesting. The way that blue eyes lit when she described the ground floor design Bea had started and finished its first draft during last week told the brunette all she needed to know, but she bit her tongue, hoping it’s only a passing, platonic girl crush.

Bridget returned to lie down next to Franky, while Bea was sitting dabbling her feet into the warm water. She wanted nothing more than to strip down into her swimming suit and go into the waves but she and Allie didn’t have much more time until they were to come back to the picnic venue, considering that rental tables and chairs ought to be delivered by a Little Rock company at two o’clock.
‘I’ll bring her over her hat, she’ll burn’, Allie said with a concerned look before she jumped on her feet and hurried over to Bea.

‘Sure you will’, Franky murmured behind her back, causing Bridget to half-raise herself and give her a questioning look.

‘Thanks’, Bea smiled, as she put on the straw hat. ‘Want to burn out some calories from those sandwiches?’ she joked, motioning ahead. Allie happily agreed and they spent half an hour walking lazily along the shoreline, jabbering and cackling about most trivial things. The time on Bea’s watch warned them they have to head back, which they did, firstly keeping a fair pace, but slowing down with each metre they were closer to the married couple, until they finally stopped, facing each other, sunk in a deep conversation.

Allie couldn’t tell which was the exact moment when words died out or why, but she suddenly found herself silently staring at Bea, who held her head up, holding blue gaze in hers, noticing how that sapphire colour seemed even deeper than the ocean.

‘In the sun, your irises have green rings around them’, Allie uttered fascinated.

‘They do, I take it after my mother’, Bea smiled an equally stupefied smile, 'but no one ever noticed that before.'

Allie's fingertips brazed Bea's as she took a step closer to her. Her eyes fell on her naked shoulders and Allie caught herself swallowing hard. Bea was wearing a knee-length beach dress, with off-the-shoulder crop top and three buttons on the front. The dress was of a dirty cream colour, with several brown flowers printed out here and there, matching the brown nuance of the chest buttons. Allie found her forefinger touching the highest button, and the swell of Bea's breast heaving underneath it.

‘Having a little heart-to-heart?’ Franky swooped in between them, hugging both of their shoulders with her arms. 'Mind if I join you?’

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After the tables and chairs were delivered and set, a portable stage installed, there was nothing left but to wait for the electrician to show up and bring a power generator and some light bulbs. The guy was running seriously late and Bea was starting to feel frustrated. He was supposed to come at four, but it was almost five when he parked his boat on shore. It took him another half an hour to hook up wires and cables and then they were finally free to go.

Once in Little Rock, four women agreed on having dinner together at nine. Bridget and Franky had already made reservations in a restaurant they discovered last night. It was an added bonus that “The Rockets” were having a gig there every Saturday night so Bea and Allie could check them out. They saw their promotion videos, but nothing could beat the live sound.

The restaurant was called 'Fletchers’ Tavern’ and as soon as they were seated, the owners came to greet them, which was their habit with all the guests.

‘Hello, I'm Matthew Fletcher, this is my lovely wife, we are very glad to be your hosts tonight’, his arm was wrapped around a tall brunette's waist, who looked about seven months pregnant.

'Maxine Fletcher, nice to meet you all’, she chirped out.
'Wait, aren't you Maxine Conway’, Bea asked in surprise, as she took a closer look into those warm, dark eyes, 'the manager of “Silver Lagoon” hotel?'

'I sure was eight years ago… Bea’.

As they recognised each other, Bea stood up to hug the tall, smiling woman.

'Bea was a freelance decorator we hired back in the day at the ‘Lagoon’ and she did a splendid job. We met five times before the job was finished and each time it ended in us grabbing afternoon coffee which turned into dinner’, she chuckled, explaining their acquaintanceship to her husband and the other three curious women.

'Please have a seat, join us for dinner’, Franky offered and it didn't take long for the couple to agree, for Maxine really wanted to catch up with Bea.

'The dinner's on the house’, Fletch insisted when they protested.

'So how have you been, Maxi?’ Bea asked patting the brunette's hand.

Maxine told them about how she five years ago transferred to be a manager at 'Harbourview Hotel & Spa’ in Melbourne, where she was offered almost a double salary. Two years ago she came to Little Rock on a vacation, where she met Fletch and couldn't help falling in love. He was just opening his restaurant then, having previously left his position as deputy governor at Walford Correction Centre. The prison was making him depressed and he decided his health was more important than his career so he quit his job and sold his house in the city. He moved to this charming island to live at a more peaceful rate and never regretted his decision. When Maxine agreed to marry him, he was the happiest man on Earth, that is until the day she told him she was pregnant. Maxine loved her job so she decided not to quit, instead Fletch bought her a powerboat so that she can reach Melbourne in about seventy minutes and doesn't have to depend on the ferry departures’ schedule, if she has to work long hours. After she got pregnant he insisted on her taking the monthly ticket for the chopper ride.

'I will be working one more month, I told them I'm quitting after that. We’re already interviewing my prospective replacements. I decided to be a stay at home mum until this little boy can stand on his feet.’

'Did you decide on the name?’ Bridget smiled at the couple.

'We will call him Morgan, after Maxine's dad’, Fletch smiled back.

'That’s a nice name. It was always on my shortlist, but we are almost certain to adopt’, Bridget squeezed her wife's hand.

'I'm glad to see you so happy, Maxi’, Bea gushed out, Maxine cupping her cheek and replying:

'It's good to see you too, hon. You haven't changed a bit, just got perhaps even more beautiful.’

Bea's cheekbones coloured at the compliment, making Fletch comment, 'Oh Maxi! Now you've made her blush.’

'Yeah, she does that a lot’, Allie smiled at Bea, as if she knew her for a thousand years.

Maxi couldn't help but notice the look that Bridget and Franky exchanged or the mesmerised gaze that young Allie seemed to get whenever her eyes locked with Bea's.
'Allie here is also about to marry', Franky turned the attention to her new friend.

'Congratulations, honey!' Maxine exclaimed.

'Well, we didn't set a date yet', Allie didn't know why she was suddenly so uncomfortable.

After dinner she and Bea went over to meet “The Rockets”, who were just about to start their show. After they played couple of songs, Allie told Bea, ‘You chose good’ and smiled into her eyes.

They didn't have any original songs, but their covers were impeccable. Lots of guests were on the dancefloor and when a handsome fellow asked Allie for a dance, she was shoved off with him by Maxine and Franky.

Over her dance partner’s shoulder Allie could see Bea sending a smile her way so she winked back at her, making the redhead shake her head and laugh.

'Bea, would you accompany me to the ladies’ room?’ a pissed off Franky asked. In there she made sure both of the stalls were empty, before she went off on her friend, 'What are you doing, Red?'

'How do you mean what am I doing?’ Bea seemed genuinely surprised.

'Oh, don't you play innocent with me! What are you doing to young Allie?’

'What am I doing to her?’ Bea furrowed her brows.

'You’re leading her on! For God's sake, Bea!’

'I don't know what you're talking about, Franky, Allie and I are only friends.’

'And I'm the Queen of England’, Franky rotored sarcastically.

'I'm not gunna stand here and take this shit, Franky. There's nothing going on between Allie and me. You just can't stand that I've made a friend besides you.’

'I'm not being petty here, Red. That girl looks at you like you hung the moon in the sky.’

'So what's it to you, Franks?’ Bea throw her head back, tears glistening in her eyes.

'Listen, she’s one of the good ones and you have my blessing, actually I'm happy as a lark for you, if you can look me in the eye and tell me you are ready to go over your limits for her. So I'm asking you as a friend, Bea, are you?’

'You have got it all wrong, Franks. Allie and I, we're friends. I'm so relaxed around her, because I'm completely sure of it. She's straight, she has a fiancé in Heaven's name, and I've never even looked at her that way.’

'Whatever you say, Red.’

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Allie noticed the tension between Bea and her tattooed friend so after they had said their goodbyes to Fletchers and left the restaurant, she suggested they give the married couple some privacy. Franky was quick to agree, but threw one last dark glare at Bea before she linked arms with her wife and took her to the discotheque across the street.
'Where do you want us to go?' Allie asked warily, unaccustomed to Bea's sullen face.

'I'll just head back to the hotel. Why don't you go after them, enjoy the rest of your evening?'

Allie intertwined their fingers and tugged on her hand, dragging her off the street and towards the hill behind which their hotel was lain.

'Let's just take a shortcut', she said softly to Bea. 'I can see you're upset and you don't have to talk about it, but a walk through peace and quiet might help clear your head.'

Bea silently agreed, letting herself be led across the hill and into a lone plane that overlooked their hotel. Allie stopped there to watch the stars and Bea turned to look in her eyes. They were so carefree and full of sparks of blue. She forgot about Franky and her preposterous assumptions and allowed herself to be lulled again into all things Allie.

The other side of the hill was in complete darkness, enshrouded from the street lights, only weak moonlight lighting their way.

Bea dropped Allie's hand and made some distance between them. At first Allie wondered what she did wrong, but then she noticed Bea's eyes scanning the surroundings, as if in panic, and her body slightly trembling. She obviously had fear of the dark and Allie let her be until they reached the hotel.

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'I thought that you were only kidding!' a very dishevelled Allie exclaimed, after she'd heard a knock at seven a.m. and opened the door to see Bea in full sportswear, jumping up and down in her running shoes.

'Come on, Allie, you gotta start taking your health seriously. No skipping.'

'I don't even have anything to wear for jogging', Allie whined.

'For all I care, you can run in those pyjamas. Let's go, no excuses.'

It was a short exercise, they were back in the hotel at eight, but Allie couldn't deny it did her good. As they shared their breakfast, she could feel the energy that had filled her body, and smiled gratefully at Bea.

'So this will be our thing then?'

'Yup, every Sunday at nine.'

'Good.'

They dressed up and put full makeup on and met in the lobby at quarter to ten. When they saw each other, they both gasped in surprise.

'Oh shit!' Allie exclaimed. 'We didn't think this part through.'

She was wearing a long satin gown, with a slit on the side of each leg, from thigh to the ankle so that she can move freely. The problem was that the gown was dark red, exactly the same nuance like Bea's silk, knee-length dress, so they just stood there, watching each other, pondering what to do. To
make the matter worse, even both of their shoes and purses were also red.

'Do you have any other formal dress here?' Bea asked.

Allie shook her head.

'Neither have I. What can we do, let's just go, we don't have much time until caterers arrive, it's not like it's the end of the world.'

They were supposed to be there earlier than the guests, who weren't expected sooner than eleven o'clock. That included Franky and Bridget, who were to come later with passenger ferry that will operate the whole day long between Little Rock and Rock Island.

When they arrived at Rock Island, they have seen that the band had kept their part of the deal, having had already set up their equipment, and was currently doing a sound check. They have also brought a radio with them, that they connected to speakers as well, so that they can go on a break now and then. The speakers were scattered at all corners of the venue and not only inside of the tent.

'You did a good job, guys', Allie commended them, as she came to the microphone and said few words into it to test it.

'Sing us something', they joked, but to their surprise, Allie did and she was so good Bea couldn't believe it.

Caterers came at quarter past ten, all waiters already formally dressed, and as Allie dealt with them, Bea instructed the florists, who came shortly behind them, where to arrange the vases with purple-white lilies Bea had ordered.

Quarter after eleven first ferry with guests docked. Tanner, Mr Johnson and Mrs Rodgers came with it, wanting to be there to greet all the guests as they arrive. Mr Johnson praised Bea and Allie for the work they've done, and was very satisfied to hear back that they didn't overstep the budget.

The next ferry brought Ms Hagurson, Tess with her husband and son Greg, Elaine, Richard, Todd and the rest of the managers of 'Hagurson Public Relations’. The 20m long catamaran ferry Mr Johnson bought for the transportation of the future hotel guests could carry around eighty people, and approximately as much have arrived the second time it docked, so Bea and Allie and all of the other employees of both companies made themselves busy mingling with the crowd and pitching the future resort.

The third time the ferry returned, it carried another eighty guests, among them Paul, Bridget and Franky. The three of them met at the harbour in Little Rock: Franky approached Paul after having recognised him from the pictures Allie showed her yesterday at the beach.

Paul seemed to get on well with both of them, but after he kissed Allie hello and made sure he latched extra long onto her lips, his eyes shrunk and his look hardened when he turned to Bea, saying, 'And you must be the woman who's swept my girl off her feet.'

'Oh, we do get along, but I think you're giving me too much credit', Bea tried to turn on her charm, for Allie's sake.

Paul's charm was as equally fake when he responded, 'But not at all. Allie's totally besotted with you.'

Neither of them stretched out their hand, neither of them said it was a pleasure to meet, their eyes glued to each other's as roosters’ before the fight. Bea wanted to be pleasant, but after his second
sentence she decided to stand her ground, so Franky swooped in, hugging her around her waist and
dragging her under some excuse away from him. She may not approve the behaviour of her friend
and understood the poor fellow who seemed to be fighting a battle he had already lost, but the hell if
she allows her friend to be put on a spot and dragged through the mud.

After that, Allie and Bea didn't spend much time together. They were on their feet the whole day,
working their tongues off, while watching others have fun. Paul kept close to Allie's side. Having
learnt a lot already about Rock Island from his fiancée, and being skilled with words in general, he
turned out be a great help to Allie.

Shortly before one the news crew arrived, and at one Mr Johnson laid symbolically the foundation
stone and held an appropriate speech. After he finished, champagne bottles were popped and cakes
were brought out, and TV crew has filmed that all and another hour of guests having fun, as well as
some nature around them, which will be later montaged into a half an hour reportage, and played on
local TV that night after evening news, as well as in several reruns next week.

After TV crew had left, all guests started to loosen up a bit. Tanner was giving organised tours of the
island and Paul went to one of them, curious to explore around. Todd and Greg seemed to have hit it
off, they played frisbee with several other young people. Bridget found occupation messing around
with several small children, who really took a liking to her and wouldn't leave her alone. Madam
Mayor was in a deep conversation with Elaine, and Mrs Rodgers kept returning for more cake. The
band was playing tirelessly and most of the people who haven't already taken off to stroll around or
go for a swim, have been dancing on the dancefloor in the tent or outside on the grassland.

Allie and Bea couldn't afford themselves such luxury, they had to run around supervising caterers
and see to guests if they needed anything, but above all they tried to chat up each person to win them
over into visiting once hotel and spa centre are open and running.

However, when Ms Hagurson asked Bea for a dance, the redhead couldn't say no, not so much
because the old lady was their boss but because she was one hell of a smooth talker, who could just
persuade you into anything. She seemed to have loads of fun in the arms of the old womaniser, and
Allie watched her laugh from across the tent to something the old lady whispered in her ear.

Allie couldn't help but smile, Bea was so beautiful she couldn't take her eyes off her. She poured
herself a drink, to create herself an excuse to lift her head towards Bea every time she took a sip, so
no one would notice.

But Franky did notice and came to chat up Allie, in an attempt to avert her attention from the fiery
redhead. Allie smiled up at Franky, but her eyes never left the odd dancing couple before them.

'Paul's right though, I'm totally besotted with her. How could one not be? I mean, look at her,
Franky, isn't she the loveliest woman you have ever seen?’

Franky looked at the naive expression on the young blonde’s face, her heart breaking for her. 'Sure,
after Bridget, and myself’, she tried to crack up a joke.

Allie didn't laugh, her face suddenly turning more serious.

'Franky, can I I ask you something?’ she said in a raw voice, and not waiting on an answer, she
continued, 'Why is Bea single?’

Franky's crystal blue eyes locked with her darker ones, as she licked her lips in confusion what to
say.
'She... Er, she could have anyone she wants’, she stuttered when Franky didn't reply, 'probably including all of Ms Hagurson’s money’, she tried to joke, 'but she is so unaffected by all the attention, and I… I can't help but wonder…’

Franky cut her off, wanting to spare her further embarrassment, 'Look, Blondie, Bea is single because she wants to be single, okay? She doesn't want to date anyone and it is the best if you’d be a friend to her and leave her to it.’

'Well, she doesn't want now, but eventually everyone needs someone beside them…’, Allie sunk into another haze, her eyes fixed again on the slender figure in red.

'Not Bea’, Franky found her courage, 'Look, kid, it is not uncommon for a person to change their mind before the wedding, everyone is entitled to it - hell, better before than after you tie the knot, I’d say - but if you think you should do it’, Allie's eyes shot right back to hers, 'then do it for right reasons, don't do it for Bea.’

'How…? Why…?’ Allie staggered, embarrassed to the bone, but unlike Bea last night, she wasn't denying the attraction from her part. After she had found out that Bea was gay, she had been thinking about her feelings long and hard, and she understood she was attracted to her, she only couldn't figure out whether it was a sexual attraction or a platonic investment which cannot interfere with her relationship with Paul. She stood there bravely holding Franky's gaze, waiting for an reply, her heart beating out her chest. 'Tell me why, Franky.’

'Because she's fucked up’, Franky finally hissed through her teeth, tears in her eyes, 'she's fucked up, Allie, and you should stay away, okay?’

She wiped the corner of her eye with her fingers and abruptly left Allie.

Several moments earlier Bea parted with Ann Hagurson and spotted her two friends engaged in a serious conversation. She saw Allie trying to catch her breath and Franky hurrying out, so she went after the brunette. She grabbed her by the arm when she'd finally caught up with her, whispering through her teeth:

'What did you say to her?’

'Nothing’, Franky looked her in the eye, 'I told her nothing. But you mind your steps, aye?’

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Bea was getting really tired of being on her feet the whole day and of endless small talk. She went to a table to pour herself a glass of red wine and eat at least something. Allie and Paul ate on their feet while talking to guests, not at least phased out, Paul flirting with his girlfriend and all the other women at the same time, making Allie giggle at his attempt to attract visitors with his persona. Every time he was around Allie, Allie looked so relaxed and in a good mood, Bea thought to herself. He might not like me, she pondered, but Allie was right, he’s a good man and good for her. I'm glad, she concluded, finishing off her drink and pouring herself another one, then going back to mingle in the crowd.

Around four all Melbourners said their goodbyes, wanting to catch the last ferry to the city. Mr Johnson and Ms Hagurson repeated again how pleased they were with the organisation of the event before they got on the ferry. Tess patted Allie on the shoulder and Todd gave her a quick hug. While Paul was kissing Allie goodbye, Franky took Bea in a tight embrace, then Bridget did it too, whispering something in her ear. They exchanged their numbers with the young blonde, hugged her goodbye and headed back to Melbourne to get ready for another manic Monday.
After the working city folk had left, there were still around hundred people left to entertain, most of them tourists currently on vacation in Little Rock.

So Allie and Bea gathered their strength and returned to the crowd for another round of self-promotion.

Chapter End Notes

How do you all like new characters: Franky, Bridget, Maxine? Any comments on my unusual matchmaking Maxine with Fletch? I am not so sure whether it's your cup of tea.
Afterparty

Chapter Notes

I won't be home tomorrow so you get an early update. All comments about likes and dislikes will be highly appreciated, just be honest. Thank you all.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

After the last guests had left, Bea and Allie returned to supervise the caterers who had to pack up the remaining food and dishes. The guys from the band have packed their equipment onto their boat.

'We had a really good time, girls', they said as they were leaving. 'That was some party you threw alright.'

'You were really good, thank you', Bea smiled in satisfaction.

'I hope we can hire you again, when a chance arise', Allie added.

'Anytime, ladies', the singer patted Allie's shoulder, adding: 'We will leave you with the radio, not to be bored until you finish here. You can just leave it at your hotel reception and I will pick it up tomorrow.'

'Thanks, very nice of you', they smiled.

As they waited for caterers to wrap everything up and bring it back to their boat, Allie kept wandering around, exploring the island and helping out a bit too. Now and then she glanced at Bea, who didn't seem to let go of her glass, the glass always full then empty time and again, as Allie would pass by the rock Bea was sitting on, her gaze lost in the depths of the sea.

After an hour the caterers' boat was only a dark fleck in the horizon so Allie returned to the place where she’d left Bea, not trusting her enough to be left alone, sitting half-drunk on the edge above the ocean.

'Come', she said lifting her up. 'Come keep me company while I clean up.'

Bea reluctantly got up and followed Allie into the tent.

As Allie found a broom and started sweeping confetti off the dance floor, Bea only sat dully into a chair, filling her glass once again with wine, her pensive eyes never leaving the blonde's figure in front of her.

Soft rock was being played on the radio and with the amount of alcohol Bea had, she started to feel unusually sentimental.

She was watching Allie work around diligently, and when the bottom of the glass made appearance yet again, she stood up like in a trance and crept behind the half-bent girl.

Allie has just finished sweeping, and was laying the broom on the ground, when she felt Bea's strong arms winding themselves around her. She leaned into her embrace, her head resting on Bea's shoulder and her eyes finding the pre-dusk sky.
’This island is so beautiful, Bea’, she sighed. ’I’m so happy we’re here.’

’Yes, isn’t it?’ she felt how Bea smiled against her neck, her breath reeking of alcohol, but she didn’t care.

’We only worked and worked the whole day long’, Bea pouted. ’Give it a rest already.’

’It’s almost done’, Allie protested. ’Just to finish with…’

She felt Bea's hand muffling her mouth.

’No more’, Bea slurred into her ear. ’Come dance with me. You haven't danced the whole day, Cinderella.’

Allie wanted to protest again but then she felt something in her body change at the thought of dancing closely to the gorgeous redhead.

Taking Bea's hand, she led her to the center of the tent and turned around to face her. The redhead smiled a dazzling smile and pulled her closer.

Her hands resting on Bea's shoulders, her waist clamped tightly between Bea's palms, Allie swung slowly to the music. Allie was only a tiny bit light-headed, but Bea was off her face. Allie chuckled at her state, Bea was clearly a happy drunk, and it was so good to see her completely relaxed for once.

’You’re laughing at me, huh?’ Bea asked rhetorically, poking with her fingertips deeper into Allie's flesh, as a form of punishment. That made Allie chuckle even louder, and when Bea started to tickle her, she jumped and hung her arms around Bea's neck, laughing aloud into Bea's hair. Pressed close together, their bodies shook from laughter as one, and they remained so even after their fit subsided. Bea held her close, her arms squeezing her back by her shoulder blades. Allie's nose was stuck behind Bea's ear, her breath caressing her lobe. They danced slowly to the next song, its familiar melody warming their hearts and quickening their pulses.

The evening was settling in, and there were only few orange stripes remaining in the sky. Some birds could be heard from the distance until few moments ago but now even they went quiet, reminding the two women that they were the only people left on the island, left alone to enjoy each other's company and beautiful lyrics coming from the radio speaker.

Allie hummed along into Bea's ear:

’I've never seen you looking so lovely as you did tonight;
I've never seen you shine so bright…’

Her beautiful voice skipped over verses she didn't like to relate to Bea, her lips resting against Bea's earlobe in the meantime, then soon continued:

’And I have never seen that dress you're wearing,
Or the highlights in your hair that catch your eyes,
I have been blind’, she gripped at the nape of Bea's neck firmer, as her excited voice moved to chorus:

’The lady in red is dancing with me, cheek to cheek;
There's nobody here, it's just you and me;
It's where I want to be;
But I hardly know this beauty by my side,
I'll never forget the way you look tonight.'

Allie could feel Bea's body completely relaxing in her embrace, she nuzzled her heavy head into blonde locks, she smiled against them. Allie could clearly hear her inhaling the scent of her hair, that making her heart banging against her chest bone and her voice stuck in her throat.

She couldn't continue singing with her frozen voice, so she lowered her head onto Bea's shoulder and quietly danced in unison with the redhead's body.

When the next chorus striked, she could hear Bea's drunken murmur into her ear:

'We both wearing red and then this song, talk about coincidence.'

'Or faith', Allie murmured back, bringing her hands even higher, to tangle them into red mane, as she looked up into serious brown eyes.

Bea was getting shaky on her feet so Allie wound her arm around her waist and led her to sit on the swing a bit.

'You rest there for a while, Bea', Allie said gently, 'and I will finish with the cleaning, aye?'

Bea yawned and stretched her arms and legs, while she was watching Allie quickly walking away and finding the discarded broom again. She looked at Allie bending to pick up the broom, her movements so swift, her body so perfect. She could still feel the smell of her hair in her nostrils and that smell gave her a sense of security and warmth, like she didn't experience in many, many years.

She smiled towards the slender figure in red, that smile turning into another yawn, as her heavy eyelids started closing. Bea didn't even notice when she lay down in the swing or lulled herself into sleep.

Allie cleaned up everything, as quietly as possible, noticing that Bea has fallen asleep. When she was finished though, she didn't know what to do. She felt so sorry to wake Bea up and besides, she didn't think it was a good idea to bring an intoxicated person on board into the open sea. Concluding it would be the best if she let Bea sleep it off, she turned off the music and approached the sleepyhead on her fingertips.

She was so peaceful, so beautiful, her lips half-parted, her long eyelashes black against her olive skin. Allie carefully took her shoes off, then she took off her own and laid herself next to Bea's warm body. Their faces were lain only centimetres away, their breaths were mixing. Allie smiled when she felt alcohol still radiating off the other woman. She was so sleepy herself, darkness approaching heavy upon them. Suddenly remembering how Bea had scared away from her last night, clearly afraid of the darkness, Allie got up and turned on the light. Bea scrunched her nose at that, but luckily didn't wake, so Allie returned to resume her previous position. She hugged Bea's waist with her right arm and let her eyes wander all over that beautiful face. It was such a miracle what she felt for this woman, she only knew her for a fortnight or less, yet she already meant the world to her.

Some minutes later, Allie could hear the distant sound of her phone ringing in her purse. She knew it was Paul checking up on her, but it wasn't important enough to her to break this moment, so she ignored it and remained put.

Allie fought to stay awake, wanting to prolong this wonderful moment of peace. She frowned when
Bea furrowed her brows in her sleep, and she smiled at her smile when she was dreaming something pleasant. She stroked her hair when she seemed to twitch from something in her dream and she loved how her touch seemed to have calmed Bea instantly. She was so dependant on the older woman, like she wasn't on anyone, ever, in her lifetime.

Resting her forehead on Bea's, inhaling her sweet breaths, she finally closed her eyes and drifted off.

Three hours later, Bea was the first one to wake: her eyes opening to a pressed on face, she inwardly scared and almost screamed. She sprung into sitting position, the movement causing her a severe headache. Realising it was only Allie, she calmed down, regretting that she woke up the tired young woman.

'Sorry to have woken you', she whispered. 'I thought you were someone else.'

She tried to get up, but her head was spinning, so she groaned as she was forced to lie back down on the swing. Allie however was completely sober by now and quick on her feet.

'I have some aspirin in my purse', she said before she disappeared out of Bea's sight. She typed out a quick text to Paul to let him know she was alright, found an unopened bottle of water in her purse and returned to her friend.

'Here, drink this', she said, lifting Bea up and stretching her hand out for her to take the tablet. Not thinking, Bea picked up the tablet with her mouth, both of the women freezing at the sudden realisation what she'd done when her lips sucked in the tablet from the gentle skin on Allie's palm. Allie felt a temporary rush into her head and that annoying throbbing between her legs, but she didn't want to let it stop her from helping Bea. She opened the bottle and held it against Bea's lips, as she was swallowing.

'There you go', she said putting the cap back on the bottle, but Bea took away the bottle from her, drank a bit more, then stood up with difficulty and dragged herself to the grass outside of the tent. Allie watched her washing her face with cool water, then returning to sit next to her.

'You only smeared your makeup', Allie giggled.

'Never mind', Bea replied, 'I feel better now.'

Allie found some Kleenex in her purse:

'Let me clean you up.'

Bea didn't protest so she raised herself above her in a kneeling position and gently removed her mascara from her eyes. With the second wipe she lingered on her lips longer than it was necessary to remove her lipstick, and with the third she really took her time, because she knew this one must be the last. She was driving the wet tissue all over Bea's face, cleaning her skin at an excruciatingly slow speed. Bea held her eyes closed and didn't protest so her heated fingertips felt free to prolong the act until there was no excuse left anymore.

'So, all pretty again', Allie's voice slightly trembled as Bea was slowly opening her eyes. She didn't know what it all meant: her nervous excitement at touching that smudged face, the fire that lit up under her fingertips, her heartbeat so strong against her chest bone that Bea could also hear it. She didn't know and she didn't care to know, because she was afraid, if once she fully understood, she could lose Bea or have to force herself to give her up.

But Bea knew. Looking up at Allie's flushed face, her hands that trembled against her cheekbones, hearing her heart thumping soundly behind her quickly rising and falling chest, Bea understood.
Suddenly remembering Franky's warning words from yesterday evening, she heavily regretted her drinking, dancing with Allie, allowing the situation to escalate into them being so close to each other.

'Thank you', Bea said fondly but determinedly, 'we should go now.'

She stood up so quickly that the earth started spinning around her still plastered self. As she tried to get away, she found herself pulled back, Allie tugging firmly at her hand.

Blue eyes looked into hers most seriously:

'Bea', she squeezed her hand, 'don't take this the wrong way, but I'm not going into the ocean with you until you sobered up.'

Bea was surprised to hear those firm words and felt ashamed when she realised how much right was Allie to say that. She was nowhere fit to drive a motorboat and she would certainly not dare risking Allie's safety.

She groaned with frustration and sat back down.

'I'm sorry', she said, her head in her hands, 'I'm never drinking again.'

'Don't be', Allie ruffled her hair, 'you're a fun drunk. I'm glad to see you’ve loosened up a bit. But how come you drank so much in the first place?'

Bea remembered watching Franky next to Bridget, Tess next to her husband, that old couple holding hands, and oh, those hurtful scenes of Paul's arm winding itself around Allie's waist every chance it got. She couldn't tell Allie how lonely she felt looking at them, like everything was taken away from her, like she was an outcast, left alone with an empty glass that needed to be filled regularly to keep her going and fake-smiling. So she kept her gaze to the ground and shrugged her shoulders.

The young woman wrapped her arms around those shoulders, making Bea gasp inaudibly. She pulled her feet up on the swing and took Bea's head into her lap.

'I'll make it go away, don't worry', Bea heard her soft voice promising her, as she felt her fingertips circling around her temples. She didn't know how to fight this misguided kindness so she let it happen. With no way out, she accepted Allie's gentle efforts and allowed herself to relax into her touches. Allie massaged her scalp so long, so tenderly, so selflessly that Bea could feel the tension in her head withdrawing but tears accumulating under her closed eyelids.

'Sweet Allie', she uttered, the colour of her voice revealing to the blonde how touched she was. So Allie allowed herself to place a kiss into the crown of her head, as she rocked her gently into sleep.

***

Bea slept for hours, lying on the side, her arm wrapped securely around Allie's waist, her face tucked into that curve between Allie's abdomen and upper thigh. To Allie it looked like she had found a perfect hiding place and she revelled in the feeling of being a safe haven for so often troubled looking redhead.

She herself didn't sleep at all, didn't want to sleep. She felt like she's been entrusted with a treasure and she was its devoted nightwatch. She caressed Bea's hair throughout the night, her long fingers
never getting tired of entangling themselves into the silk strands.

Occasionally her thumb moved to Bea's cheekbone or nose or chin, amused that Bea was in such a heavy slumber following her drunkenness that no amount of touching or teasing seemed to be able to wake her up. Her fingers explored greedily every inch of her beautiful features: her eyebrows, her eyelashes, her forehead, then her neck, her ears, her shoulders. Most often her eyes kept returning to Bea's full lips, she longed to touch them too, but she couldn't. With Bea drunken and sleeping, that would feel like taking advantage so she loyally skipped the part of her face that she yearned the most for.

Allie couldn't help but wonder where this need to touch Bea's lips was coming from. She knew Bea was gay but she wasn't, not counting the childhood's stupidity when she and her best friend kissed at the age of thirteen. She was now a grown, straight woman, engaged nonetheless. On Bea's wristwatch she could see its hands overlapping at 4.22 and she knew she should stop the childish behavior, stop her ridiculous caresses and wake up Bea. It was Monday morning and she was due back in Melbourne soon enough, back to her job, back to Paul. But looking at Bea's wristwatch she couldn't bring herself to wake her up, her mind going back to all of their encounters when the hands of the clock overlapped, evoking the memory of each breakfast, each lunch, each gentle word they shared with each other. And nothing of the things awaiting her in Melbourne seemed as important as the woman lying peacefully in her lap.

***

It was half past five when Bea woke up into a smiling blue gaze. She felt like she's just had the best sleep in years, her head was clear, her body relaxed. She was firstly plagued with a feeling of inappropriateness but in the same time it felt so natural and safe to be lying on Allie's lap that she let rules of etiquette go. Instead of apologising, she simply smiled at the sweet girl above her and wished her good morning.

'Good morning, sleepyhead. Feel better?'

'Much. Thank you.'

'My pleasure', Allie said, as her smile grew impossibly larger.

Bea got up on her feet and helped Allie up too. She gathered their purses, Allie picked up the radio, and they headed towards their motorboat. It was quarter to six when they parked at the harbour in Little Rock and headed the shorter way to their hotel, over the small hill. Allie faked bad form when climbing up the hill, thus resulting as Allie expected - in Bea taking her hand and dragging her up. She chuckled cunningly into her chin, but at the same time the grown-up in her asked herself what the hell she was doing.

They snuck into their floor, parting hands in front of their rooms.

'Wanna have breakfast together?' Allie breathed out.

'Sure', Bea smiled, 'see you at nine downstairs.'

'Okay', Allie smiled back then disappeared behind the wooden door.

***
Allie was sitting in the hotel restaurant since half past nine, sipping on her coffee. 8:44 Bea breezed in fresh as a daisy, but as she took a seat across her, Allie couldn't find the woman she parted with only three short hours ago. They were both showered and dressed up in office skirts and shirts, but with Allie it was only appearance, while Bea was in full business state of mind, losing every resemblance to a merry drunk from last night.

Allie sighed inaudibly several times, while they ate mostly in silence. It was a quick breakfast, as they were back on the pier with their luggage in their hands before the clock stroke half past nine. The ferry was waiting on passengers to board. Bea's swings and pillars were already packed on board, the hotel construction workers having had dismantled the tent early in the morning and transported it to Little Rock. Together with six dozen passengers they got on board too, and soon watched the friendly town disappearing in front of their eyes.

They sat together on a bench near bow, Bea still not talkative and Allie feeling like a burden was pressing on her chest.

Bea was feeling too guilty and ashamed to even look at Allie. Franky's words were resonating loudly through her head. What the hell was I thinking, Bea cried inwardly in sheer desperation. Her eyes glued on the ocean, she didn't even notice the waters in front of them; instead her thoughts kept going back to her drunk self from last night, how she hugged Allie, she who didn't hug anyone that way in ages, how she made her dance with her, lay in her lap, led her on. Franky was right, she didn't think this through, she got close to the young woman, when she knew that she didn't have anything to give her, while in the same time Allie had this incredibly good man by her side, who would do anything for her.

Despite that, her mind couldn't be tamed not to return to the moments when Allie's hands were on her face, her fingers in her hair, her mouth breathing into her ear. She almost cried as those sweet memories got corrupted by fear that crept into her soul, that familiar fear that kept her away from human touch all these long years. She could feel Allie's palms cradling her cheeks but those memories didn't bring her happiness like last night, only desperation and angst. She shuddered from fright and put on her dark sunglasses, in attempt to hide her emotions from those ever-questioning blue eyes which never seemed to leave her face.

Allie was sitting confused and sad next to the woman who looked like an iceberg. After an hour or so, she dared to cup her hand with hers, only to see it withdraw at a lightening speed. The young blonde was rejected, wounded. She barely kept her tears from falling. Franky was right, she thought to herself, she is emotionally unavailable; hell, I didn't even get a chance to get to know her and I have already lost her.

***

At twelve they shared lunch the cordial hotel owners packed up for them, their words still scarce. Half past twelve they docked in Melbourne, the same tipper truck from the other day, with the same two workers, waiting on them to take over the tent and pillars. Two women rode in the front seat, their thighs pressed closely together, making them both vulnerable and uncomfortable, while one of the workers was again nice enough to ride in the back with pillars and tent. They arrived at Bea's after only ten minutes drive, both women releasing a breath of relief when they were able to finally part.

'I'll make us coffee while you unload', Bea offered and headed towards her home.

'Do you want the pillars back in the shed, ma'am?' one of the workers shouted out after her so Bea
turned around and replied: 'No, I have some plans for them. Just leave them in the garden next to the wall.'

Allie wondered what plans but wasn't in the mood to ask.

Bea returned with four paper cups of coffee to go; she thanked the workers after handing them their coffees, letting them enjoy her grateful smile for a few seconds. When Allie paid them and they left, she turned back to Bea, the redhead giving her one of two remaining cups, simply stating:

'Black with sugar for you.'

They fingertips briefly touched, and while Bea seemed unaffected by it, it was enough to jumpstart Allie's heart and give her enough strength to survive the rest of the day.

She parked her car out of Bea's garage, Bea driving her sinister black Jeep after her red Mini, fifteen minutes later they were parking on lots 15 and 16 in the underground garage.

'What are you going to work on today?' Allie asked as they rode the elevator.

'I thought to start on the rooms with balconies. The sea view from them will be magnificent.'

'I guess it's easier to get an inspiration when you have seen it with your own eyes, aye?'

'Indeed', Bea replied. 'What will you do?' she asked as they were entering their office.

'With only three hours left until knocking-off time, I will only update our social networks with new stories and replies, then head home at five.'

Bea nodded in response, happy to be able to sit behind her monitors again.

As Allie's laptop was powering up, she watched the red-haired woman sitting so composedly in front of her. She was radiating cold politeness, a perfect stranger.

Looking at her, Allie was convinced that the last three days never happened, a beautiful island and a beautiful woman in her embrace were nothing more but distant figments of her imagination.

Chapter End Notes

Lyrics belong to the song "The Lady in Red" by Chris de Burgh.
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

After the picnic they organised on Rock Island their social networks’ pages got quite a few new followers. Allie recognised most faces as tourists that visited their party last Sunday and the word obviously has started to spread around, she concluded with satisfaction, as she found out that lots of the unfamiliar followers were Facebook friends with the ones she met on Rock Island. She also got dozen PMs, inquiring about a possibility of an early New Year's booking or a potential discount. All of that meant a lot of work for Allie: she posted heaps of pictures from the picnic across all social platforms, as well as several Insta-Stories; she replied on each post and answered each question. On Wednesday afternoon she participated in a show on a talkback radio station, and afterwards the number of followers doubled, which kept her busy throughout Thursday and Friday.

Bea on the other hand had a peaceful week, making a palpable progress with her design on the rooms with seaside view.

Despite them not talking much in the last week, Bea and Allie kept their breakfast and lunch ritual alive. They didn't mention again to meet on Sunday, but as Allie showed up on their last meeting place, she wasn't surprised to see Bea stretching out, waiting for her.

On Monday Allie invited her to her birthday party next Saturday.

'It's your birthday?' Bea asked again to be sure she heard it right, showing more interest in Allie then anytime last week.

'Yes', Allie confirmed. 'My aunt is throwing me a party at her bar, like every year. My cousins and friends will be there, as well as Todd, and Mary with her husband. Please do come too.'

'I wouldn't know anyone there except you and Paul', Bea uttered.

'Oh, I have already invited Franky and Bridget, and you can bring as many people as you like.'

'Alright then', Bea smiled for the first time in ages, 'birthday girl'.

***

February 6th, the day of Allie's birthday, was with thirty two degrees one of the hotter days in Melbourne that summer. Allie woke up excited into what it was her special day, though not so excited as Paul, who took a day off and was preparing his girl a breakfast in bed. Kaz called her before she even had a chance to finish that breakfast, emotional that she couldn't get to spend some time with her daughter, not even on her birthdays. Days like these brought tears to Karen's otherwise very fulfilling life, wondering whether she’d really made the right decision, being a mother, no matter that her little one has just turned twenty six today.

Paul's parents dropped by around eleven bringing a present and ice cream they all shared on the front porch, catching up and joking with each other. Moments like these were the best part of being in a relationship with Paul - having had a lonely childhood, Allie finally had a sense of belonging to a
normal family, which accepted her for who she was. Paul's parents were always so kind to her, not differing between her and their son, that sometimes Allie wondered whether Paul was her brother and she was born into this warm family nest.

Bea, on the other hand, woke up nervous, not keen on attending Allie's party. She really wanted to be there for her, but had no wish to endure what she knew would be a long night of standing on the margins, observing Allie's perfect life, knowing she would never be a part of it. It was only the unbearable thought of hurting her young friend if she didn't show up that made Bea keep her promise to Allie. She couldn't bring herself to type out a text message to congratulate though. I'll congratulate her tonight, more than that would be over the top, Bea concluded.

***

The party was already well off, and Bea hasn't shown up yet. Allie had expected her to come with her neighbours, but an hour has passed already since Franky and Bridget arrived and still no sign of the redhead.

Allie didn't know why it bothered her so much. She had a ridiculous feeling that the place was empty and she was lonely, that this whole big celebration was a pointless exaggeration. She forced herself to chat and smile, that terrible dread freezing her blood. What if she doesn't show up at all, she choked on her thoughts.

At six four people came through the door, making all heads turn their way. They were all wearing black leather jackets and pants, matched with black biker boots. If her heart didn't already tell her better, Allie would have almost not recognised Bea as one of them. She headed straight to greet her, as if pulled by a magnet. The coconut scent of her long, loose curls, that she felt as instantly as she hugged her, overflowed her with calmness, soothing her nerves and washing all her worries away.

'I thought you wouldn't make it', Allie stuttered, as she pulled back to look Bea in the eye, her hands still on her shoulders. It hurt her to see how strange, even though stunningly beautiful, Bea looked. She had a heavy makeup on: smokey eyes painted with the darkest shadow from the palette and a lipstick of the same fiery nuance as her untamable hair.

'Of course I would make it', Bea's hands gripped firmly up Allie's ribs, 'just that the race took longer than usual, and we're running a bit late, is all'.

'And we also made a stop to get you these', a tall man next to Bea said pleasantly and pulled out a bouquet from behind his back.

'Allie', Bea turned back to her friends, 'let me introduce you to some of my best crew mates: this is Nash Taylor and his wife Doreen Anderson…'

'Nice to meet you, Allie; happy birthday', Doreen gave her a quick kiss on the cheek and handed over a big box of chocolates.

'You shouldn't have to bring anything', Allie gushed out, 'I'm just happy that all of you could join us'.

In the meantime Paul has come over and was now standing with one hand around Allie's waist and with the other shaking the couple's hands, getting acquainted.

'And this is Kim Chang', Bea introduced somewhat shy looking, pretty girl, standing behind her, as if hiding.

'Hi Allie, all the best', the girl stretched out her right to meet Allie's, then handed over a bottle of
champagne she held in her left. As she gave it to Allie, her arm clung automatically to Bea's and Allie couldn't help but feel a sting of jealousy. The girl was very attractive, her straight black hair reaching her waist, her dark eyes piercing through Allie's face.

Bea dug into her inner pocket and drew out an envelope. Allie opened it, seeing it was a birthday card with two tickets in it.

'As my birthday present, I'm taking you to a soccer match next week’, Bea smiled at Allie, 'it's time I teach you something about the game’.

'It's not just any soccer match’, Nash blurted out excitedly, 'its a city derby! Man, I'm so jealous!'

Allie smiled at him dumbfoundedly, she couldn't care less whether it was a soccer derby or a street mopping spree, all she cared to understand was that Bea's taking her somewhere, that she gets to spend time with Bea again.

'Oh Bea, you really shouldn't have', Paul laughed sarcastically and Bea, who was about to pull something out of her side pocket, looked up to meet his territorial gaze, then changed her mind and left whatever she was trying to dig out to lie in her pocket.

She said she was gunna go find Franky and Bridget, while her mates went to mingle among crowd at the bar. Her eyes soon found the cheerful brunette and she headed her way, only to be pulled back by her arm after taking not more than couple of steps.

She turned around to face pleading blue eyes.

'Don't disappear on me so soon, you just got here’, Allie said with the smallest, most insecure smile, 'there's someone I want you to meet’.

She tugged on Bea's hand until she led her to a short blonde woman, about fifty five years old. 'Bea, I want you to meet my aunt Liz’, she said, hugging the older blonde around her shoulders.

'You must be Kaz's sister then. Pleasure to meet you, Allie speaks so fondly of you. Is Kaz close by?’ Bea asked, nervous but excited to meet Allie's mum.

'Mum can't make it tonight’, Allie shrugged her shoulders.

Seeing how sad her question has made Allie, Bea changed the subject, turning back to Liz and thanking her for inviting them into her bar.

'We’re still warming up, love’, Liz said, 'soon we’ll be moving upstairs to the dance podium.’ Liz’s establishment was a classic pub with bar and booths and a game of darts on the ground floor, but a weekend nightclub with DJ on the first floor, dance podium occupying eighty per cent of the space. Liz had been running this place alone for years, but right about as she was starting to feel the job taking its toll on her aged self, her daughter Sophie stepped in so they were now partners. Sophie being in charge of the late shift and night shift on weekends gave Liz the opportunity to go home after five each day and to take it easier in general. Sophie was twenty one, after she finished high school, she was aware that uni is not something where she could thrive, so she decided the best course of action for her and her family would be to go into business with her mum. The family earnings from the club have been huge, and her mum was getting tired and needed help. Her younger brother Artie had a whole different future planned out for him, he was a freshman at Melbourne Uni, with plans to go to law school afterwards.

As Allie introduced her adoptive cousins and Liz's husband to Bea, Sophie and Artie couldn't help but wonder why Allie cared so much to get her whole family so formally introduced to a woman she
knew for only four weeks. Something was off and odd with Allie, they couldn't put their finger on it though, but Allie's redhaired co-worker seemed to notice it too, as she looked slightly embarrassed and somewhat guilty. Allie on the other hand has got so excited about them meeting each other that she was completely oblivious to their confusion.

Bea was soon rescued from her awkward situation by her mate Kim, who dragged her off upstairs with other guests, wanting to dance with her.

Once in the nightclub, all the guests substantially loosened up, taking more drinks and dancing in small groups. Two hours passed in a blink of an eye. Allie couldn't get anywhere near Bea, as Kim wasn't leaving her side, she and Bea dancing in a closed group with Bridget, Franky and Nash, and Paul relentless in asking for a dance after another from her. Allie didn't know what's got into him, he was never possessive before, but now she had a feeling as if he was marking his territory, not giving her a chance to mingle with her guests. She was planning to approach Doreen and possibly find out more about the 'Angels' and Bea's involvement with them, however when she finally broke free from Paul's embrace and got a hold of Doreen, she failed to change the subject. Doreen was in a deep conversation with Mary, it turned out she and Nash also had a baby - a toddler boy named Josh - and it proved to be impossible for Allie to divert their attention to any other subject but motherhood and its challenges. Frustrated, Allie finally gave up and left them to it, joining Boomer and Regan on the dancefloor. Regan's boyfriend Tom was standing nearby with Paul and Todd. Todd seemed to have really got off with Tess's son Greg that weekend on Rock Island, because he brought him to Allie's party that evening, much to Allie's surprise.

Some time later she finally ran into Bea as Bea got out of the toilet. Her lips split into a huge smile and she was just about to chat her up, when she saw Kim holding two beers and motioning Bea back to the dancefloor.

'Is she in love with you or something?' Allie blurted out, unnerved.

'Who? Kim?' Bea got into a fit of laughter, the mere idea surprising her with its preposterousness. 'No, no, she's in love with a girl named Tina for ages now - the one that I told you about, who works in our building', Allie nodded, 'Tina loves her back, she's just not ready to commit yet and start a relationship with Kim, she still has wild geese to chase, I guess’, Bea shrugged. 'Sorry, I got to go’, Bea added as she saw Kim getting impatient.

Around nine pizza was served for everyone, Franky and Boomer getting acquainted over the last slice of pepperoni, which they first fought about but then decided to split. Soon enough Sophie went up to DJ's microphone, announcing karaoke night can commence. All guests got really excited about it, well all except Bridget and Bea, who couldn't be persuaded to participate, not for the life of them. Sophie was the first one to sing, then she did a little duet with Artie. Mary and her husband followed, earning serious cheers from the crowd, as well as Boomer and Franky, who went to the stage together to perform Gwen Stefani’s 'Hollaback Girl’. Allie hollered and laughed at the top of her lungs, finding the song to be a perfect choice for both Franky and Booms. Greg was very insecure on stage, rapping to Fetty Wap’s 'My Way’, but the crowd clapped him on through the song, joining their voices with his to cheer the youngster. Near the end Paul, Tom and Todd jumped to the stage, goofing around him until they all choked from laughter. Things got awkward when Franky and Kim wanted both to sing the same song so they ended up having a heated duet on the stage. Bridget's face turned green as she was watching her wife's back pressed into the hot Korean girl's front. They were both wearing a camisole top, as it was revealed once Kim took off her leather jacket, and both had tattoos on their upper arms - Franky's many tattoos varying in colour and shapes, while Kim only had one black ink tattoo on her left shoulder, showing an image of an angel in flames. They looked incredibly hot together on stage and Bridget was seriously considering making a scene and break in on their performance of 'I'm Too Sexy’ classic by Right Said Fred. Allie searched Bea's face for any
traces of jealousy, but when she found none, only amusement, she relaxed, finally taking Bea's word for it that Kim was just a mate to her.

'Well, we all know who's the best singer in da house!' she heard Sophie's voice screaming into the microphone. 'Birthday girl, come up here, cuz!'

Allie knew this was bound to happen, as it happens every time her family gets together. The talent for music was something she inherited from her biological parents and although she wasn't nowhere good as they were, she was still far better than an average person and her adoptive family and friends enjoyed taking advantage of her gift any chance they got. Yet she got so carried away by the interesting performances of her friends that her own completely slipped her mind and she realised she didn't even pick out a song. Oh shoot, she said to herself, I'll just sing whatever I sing around the house these days.

Allie finally chose a song that always managed to make her happy and bring a smile to her face.

Bea watched her from the crowd, going confidently into the stage, dancing into opening chords. Paul whistled and she smiled briefly at him, then started singing:

*Your mouth is a revolver firing bullets in the sky  
Your love is like a soldier, loyal till you die  
And I've been looking at the stars for a long, long time  
I've been putting out fires all my life  
Everybody wants a flame, but they don't want to get burnt  
And today is our turn*

It was a great song choice, because the crowd cheered up as soon as first verses were out. A big smile on Allie's face brought out smiles on all of her friends' faces, everybody’s good mood brightening even more until all exploded together into the chorus:

Days like these lead to  
Nights like this lead to  
Love like ours  
You light the spark in my bonfire heart  
People like us, we don’t need that much  
Just someone that starts, starts the spark in our bonfire hearts

Bea couldn't peel her eyes off the blonde on stage. She admired her powerful voice, her spirit and confidence and her heart ached at how beautiful she looked. Her blonde hair was tied up in a cute ponytail, revealing all the smooth skin of her throat and shoulders, under the thin straps of her plunge neck dress. The dress itself was an elegant high-low dress, whose silky material hugged Allie's backside in feminine waves, covering her knees on the front and reaching up to her ankles on the back, but still looking very sexy and provoking on her. Its colour was navy blue with floral sky blue print and it has brought out Allie's eyes perfectly, even from afar.

Those blue eyes pierced right into Bea's soul as they found her brown ones, when she started singing the next verse. Her big smile slackened, her look serious, as she sang to Bea, not averting her eyes for a second from hers:

This world is getting colder, strangers passing by  
No one offers you a shoulder, no one looks you in the eye  
But I've been looking at you for a long, long time  
Just trying to break through, trying to make you mine
Everybody wants a flame, they don’t want to get burnt
Well today is our turn

Days like these lead to
Nights like this lead to
Love like ours
You light the spark in my bonfire heart

Bea’s heart rate went through the roof, she couldn't take it anymore, she got so scared. She turned around, fighting her way out of the crowd. She needed air and she needed it fast. She headed straight for the terrace door, stepping out into the small terrace, she inhaled deeply, her fingers gripping at the railing. She could feel her legs shaking so she turned around searching for anything to sit on. There was no chair there, as the terrace was merely a fire escape platform, so she let herself down on the fire escape stairs and took her head into her desperate hands. She could clearly hear Allie's brilliant voice singing chorus after chorus and the mass singing along, and the jollier they got, the heavier was the weight that pressed on her chest. Next she heard the DJ taking over and the crowd settling down. It took her another couple of minutes to compose herself enough to face the people, and as she was about to pull up her head from her knees and stand up to return inside, she felt a hand running through her hair. Surprised, she quickly looked up, only to meet Allie's blue orbs looking down at her with concern.

'You alright?’ Allie whispered.

'Yeah, just needed a bit of air’, Bea rasped out, trying a faint smile.

'Oh, Bea’, Allie exhaled, taking her head in her both hands, lowering herself to sit next to her. Her long thumbs caressed olive cheekbones, her mouth kissed the corner of the troubled brown eye. 'You’ve worn yourself out today, with the race all day and now this.’

She looked into her deep, dark orbs and her heart shuddered at how tired they seemed. Her hands went up to Bea's hair again and she pressed her head into her chest, holding her in a bone crushing hug. 'I won't mind if you went home now to rest’, she murmured against red locks, 'I am just so glad that you made it at all’.

Bea was trying not to panic, feeling like she was gunna suffocate on Allie's outburst, so she carefully untangled herself out of the blonde's embrace. 'I can't leave until I give you this’, she said, pulling a gift box out of her pocket.

'What’s that?’ Allie asked in surprise. Her eyes went even wider when Bea opened the blue box, revealing two stud earrings. They were white gold with a framed, round cut, navy blue stone in hazelnut size.

'What are these?', Allie wondered.

'These are tanzanite stones, to match your eyes’, Bea smiled into her puzzled expression.

'Oh, I can't take it, Bea’, Allie stammered, 'it's far too expensive’.

'Don't be silly, it's a present and it's not that expensive. And I can afford it’, Bea assured her. She squeezed her hands as to convince her, then continued, 'I just want you to have something long-lasting to remember me by. Next year on your birthday’, she said as she picked one earring out of the box and put it through the pierced hole in Allie's left ear, 'we will be already long over with this project so this is my only chance to give you something of substance’.
'What do you mean', Allie asked in a trembling voice, while Bea was screwing in the earring nut on the threaded post to secure the earring from falling out, 'You’re saying you don't want to see me anymore once we finish working together?'

'I’m saying’, Bea plucked out the second earring and took Allie's other earlobe between her fingers, 'people often go their separate ways and when we inevitably do, I would like you to have something of mine so when you see it once in a while, you can remember we were friends once.’

Allie kept silent until Bea finished fastening the earring, then took her hand into hers and brought it to her chest. Bea was shocked to see tears glistening in her eyes, when she lifted her head and spit out:

'Just so you know, I will never opt for us to go separate ways, and if you do, I wouldn't need jewelry not to forget you, I would always remember you.’

'I didn't mean to upset you, Allie’, Bea mumbled in a jolt, 'I'm just not good with words, I’ve never been able to express my thoughts correctly. I don't mean us to stop being friends, I only meant as “just in case”, y’know’, Bea rambled trying to soothe Allie, as she took her into her embrace, her fingers stroking down blonde locks. 'Please don't cry on your birthday.’

'I didn't even think you were gunna come’, Allie sobbed into her chest, 'you barely spoke to me for two weeks’.

'Now, what are you talking about. That's bull. We spent almost every day together.’

'Yes, but you were so different’, Allie lifted her head to look Bea straight in the eye, 'ever since the Rock Island’.

'You're hypersensitive, that's all’, Bea said, as she wiped Allie's eyes with her palms and thumbs. She fumbled into her pockets to find a tissue then held it under Allie's nose. 'Now blow your nose and tell me you like the damn earrings.’

Allie did as she was told, couldn't help but smile when Bea shook her head by her nose. 'I like the earrings, Bea’, she whispered through her shy smile, ‘thank you’.

'You're welcome, sweet cheeks, let's wait a bit until that redness disappears from your face and head back inside, okay?’

Allie nodded and snuggled her face into Bea's shoulder. 'This is my favourite part of my birthday’, she whispered after a while. 'You're my favourite person. You make me so calm.’ She felt Bea's lips in the crown of her head so she raised her head to look into her eyes, their faces centimetres apart. Bea's hot breath was on her skin, inflaming her from the inside.

'Al, are you out there?’ they heard Paul's strong voice coming from somewhere near. 'Oh, there you are’, he said as he stepped into the terrace, surprised to see his fiancée sitting on fire escape stairs with her co-worker. 'What are you two gals doing up there?’

'We were just talking’, Allie smiled, not too convincingly.

'Don't you do that all day in the office?’

'No, we actually work in the office’, Allie's smile got bigger and more genuine.

'Well, we can't cut the cake without you’, Paul stretched out his hand for Allie to take, which she did and jumped happily to the terrace.
'Come on, Bea’, Paul asked her, as he dragged his fiancée into the room so Bea sighed and followed.

Allie couldn't come back in at a better moment, because her assistance was needed to part inebriated Franky from still very much sober Boomer. They were sitting at the bar, trying to outdo each other in drinking up tequila shots, Boomer winning by far. 'This competition ain't over, smug face’, the tattooed brunette threatened to her new, oversized mate, 'ya prepare yourself for round two tomorrow’.

'I'm gunna whip your skinny arse tomorrow, dipshit’, Boomer grinned into her face. Franky put her arm around Boomer's broad shoulders, wanting to throw something witty back at her, but she was interrupted by a mildly disturbed looking Allie:

'No competition’s gunna happen tomorrow, Boomer. First of all, you both had enough until next month, and second of all, did you forget tomorrow afternoon was supposed to be our time together? We were having a picnic on the beach?’

'Shit, Al, I forgot Paul was working all day and that we made plans for the picnic. I kinda offered Franky I would help her with cleaning her attic tomorrow. She wants to move her library there, and there will be a barbecue later.’

Allie sighed in frustration.

'Come on, Blondie’, Franky slightly slurred, 'you can come too. We start at one, but you don't have to do anything, just come hang around, keep Bridget company while us three strong gals take care of the business.’

Assuming that the ‘third strong gal’ cannot be anyone else but her favourite redhead, Allie agreed to come, suddenly in a much better mood. When she went over to the portable table to blow the candles and cut the first piece of cake, there was not a trace left on her young face of that sadness that gripped on her over at the terrace.

After the cake, the dancing and partying continued. Paul grabbed the young blonde around her waist, spinning her on the dancefloor, plunging his tongue deep into her mouth when the song died out. Bea swallowed hard at the sight. This is how it should be for her, she thought to herself, they belong together, and besides, I have nothing to give her, I'm no good - the only thing I seem to be good at is to make her cry, she pondered with self-hatred. This is what she wanted for Allie, this fine man so devoted to her, who always seemed to make her laugh. All was as it should be, Bea thought, but she still couldn't bear to watch it - his tongue deep within that delicate milky white throat. She felt like the healthy thing was to go out and cry a bit herself, but she couldn't peel her eyes off the couple. She just stood there and watched them, as her heart grew cold. She could feel herself turning to stone, the reality of who she was and what Allie's perspectives were hitting her hard in the face. Even though she's just told Allie their friendship would continue beyond work, she felt deep down that they should never have met, for her sake and, above all, for Allie's.

She startled from her inappropriate haze, when Kim squeezed her wrist and said softly, 'Bea, we are all gunna go. Doreen's and Nash’s babysitter ought to be going home soon and Tina and Mel are waiting for me at “Brown Alley”. Wanna join us?’

'No, thanks, I'm shattered’, Bea refused, her eyes still firmly glued to the happy couple, 'but I'm gunna leave too’.

The four of them quickly said their goodbyes, Bea couldn't prevent Liz from pulling her into a hug though. There was something about the discomposed redhead that woke up Liz's maternal instincts, making her want to protect her like a child and kiss it all better.
The party lasted until one a.m. and the guests all left in spirits high as it gets.

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Allie woke up at seven thirty, not particularly well-rested thanks to Paul, who God knows from where found the energy to make love to her at two a.m., but without hangover either, because she paid attention not to drink much last night. She saw Bea drinking only two beers for the whole evening so she assumed she wouldn't oversleep and would go running as always. As silly as it was, she wanted to get up early and go with her.

After taking a shower, she fixed herself a strong breakfast - lots of bacon and eggs with a mug of natural yoghurt - to keep her strength up on the jogging trail. After she drank her coffee, she almost felt like a human again.

Bea was surprised to see her, to the very least. 'I thought you were gunna let this Sunday slide'.

'No way', Allie retorted, 'you said it yourself, I'm in too bad of a shape to let any Sunday slide'.

'You look fine to me', Bea slapped her backside, 'although a little overdressed', she added, alluding to the tanzanite earrings that were still in Allie's earlobes.

Allie shrugged her shoulders, 'I love them too much to take them off', she said knowing how silly she must appear wearing them to a singlet and trackie dacks.

'At least they're all blue', Bea smiled at her and they began stretching.

After an hour and a half they took brunch in the same tavern as always; Allie was so hungry that she cleared her plate and a half of Bea's.

'Didn't you say you had a heavy breakfast', Bea raised her eyebrows in wonder, 'you're not pregnant, are you?'

'No', Allie replied with a full mouth, 'not ready for that yet. I'm so big on protection.'

'Yeah, me too', Bea concorded understandingly, making Allie's eyes shoot up in surprise.

'I thought you said you were single?'

'I said I gave up on relationships, never said I gave up on sex.'

'Oh', Allie said in confusion, suddenly losing her appetite.

Bea took her to hers afterwards, as it was already past eleven and they were due at Franky's at one. She took Allie straight to her bike garage, where she had a lounge room at the entrance and a bathroom for Allie to freshen up. Allie took up on her offer to take a shower in the garage, while Bea went inside the house to do the same. Before she went to shower she came back to bring Allie a change of clothes, the longest pair of jeans she possessed and a blue polo shirt. She returned quarter an hour later, she herself dressed in jeans and a white vest, to find Allie glued to her motorcycle at the back of the garage.

'Wow, it's beautiful, Bea’, she gushed, her fingers skimming over the saddle.

'Yup, that's my baby', Bea said proudly, her eyes sparkling as she approached the bike. 'May I present you Harley Night Rod 2012, the most beautiful boy I've ever met’, she joked.
Bea's bike was indeed beautiful, all black as night, its powerful engine sound asleep before them.

'Take me for a ride', Allie's eyes glistened eagerly, as she turned her head to look at Bea.

'I don't know, Allie', Bea hesitated, 'I haven't had a passenger in years. There's not even a proper passenger seat.'

'I don't care', Allie's eyes were pleading, 'I'll scooch closer together'.

'Okay, trouble', Bea raised her hands in surrender, opening a closet in the workshop to pull out her gear. She handed Allie a jacket and a helmet and chose one of two remaining helmets for herself and a jacket too.

'You have about dozen jackets in there. I thought that bikies always have just one, which they never part with, like their second skin', Allie wondered.

'Well, I don't know about other “bikies”', Bea was amused, 'but this “bikie” likes to throw her sweaty jacket into the washing machine at the end of a whole day's ride and still have a clean one for tomorrow'.

'You wash leathers in a washing machine?'

'It's a quality eco-leather', Bea replied patiently. 'My crew rides in real leather, but I don't encourage leather use, unless absolutely necessary. Like my footwear', she said taking off her sneakers and putting on her riding boots, 'my shoes are always leather, 'cause I had flatfeet as a child and even though it's corrected, it still kills my soles if I wear artificial leather.'

Allie nodded and opened her mouth to ask more about Bea's childhood feet condition but Bea intercepted with one impatient: 'Are ya gunna stand there all day asking questions or ya gunna go open the gate so I can take you for a ride?'

Allie opted for the latter and they soon took off along the beach road.

Allie's arms were firmly clasped around Bea's waist, the side of her face pressed between her shoulder blades. It was a feeling like none before, trees and faces flying by them.

'Are you alright, Allie?' Bea's voice coming out of their dual Bluetooth headset woke Allie up from her state of trance. 'Yes!', she yelled in response.

'You don't have to yell, doofus, I hear you just fine', Bea chuckled. 'Would it be alright if I went faster?'

As soon as Allie confirmed, Bea hollered, twisting the throttle backwards to accelerate. Allie held on even tighter, her arms traveling further up beneath Bea's jacket. The objects they were passing by were almost a blur. It hurt her to watch so she only closed her eyes and rested her head against Bea's back. She was so happy, taking in the unique scent that was Bea's and Bea's alone. She propped up a bit higher on the seat so she could nuzzle her nose into Bea's plait, her lips brushing over silky strands. She dared moving her arms even higher, knowing there's nothing Bea could do in her current predicament to stop her. Her right palm was resting just under Bea's heart so that she could feel her sound heartbeat. This is everything, she thought to herself, I don't want this to end.

Alas half an hour later, Bea was gliding back in through her gate she’d left wide open and into the garage. 'Let go, chicken-heart’, she said softly to the blonde, who still had her eyes closed.

'I wasn't scared’, Allie protested as she got up and started stretching her legs.
'Oh yeah?' Bea laughed at her. 'That’s why you almost dug my intestine out?!

Allie's chest was suddenly flushed. She found the truth inexplicable even to herself so she let this one slide, accepting the joke on her account.

When they went outside, it was only then when she noticed the garden was somehow different and soon she realised the shed wasn't there anymore. Instead, behind the handsome birches was a white tent, a purple bow flapping in the air from its rooftop. Excited, she ran over to the tent, Bea hot on her heels.

'Oh, Bea, it's like a fairytale’, she let out a shriek of glee.

'Yeah, I finally had the shed torn down’.

'What did you do with those stuff from the previous owner?'

'I took them to my basement. I have a workout room in there and it looks God awful in the corner next to my gym equipment, but it's worth it every time when I walk into the garden.'

Bea had had four pillars cemented deep into ground, each four metres apart from the other. The white drape was only on the front and on the roof, while the sides were hidden from view by thick grape vine trellis between the tent and the house and four birches on the other side. The backside pillars were only a metre away from the garden wall.

'The drape is different’, Allie noticed, her hand going up and down the fabric.

'Yes', Bea confirmed, 'I bought a waterproof one, so that I don't have to dismantle the fabric during rainy months.'

'May I come in?’ Allie asked eagerly so Bea tied each drape side to a pillar and let her in.

Once inside, Allie admired the design. There were two white swings, hanged between pillars - one was in front of the wall and the other was forming the right angle with the first, on the side where the grape trellis were built. They were both padded with white swing cushion covers and they looked so comfy that Allie threw herself into the right one, amused that she could pluck a grape berry each time she swung her swing.

'They are still green, doofus’, Bea laughed as she followed her example, lying down on the swing next to hers.

'They taste good to me’, Allie replied with a full mouth, 'sour but good'.

She turned on her back, noticing that a big part of the roof cover was made out of a transparent plastic material. She pointed with the her finger to it, 'So that you can watch the stars?’ she asked excitedly. Bea nodded, a smile on her face. 'Oh, you thought of everything’, Allie stated contently, turning on her stomach so that she can meet Bea's eyes, their heads close to each other's.

'Where are the other two swings and the rest of the pillars?’ Allie was curious.

'They were really redundant to me so I meant to sell them, however, the owner of the small company I hired to tear down my shed and cement those four pillars, was so enthused with my tent that he offered me a barter: no charge for his work in exchange for the two swings and pillars. He was probably better off in this deal than I was, but I was just so happy I could get it all over with in one day. Plus, he has a couple of teenagers so they will enjoy the swings.’
'Yeah, tent will be their little make out shack. Daddy will rue the day he made you that barter’, the blonde giggled.

'Allie, you're so bad’, Bea slapped her on her arm, giggling alongside her. She tried to pretend-slap her again, but Allie was quicker, capturing her hand within hers and pinching on her finger pads.

'Say you surrender’, Allie squealed.

'Never’, the redhead replied, trying to wiggle her fingers out of Allie's grip.

'Hey, hey, children, calm down’, they heard Franky's amused voice calling out to them. 'What are ya doing lying there, ya loafers? Boomer is already in full swing, come on!’

Allie groaned, stroking on the finger pads she’s just been so mercilessly pinching.

'Oh, don't worry, princess’, Franky teased, 'you don't have to do anything, just stand there and look pretty’.

'I'll show you who's the princess’, Allie jumped to chase her, making Bea roll her eyes and get up.

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'We want to move our library and my study room up here in the attic so that we empty the space that is supposed to be children's room, if we go through with this adoption idea’, Franky explained once they all climbed into their spacious attic, well illuminated and high-ceiled but cramped with junk and old furniture. Bridget got sentimental upon the very mentioning of a possible baby in their home so she hugged her wife around the waist, romance ruined by Franky squeezing on her buttock.

'So, what are y'all, lesbians?’ Boomer said as the realisation finally hit her that the blonde psychiatrist was not only Franky's housemate. Franky only laughed, slipping her wife a dirty one, as in answer to Booms.

'Good for ya’, the large brunette said before she started rushing them:

'Now go on, go on, lift that side’, she lifted one side of a massive closet herself, while Allie stood by, not even wanting to try her luck on lifting that heavy son of a bitch, and three other women bent under the weight of their half.

'I thought you're supposed to be stronger than normal females, having no man around to lean on’, Boomer nagged while they were taking the closet over the doorstep, seeing that the most of the heavy lifting fell on her shoulders.

'We are still regular women, Boomer’, Bridget tried to reason with her.

'I thought that you just said that you were lezzies? Franky just kissed you and all?’ Allie thought the confusion on Boomer’s face was priceless.

'You can't win with her, Gidge’, Franky patted her wife's shoulder, after they finally put the closet downstairs, remembrance of the morning headache that followed her attempt to outdrink Boomer on Allie's birthday still fresh.

It took them quite a few hours to clean out all the papers and junk and take out all of the old furniture down into Bea's jeep. It took her and Boomer several trips to the waste disposal site, while Allie
made herself useful in cleaning alongside Bridget and Franky. After everything was cleaned out, they mopped the floor and painted the walls in cappuccino colour. It was very beautiful and worth every drop of sweat. Boomer was the owner of a prosperous welding shop so she suggested Franky she could make her some metal book shelves and anchor them to the walls once the paint dries out completely in couple of days. Franky loved the idea until Boomer took the offence when Franky asked about the price, saying her money was no good in her shop, that she wanted to do it for her for free.

'It's funny, really’, Bridget said to Bea and Allie, all three of them watching from the side two brunettes bickering at one another, 'they know each other less than twenty four hours and already they seem like a pair of twisted sisters’.

'I've known Boomer half of my life’, Allie commented, her pensive eyes glued to her childhood friend, 'and I've never seen her warming up so quickly to another person. She usually has trust issues until she gets to know the person well’.

'She accepted me fast enough’, Bea raised her eyebrows.

'It was different with you’, Allie smirked at her, 'she saw you were wearing Allie's stamp of approval’. That caused Bea to nudge her shoulder and laugh.

Later on that evening, they were all sitting around the barbecue in the backyard, drinking beer and waiting on meat to be grilled. Bridget was behind the grill, while Franky was holding out her wedding album to Boomer, trying to explain that her and Gidge were indeed legally married, at least according to Canadian law. They had taken some lovely pictures of the two of them in front of Niagara Falls and Franky felt herself getting sentimental when remembering her honeymoon with Gidge. She was only twenty four back then, but she didn't doubt for a moment that she wanted to tie a knot with the beautiful thirty two year old psychiatrist. She took a leap of faith following her heart and never regretted it, because the last ten years of her life were her happiest.

Bridget was circling around with the first platter of grilled sausages, wanting them to snack on it before she starts grilling steaks, but making a mistake of starting with Franky and Booms. While her wife took only one piece, the larger brunette loved her snags so she filled her plate, never stopping to think she should leave something for Allie and Bea. Bridget shrugged her shoulders in surrender and offered them the one small sausage that was left, previously splitting it in two with a knife. One part was notably more appealing than the other and Bea's and Allie's hands collided going after it.

'You take it’, they both said and moved to the other piece, only to bump their fingers again against each other's.

'I'm not hungry anyway’, Bea leant back in her chair.

'Bullshit you aren't, I heard your stomach growling’, Allie took the plate and squatted in front of Bea's chair, holding the sausage under her mouth until she took a bite.

Their eyes were locked with one another's, their mouths taking turns on biting the meat between Allie's fingers. Bea's eyes were still fixated on Allie's fingers, while Allie was licking the grease off them, never noticing the looks that her tattooed friend exchanged with her wife.

Chapter End Notes
Lyrics belong to the song "Bonfire Heart" by James Blunt
About Ties and Tides

Chapter Notes

Please don't give up on Bea, or me :(

Allie had a very busy week behind herself, she was more on the field than in the office. She did another radio interview and two appearances on cable TVs, following a reportage that was produced back in the local Little Rock TV station during their cocktail and bought by 'South Star Hotels' to be distributed nationwide. Bea on the other hand was completely untouched by it all, spending her days designing in peace in their office.

Saturday finally came and Allie was standing all nervous in front of the AAMI park, waiting on Bea to show up. The game wasn't supposed to start before seven thirty p.m., but Bea told Allie to be there one whole hour earlier and now she wasn't even punctual. Allie was wearing a navy blue, long-sleeved shirt and grey jeans. Bea told her it would be nice if she showed up in navy blue, white or silver, but whatever she decides, just to make sure she doesn't wear anything sky blue or red.

'R u coming? Where r u?' Allie typed out a message after twenty minutes of overly excited shifting from one foot to the other. Her phone chimed thirty seconds later. 'Right behind you', she barely had time to read it, when she felt two arms winding themselves around her ribcage and soft lips on her cheek.

'I'm sorry for being late', she heard a whisper in her ear, and the grip on her ribs has got tighter, as if to assure her she meant it. She spun around to meet the eyes she was desperate for. And as she locked her gaze with them, all of the agitation, all of the unrest left her, and she just couldn't be mad at them anymore. I could forgive her anything, she understood and the realisation terrified her. But only for couple of seconds. 'Where you've been?' she asked in a weak voice, almost needily, as she intertwined their fingers.

Bea gave her a reassuring squeeze before she reached in her bag. She was wearing a soccer jersey and a scarf saying 'Melbourne Victory' and now she has pulled a duplicate scarf out of her bag.

'My niece Melissa dropped by unexpectedly', she said apologetically, as her hands busied themselves wrapping the scarf around Allie's neck.

'You never mentioned you have a niece', Allie was confused.

'Oh?' Bea was surprised. 'Well, I do, her family lives in Newcastle, but she came here last year to study Marine Biology at Monash', she explained as she tied both ends of Allie's scarf into an overhand knot, 'her father Charles is my first cousin, and two of them are the only relatives I have left', she sighed.

'I wouldn't mind if you'd cancelled', Allie said.

'But I didn't want to cancel', Bea waved her off, 'I wanted to see the game, and I wanted to see you.' Insecurity crept onto her features, 'Why? Did you want to cancel?' she asked in a feeble voice.

'Indubitably not', Allie grinned.
Bea searched her eyes once again, just to be sure, and when she saw no signs of concealment or withholding, she respired, then grinned herself.

'Let's go then', she said warmly, 'we want to take our seats before the first half ends’, she joked.

The queue at the gate wasn't that long, almost all fans already being seated. Bea led Allie down the passage between rows of people until she stopped by two empty seats in the eighth row above the field. 'Home sweet home’, she smiled, as she put her bag under her membership seat. ‘Hey, doll’, the old man on Allie's right accosted Bea, 'when I didn't see you here before me, I thought you finally fell off that damn bike.'

Allie glared at him, but to her surprise, Bea put her hand briefly on his shoulder and said softly, 'Didn’t mean to scare you, mate.’ Then she turned to Allie, 'I've never missed a game’, she shrugged in explanation.

'You should have’, the old man winked at Bea, pointing with his chin at Allie.

Allie scoffed at him.

‘Oi, oi’, Bea intervened, 'let's start over, okay? Allie, I want you to meet Al, an old AAMI neighbour of mine. He was kind enough to give you his son's seat tonight.’

'Thanks’, Allie uttered, still a bit unnerved.

'No problem’, Al replied, taking off his MVFC logo fan cap and wiping off the sweat from his wrinkled forehead, 'you can keep it 'till the end of the season; my son lost interest in coming anyway, bloody workaholic that one’, he huffed.

'Sorry to hear that’, Allie mumbled, then turned to Bea, 'So, how do you play this game, what are the rules?’ she asked her.

Al slapped his forehead in disbelief.

'Hey’, Bea warned him, 'I brought her here to learn about soccer, okay?’

'Well, can she at least sing?’ he asked standing up.

'That she can’, Bea smiled and gave Allie a hand. Confused, Allie let herself be pulled up to her feet. Something was happening on the field, players were entering the pitch and thirteen thousand Melbourne Victory fans were standing up, singing at the top of their lungs ‘Stand by Me’ by Ben E. King. 'Come on, Allie, you know this one’, Bea shouted, pulling her closer. Allie felt current running through her body, as she leant into the redhead. Bea's voice was so nasal, but the fire with which she sang was contagious, so Allie got caught up into the moment and joined thousands of voices around her. It was a good feeling: the fever, the energy, the sense of belonging.

'Alright!’ Al looked at the blonde with approval as they all sat back down. He noticed that Bea was unusually chilled, considering it was a derby against Melbourne City, and the fact that Bea was easy to wind up on any match. But now she didn't. Her eyes were fixed more on the blonde than on the field; she didn't seem to mind explaining the rules and she answered blonde's questions with patience he's never seen in her earlier.

My, my, Al thought to himself - he saw something in Bea that she seemed completely unaware of, so he decided to stop teasing the newcomer and get out of their way by talking to the neighbour on his
Bea did shortly get upset, when in the twenty first minute Fornaroli started leading a fast attack towards Victory's goal: he made a beautiful rabona pass to his team mate from pitch centre. 'Offside!' Al got up and shouted in the direction of the umpire.

'No, it's not', Bea grunted in dissatisfaction, 'it's clean as a whistle. Now sit down, old man, you're blocking my view.'

But only seconds later she was jumping on her feet herself, as Fornaroli got the ball in his possession again and kicked it right into her team's net. The opposite side of the stadium screamed with joy, while their side filled with sour faces and bitter remarks. Allie was amused to witness the madness, she felt detached from the feelings carrying the mass around her, yet she was sorry to see the redhead so dispirited.

'What's an offside?' she asked Bea, not that she really wanted to know, but she tried to take her friend's mind off the disappointing game score. She has mentally prepared herself to be ridiculed by Al again and was surprised when he refrained from any comments.

'A player is in an offside position if he's in the opponents’ half and nearer to the opponents’ goal line than both the ball and the second-last opponent', Bea elaborated.

'Huh?' Allie's face went all confused and blank.

'Okay, let me explain again on an example: if a player stands in the opponents’ half, and if the ball is played forward to him, and there is no opposing player between him and the opposing goalkeeper, he’s in offside. If he kicks the ball while in offside, the referee will whistle and give the ball to his opponent. If he scores while in offside, the goal will be annulled.'

'I think I get it now', Allie replied, 'but it's such a complicated rule. I don't understand the purpose of its existence in the first place.'

'Many people don’t', Bea smiled, 'but without it, one or more players would just spend the whole game lingering in front of the opponents’ goal.'

'Goal!' Al shouted, cutting Bea off. Staring at each other, speaking about the offside rule, the two women completely missed the action by Khalfallah, which has brought a tie score to their team. Their side of the stadium was the one gloating now, all fans, including Bea, standing up and celebrating the goal with their scarfs held above their heads, chanting to ‘Seven Nation Army’ tune by The White Stripes. Allie was amazed to witness the mass acting like one being, and she couldn't decide whether to like it or fear it. The fear took over for a few seconds, when someone’s let of a flare in the crowd, they’ve had a hold up for a minute, but scarcely before the cloud has cleared, it was City back in front with another goal by Fornaroli.

That third goal came so fast after the second that Bea didn't even sit back down from celebrating the previous one.

'Shit me', she cursed now, lowering herself to sit next to Allie again.

City still led 2-1 at half-time. Bea went to buy them all some sodas and didn't return for more than ten minutes. Al went on and on how unrealistic was the score, given the fact that Victory was the team that dominated the first half.

Only two minutes after the second half kicked off, Finkler scored to level Victory 2-2 with City. This time Allie jumped on her feet too, chanting and waving with her scarf. She was thrilled, not so much
for the goal itself - the hit was kind of shabby, to be honest - but for the look on Bea's face. That brooding expression was finally wiped off, giving way to a huge grin that has instantly warmed Allie's heart. Bea was pleasantly surprised to see Allie cheer, she threw her arm around Allie's shoulder, kissing her cheek in sheer enthusiasm.

After that, nothing seemed to be able to spoil Bea's newly found ardour: not the accidental coke spill on her jersey by the guy standing in the row above her, not Al's constant bickering, not even the clean goal that her team scored in 54th minute yet that wasn't recognised as such by umpires. The referee couldn't see the goal from the spot he was standing on at the time, and he relied on his linesman, who failed miserably to register when Finkler slammed a free kick into the crossbar and it bounced a good half-metre across the goal line. His omission was publicly condemned right away, but especially after a big screen replay, where it could clearly be seen how deep the ball was into the opponent's goal. As a TV replay wasn't an official soccer prop, the referee ignored the replay and refused to change his decision, leaving the score tied at 2-2, despite the obvious goal by Victory.

Victory fans started booing, igniting flares, some even threw bottles to the pitch. The disorder has lasted several long minutes, and Bea and Allie seemed like the only people on stadium unaffected by it. They kept sitting on their seats, while everyone else around them was standing, they remained quiet while the mob was shouting at the umpires, their gaze never left each other's while everyone else's was glued to the field. In spite of a riot threatening to commence, Allie wasn't scared this time. She held onto Bea's hand, not allowing it to leave her shoulder, and caressed her palm with her thumb. She knew everything was gunna be alright, as long as she had Bea by her side to protect her.

'Thank you', she mouthed inaudibly towards the redhead.

'What for?' Bea mouthed back.

Allie started to reply but Bea couldn't understand anything she was saying over the bellows and shouts all around them so Allie leant in, her lips abutting Bea's ear.

'For the experience’, she repeated into her auricle, ‘for taking me out’.

'I was afraid you were gunna hate it', Bea confessed into Allie's ear, her eyes full of uncertainty, carefully examining Allie's features for reaction.

'Who’s the doofus now?’ Allie’s hot breath tickled all the way into Bea's ear canal, Bea moving away to scratch her ear just in time to catch a glimpse of Allie's radiant smile. 'How could I ever hate anything that involves spending time with you?’ the blonde decided to be brave and flirt.

Bea gasped a bit and opened her mouth to say something back, when the heedless bloke standing in front of his seat in the row above her, accidentally hit her head with his knees while jumping up to throw his coke bottle into the pitch.

Allie half-expected Bea to explode and knit the boy a new one, however she only rolled her eyes, her voice pretty composed and friendly as she said to him, 'Watch it, mate, and calm down, will ya? It's only a game.'

He snarled at her while sitting down, 'I guess I would be as chilled as you are if I were the one getting laid tonight, but no such luck.'

Bea was confused for a second, but judging by his stare at Allie, he clearly meant her and blonde were together. 'We’re only friends’, she replied, even though she shouldn't have bothered, for it didn't matter what he thought.
'Yeah', the boy smiled brazenly, nudging the shoulder of the bloke sitting beside him. 'If I were so friendly to you, mate, you'd kick my arse, right?'

The other boy laughed, 'Damn right'.

'Show some respect, jackaroos', Al pulled brims of their caps down to their eyes.

Boys continued to chuckle, even though a bit quieter now, and Allie and Al couldn't quite hate it, Allie barely holding in a titter herself, imagining how it would all look like if the boys were right in their assumptions. She couldn't quite work out the logistics of it so she made a mental note to google it in her spare time. Bea was the only one not amused by the whole situation and she sat there with a sour expression until the game was finally resumed and everyone's attention was on the field again.

The game kept its intense tempo up to the very end, however there were no more goals so the derby ended as a 2-2 tie.

'At least it's a draw and not a defeat', Bea sighed, once outside the stadium.

'Hey, you said it yourself, it's only a game’, Allie lifted her chin with her finger. 'Right’, Bea mumbled grumpily.

'At least we fought 'till the end’, Allie defended Victory, 'we were the better team the whole time, they just got lucky’.

Bea’s gaze focused on Allie, her eyes suddenly glistening.

'We?’ she asked, barely withholding a smile.

Allie shrugged, 'We. Now it's my team too.’

'So you want to repeat the experience?’ Bea grinned.

'Def. I didn't work that hard on the offside thing just to throw it away now, didn't I?’ the blonde winked at Bea.

'Okay then’, Bea grinned even wider, 'I'll take you to more games, you being such a fan’. 

'Maybe I'll take you.’

'Maybe.’

They walked in comfortable silence until Allie realised she didn't have a clue where they were going. They both came with a tram, parking space being impossible to find near the stadium, and were meant to catch their taxis just outside of the AAMI.

'Where are we going, Bea?’ she asked. 'I've seen taxis lined up all the way over there’, she pointed out with her finger.

'Er, you said it, we did play well, that deserves to be celebrated with a drink, don't you think?’ Bea tried to play it down as much as it was possible, but in fact she didn't want to admit that she didn't want to part with her friend yet.

Allie just smiled and linked their arms, 'Lead the way’.
It turned out Bea's choice was Richmond Club Hotel in a nearby Swan Street. The pub on the ground floor was packed with supporters of both soccer teams, but they somehow managed to find a table in the corner and order a beer. On the contrary to some hotheads they spotted having a brawl just outside the stadium, all fans in here seemed to get along, sitting together, discussing the game. Everyone appeared to be content with match quality and dynamics, and everyone secretly thought their team was just a tiny bit better.

Maybe a tie is the best result after all, Allie contemplated.

'What are you thinking about?' Bea asked.

'About ties, how perfect they are’, Allie smirked.

'Doofus’, Bea said gentler than ever before, her fingers tracing up Allie's arm.

'Watch it, Bea’, Allie playfully warned her, 'this time you almost made it sound like a compliment’.

She winked at the older woman, before she took a long chug of her Carlton Draught.

They watched a game review on the sports’ channel that was playing on a pub TV while drinking their beers. When they finished them, Bea suggested they moved to the restaurant on the roof for dinner. Allie agreed, trying not to look as overly excited about it as she felt, then excused herself to the toilet. She texted Paul before she returned, saying that Bea and her decided that they were going to have a night out and not to wait up. Then she turned off her phone and got out.

It was Allie’s first time at Richmond Club Hotel. She really liked the pub downstairs but it couldn’t compare to the rooftop. She stood for a few moments in awe, while Bea patiently waited on her to decide on the seating, considering they had more choice than downstairs, several nice spots being free. Allie finally chose the ones overlooking the train tracks. She has always adored trains, ever since she was a child, and Bea was firstly delighted to hear all about an interest of Allie she knew nothing about, but soon she’s got jealous, for every time a metro train would drive by, she would completely lose Allie's attention. In that particular stretch, the railway tracks were approximately as high above the ground as the rooftop they were sitting on, and Allie had an illusion she could almost touch the wagons. Bea was aware she was being ridiculous, but ever since she’s met Allie, no one and nothing seemed to have the power to avert the young blonde's attention off her, that is, nothing until these trains. She knew it was wrong - Franky's reprimands echoing in her head - so she was making up excuses how it was perfectly safe, Allie being straight and in love with Paul, and perfectly innocent, she herself being only a friend and having no hidden agenda, until she convinced herself enough it was alright to shift closer to the blonde and touch her with her thigh. Allie's eyes shot right back at her, and that was all she’s ever wanted. She could sense Allie's flesh trembling where it was pressing on hers and she felt smug about the effect she had on her.

'You never even noticed they served us the fish and chips we ordered’, Bea said. She took one potato chip and brought it to Allie's lips, leaning in even closer, placing her left hand on the trellis behind Allie's back, thus fencing her in.

'Open your mouth’, she said, tickling Allie's bottom lip with the hot potato. She sure isn't looking at rail tracks anymore, Bea thought in content, when Allie took the salty piece from her, not even noticing another train was passing by, her lips wrapping themselves around Bea's fingers in the process. Oh, it feels so wrong, Bea thought to herself, so wrong in a good way.
'More’, Allie said laconically after chewing down the first piece.

'If you want more’, Bea brought her face so near to hers that they almost touched, 'you’ll have to dig in yourself’.

With that, she got up abruptly, saying she was gunna get them a couple of more beers. She was moving away with a smirk on her face, noticing how flustered was the blonde she was leaving behind. She sure is easy to wind up for a straight girl, Bea chuckled to herself. I've shown her for ignoring me, she pondered her sweet revenge.

What has just happened, Allie sat there in disbelief. Was she trying to kiss me, was she trying to tease me, she wondered. Bea was standing at the bar, paying to barista. She turned her head to meet Allie's gaze, and when she did, Allie noticed how her eyes glimmered with mischief. She was mocking me! she concluded. Am I really so easy to read? This infatuation of mine, I still don't know what it is, but is it obvious to her? Has she just taken advantage of my stupid, confusing emotions, and if she has, then why?

Anyhow, Allie was aware that she was left with a feeling of pressure that she needed to get rid of before Bea comes back, so she headed towards the ladies’ room. She folded several paper towels together and put them under the cold water stream. Entering a stall, she took her jeans down before she pressed the cool towels against her core.

The redhead was quiet when she got back, her smugness having left her, so they ate in silence.

'Earlier’, Allie said when she finished dinner and moved to her beer, 'what was that all about?’ Bea's eyes shot straight to hers. 'Were you mocking me?'

Bea lowered her gaze.

'Bea?’ Allie persisted.

'I wasn't… mocking you’, Bea finally managed to get over her lips. She was wiping her sweaty palm on her denim pants, while shyly looking up to confess, 'You were mesmerised by those trains and weren't paying any attention to me, for ages.’

Allie took in her reddened cheekbones. Bea was determined to brave it out, even if she felt she was going to die of embarrassment.

'I'm sorry’, she uttered. 'I'm just so used to having your attention all to myself. I didn't like sharing.’

'Oh, I've spoiled you rotten’, Allie said, cupping her hand.

'That you have’, Bea smiled shyly. 'Friends?’ she offered.

'Friends’, Allie nodded, making Bea squeeze her fingers.

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It was getting ridiculous with the two of them: they were so engrossed with each other that they haven’t even noticed how all the other guests had already left the place until one of the waiters approached them and cleared his throat to get their attention.

'It's closing time, ladies’, he said politely. ‘3 a.m.,’ he added after Bea raised her eyebrows at him in
wonder. ‘Thank you for being our guests and please come again.’

‘How is this even possible?’ Allie whispered into her ear, as she was leaving a generous tip to make things right with the exhausted stuff.

‘I don’t know’, Bea replied. ‘I’ve just never noticed the time. I don’t even feel tired’, she said dumbfoundedly.

‘Me neither’, Allie stated, as they left the restaurant and stepped out onto the footpath. ‘I couldn’t sleep now for the life of me.’

Bea accepted the challenge so they ended up sitting on a bench in well-lit outskirts of the Gosch’s Paddock for another two hours. It was a magical night, Allie thought. If she weren’t already so besotted with Bea, she would definitely be after their tête-à-tête under the magnificent, old plane tree. They were sitting with their legs up on the bench, facing each other, their shins intertwined. Allie initially tried inquiring Bea about her past relationships, but when Bea immediately closed down, she quickly changed the subject, moving the conversation into more secure area. She brought up the subject that always seemed to put Bea in a chatty mood - designing projects she had worked on so far, and her topic choice was instantly rewarded with a huge smile on the redhead's face and warm affection both for her work and for her young friend, as she was telling her all about it. Bea spoke so passionately about her projects that she's totally captivated Allie. Allie swallowed each word Bea let out, her open-mouthed expression always eager for more, just like a young bird waiting on its mother to put the food down its beak. The whole time Bea spoke she was resting her hand on Bea's right ankle and when she hooked her forefinger under the rim of Bea's sock and caressed the thin skin on her joint, Bea was so lost in her own story that she didn't even notice.

Once they'd exhausted the topic of Bea's professional achievements, Allie asked whether she'd inherited her love for soccer from her dad. She has already learnt that Bea loved her parents very much and never minded telling stories about them.

‘Surprisingly, no’, Bea shook her head. ‘Daddy was more of a cricket and rugby man, he used to drag me to games all the time, and I loved it. Mum was going nuts because we had to watch a replay as soon as we got home, that much we were crazy about it’, Bea chuckled remembering her happy childhood. ‘Even later, when I was in college, when I was in a serious relationship, nothing could keep me away from meeting my dad on those bleachers.’ Her eyes got darker, her face got serious as she remembered what had followed. She sighed and continued, ‘After their death, I was left with membership tickets so I went to the next cricket match out of habit and love for the game. Once in the stadium, I found it so empty without my father. I had to leave in the middle of the game in order not to start crying in front of everyone, and since then, I couldn't bring myself to go to a cricket or rugby match again, or even watch it on TV.’

Allie felt her pain so she draped both of her arms under Bea's knees to comfort her, and put her chin on them, her eyes locked with those dark, tormented ones.

‘But being the sports’ junkie that I am’, Bea sighed again, 'I couldn't quite go on dry turkey, so I discovered soccer and started to follow it with a fast growing passion. I got myself a membership seat that I renew each year, and that is so conveniently next to Al's, who's something of a father figure to me during those matches. I root for Melbourne Victory because it is a new club - it was founded only couple of years before I moved to Melbourne and its rise began around the time I was settling down in this city so I felt a bond towards the club, us both being new here and struggling to gain our ground.’

Allie smiled at her and kissed her knee cap through the denim fabric. Bea smiled back and added:
'Soccer is my discovery, my thing, and my thing alone. I don't need anyone there and I don't miss my
dad while I'm on stadium. This is something I enjoy doing alone, for myself.'

'But tonight you took me’, Allie noticed.

Bea's eyes filled with shock, a sudden realisation hitting her.

'But tonight I took you’, she confirmed, still in wonder.

'So how do you feel about it now?’ Allie questioned, her chin wiggling playfully on Bea's knee caps.

Bea paused, as if to listen to her inner voice. Having examined herself, she replied truthfully:

'I feel great, it was actually a wonderful experience to share it with you. And I'll stick to what I
promised: I'll take you to more games.’

Allie's smile turned into a happy grin, 'Can't wait.’

'Allie?’ Bea started carefully, knowing she was threading into a sensitive area.

'Mhm?’ Allie went along, her head all comfortable, chin resting on Bea's knees.

Bea inhaled, gathering her courage, knowing Allie won't be reacting well, but she had to find out
already, 'Speaking of parents, ever since your birthday, actually even before that, I wanted to ask you
about Karen. What is the whole deal with your adoptive mother? You speak so lovingly about her,
like you guys are on the best terms, yet every time someone mentions her, you grow sad, and you
spent only one afternoon with her in all the time since I met you? I just can't wrap my head around
what could have kept her away from your birthday party, your whole family was there, but its most
important member wasn't. It just doesn't make any sense to me’, Bea rambled, determined to say
what's on her mind and ignore the pain that shot through Allie's eyes, 'you're such a perfect person,
such a sweet soul to everyone, and I'm sure you're must be a daughter any mother could wish for -
why does she keep avoiding you?’

Allie respired painfully. She couldn't be mad at this woman, not even when she was stomping with
her feet all over her chest. 'May I?’ she asked quietly, her eyes motioning to Bea's knees. Bea
understood and nodded, feeling too guilty for making Allie so vulnerable to refuse her. Allie lowered
her face to rest her cheek on Bea's knees, gripping even tighter around them with her arms.

'Mum has not been avoiding me’, she finally confessed, 'she just isn't the master of her time. She isn't
free to come and see me or call me as she pleases,’ she held her breath in for a few seconds then
continued, 'she's a nun.’

'She's w...what?’ Bea stuttered in dismay.

'She's a nun’, Allie replied firmly, the tone of her voice warning Bea not even to think to make a joke
about it, not that Bea ever would. 'When I saw her that afternoon at the end of January, it was
because it was a family day in her convent - each last Sunday of the month they are allowed visits
from family and friends for couple of hours in the afternoon, and then is when I go to see her. She
doesn't have a personal phone either, they all share one landline in a lobby, which they use only in
case of emergency, but she got permission to call me on my birthday, so she participated in my
birthday too, the best she could, you just couldn't know that.’

Bea saw a single, stray tear running down Allie's nose.

'If she misses you so much’, Bea asked after couple of minutes, 'how come she decided to become a
nun in the first place?’

Allie exhaled loudly.

‘She was a nun when we met. She had to get out of the convent so that she could be allowed to adopt me. She took care of me while I was growing up, but she never did anything fun, she never dated, never made new friends, never wore fancy clothes - in her head, she was a nun the whole time, and it was always her plan to go back to the convent once I become independent. So she did, it's her calling, and I can't argue with that, I won't challenge her decision, she's so happy doing God's work, I wouldn't dare spoil that.’

Bea saw more tears pouring down her cheek and she felt her own eyes watering too.

'If anything, I ought to be forever grateful that she abandoned her own life path for nine years, in order to save what was left of my childhood and be my mother, but deep down, it feels…’ her voice broke and she sobbed loudly. 'It's just as if I lost a parent again. I'm an orphan all over again’, she cried into Bea's knees, her head pressed firmly into them, her arms gripping around them with desperation.

Bea stroked her hair, sympathy and affection streaming from her palms.

'Want to tell me how you lost your parents in the first place?’ she asked after a while.

Allie shook her head vigorously.

‘It’s a long story, some other time. I couldn't bear any more tears now.’

Bea wiped her cheek with a back of her hand and kissed it. ‘Whenever you want to talk about it, sweet girl, I'll be here for you, okay?’

Allie nodded into her knees and grabbed her hand to hold it.

They sat like that another half an hour, each sunk in her own thoughts, but taking comfort in the nearness of the other.

'Even silence is so comfortable with you’, Allie said dreamily.

Bea smiled and squeezed her hand, 'I was just about to say the same thing. I've enjoyed each moment last evening and this night.’

Allie finally lifted her head off Bea's knees so that she could find her gaze. 'It was great staying up all night with you; my only sorrow is that we can't make it back for our morning jogging’, she sighed.

Bea ruffled her hair, 'So sad over skipping a physical activity? Is this Allie Novak speaking or some alien that entered her body?’

Allie smiled coyly. 'It's Allie Novak speaking’, she shrugged her shoulders, 'she just became addicted to Sunday mornings with a certain redhead’.

'Is that so?’ Bea said softly, then stood up, holding her hand out to younger woman. ‘Then let's do it now, I don't want you to miss out.’

Allie put her hand in Bea's, as out of habit to concur with her, but looked confused.

'Where will we go running, Bea? It's dark in the park.’
'The Tan is near and the street lamps are lit all 3.8km of that trail.'

'Really? I never knew that.'

'It's the most popular activity trail in the city and many people like jogging and cycling at night.'

Allie stood up, taking the other Bea's hand as well. 'Well, considering it is well-lit and we both have our sneakers on - I would love to spend another couple of hours with you.'

'Oh, you think you'd last couple of hours?!' Bea mocked her.

'I'll give you a run for your money', she held her head high and threw out her chest.

Bea laughed wholeheartedly, 'One's gotta love your spirit!'

Allie tugged her by her hand and led her down the Punt Road and towards Alexandra Avenue. They walked slowly, hand in hand, chatting casually, not in any rush to get to their destination but rather enjoying the stroll together.

Allie didn't manage to outpace Bea, but she did put up a good fight and kept up with Bea, or close behind her, for three quarters of the trail. When Bea saw her losing her strength, she suggested they take a break so they ended up lying in the grass and guessing constellations - probably not a very smart idea when it was seventeen degrees and the ground normally gets colder at night, but Allie insisted it was perfectly warm, or she really just needed an excuse to be lying close to Bea.

They bowed out reluctantly at eight: after spending more than twelve hours together, they still weren't keen to part. They were taking trams in different directions, so they stood at stop 19 of Shrine of Remembrance/St Kilda Rd station, in between tracks that should lead them to different parts of the town. After seeing her tram coming in the distance, Allie threw herself at Bea, clinging around her neck like her life depended on it. Bea returned the embrace so heartily that Allie decided to pass on this ride and wait for another. It was strange really - it didn't feel like they were gunna have breakfast tomorrow together and then work the whole day in the same office; it felt rather like they bid farewell forever and they just couldn't let go.

First thing Allie did when she finally arrived home was to open her fridge. After she fed herself, she knew she ought to take a shower, to wash away the sweat from all the walking and running - but she couldn't bring herself to do it. She smelt of Bea's perfume, of her sweat that transferred to her in Bea's embrace, of her coconut hair mousse. Her arms were bearing invisible marks of Bea's palms and she could still feel their light touch on her skin. She didn't want to wash it all away, but rather keep it to hold her safe during her hours of rest. She only brushed her teeth before she snuck up into bed behind Paul's back. He was awake, she noticed right away, but he was pretending to be asleep, so she went along with it, acted like she believed his little trick and drifted off as soon as her head touched her pillow. She fell asleep happy, her fingers touching her cheekbone, where Bea's lips last kissed her on, as if she was holding onto that moment indefinitely.

It was late afternoon when Allie finally woke up. She looked at the clock: five p.m., she slept for eight hours straight. She felt great though so she stretched happily in her bed and lingered ten more minutes under covers, reminiscing every detail from last night. When her thoughts stopped on their last, impossibly tight hug they’d shared on the tram station, their bodies flush together, she didn't feel the separation angst like that morning, she felt excitement. Suddenly it got really hot under her covers, her breath quickened. She let her mind wander freely, she played out in her head how it could have been if other people were not around, if she only dared… In her mind she let her fingers slip into those red curls and pressed her lips under that cute earlobe before she let them trail down that long neck.
'Beeea’, she moaned into her pillow, the urge to get close to the redhead suddenly overwhelming. She propped herself up enough to grab her phone from her night stand. She opened a long stream of messages and added another one to them.

'You alright?’ she typed out.

The reply came quickly. 'More than’, Bea wrote her, 'woke up half an hour ago. Thank u for the adventure, sweet girl’.

'You're sweet’, Allie replied, adding a little kiss emoji at the end.

She yawned lazily and finally took that long-delayed shower.

All the good mood dispersed, however, once she came downstairs. Paul was sitting in the lounge with an exhausted, brooding look on his face. She caught him stare at nothing before his eyes noticed her and then he couldn't confront her soon enough where she'd been all night, why she’d turned off her phone. ‘Always Bea, Bea’, he admonished her and then they had their first serious fight ever. He was due for his night shift at hospital at eight, but he slammed the front door shut around six, after Allie's frustration with his questions turned into screaming at him.

Allie was still mad at him good half an hour after he had left, although she knew deep down she was the one who should be blamed. She imagined she would have flipped if she was in his place, but it was so much easier to blame him for asking about possible infidelity than to blame herself for acting like she had an affair. Her anger gave her strength to act normal around the house: to clean up, turn on the washing machine, to take lunch. But when she went to her lounge afterwards, and settled down with a mug of hot coffee in her hand, her eyes fell on a framed picture of her and Paul, taken on their vacation in Perth last year, and her eyes filled with tears. The two of them had a good thing going and she was ruining them. She cried for a while then pulled herself up to answer her phone. It was Regan, wanting to catch up. Allie talked to her for couple of minutes, not letting her troubles show in her voice, laughing alongside her friend.

An hour later a doorbell rang. Allie was surprised to see both Regan and Boomer standing on her doorstep, holding three buckets of ice cream. When she saw them like that, she couldn't help but sob and fall into their embrace. They all scooted on her sofa in front of TV, their spoons in their mouths.

‘Wanna talk about it?’ Regan finally dared to ask. Allie shook her head, only stating that she and Paul argued, and that it was her fault. She told them about pulling an all-nighter with Bea and the girls exchanged questioning looks.

'I don't know what to do’, Allie said in despair.

Regan wound her arm around Allie's shoulders, 'For once, you think of yourself first. You ought to do what's best for you.’

Boomer joined the group hug and there it was where Allie found the renewal of her strength.

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Next morning Allie woke up to an empty bed. Paul was due back at six but he didn't show up before she left. He could have been kept up assisting an operation, but she rightly guessed he was only avoiding her. As she drove to her office, all of that mattered less and less, and after she entered the diner and greeted young Molly, she kissed her favourite person in the whole wide world good
morning and, just like that, life was good again.

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Around ten Allie took a short break to make a personal call to her hairdresser. She neglected her hair in the last couple of months since she’s started on Rock Island Project, and it was overdue for trimming.

‘Oh, I see’, Bea heard her disappointed voice, ‘well give her my congratulations and best wishes’.

After Allie hung up, Bea asked what was going on.

‘Oh, nothing’, Allie sighed, ‘it’s just that my hair is a mess and I tried to make an appointment, but it turned out the hairdresser I’ve been seeing for the past ten years is going into retirement by the end of the week and doesn’t take any more appointments. I am glad for her - she will finally have time for her grandchildren and to make that Mexico trip she's always dreamt about - but I've been seeing her for so long that I don't trust anyone else with my hair, I don't like the two other women at the salon, and don't know what other salons are good, I went to the same place ever since I was a teen, for God's sake.’

Bea got up and halted behind her chair.

‘Do you trust me?’ she asked the blonde, running her fingers through her hair.

‘Yes’, Allie closed her eyes, ‘always. If you have someone good to recommend…’

Bea took a strand between her fingers and held it up to get a better look. ‘I like that colour’, she said, ‘but I reckon you’d look better lighter.’

‘You reckon?’

‘Uh-huh’, Bea leant into her ear. ‘I could do it for ya: give you a cut and colour.’

‘You sound awfully confident with somebody else's hair. You've ever done it before?’

Bea chuckled, ‘I used to be a hairdresser.’

Allie turned her head in surprise. Standing up to look at Bea, she tugged on the lapels of Bea's serge blazer, bringing their bodies flush together. ‘You were… What?’

‘It was my college part-time job’, Bea shrugged, ‘I worked for three years in a salon, and I was bloody good at it’, she smiled proudly.

Allie pulled her even closer by her lapels. ‘Is there any end to your surprises? You're killing me with your talents, Bea Smith.’

She looked down at her face with sheer affection, not even noticing that her lips were starting to converge towards Bea's. Bea put a stop to it by wiggling herself out of Allie's grip.

‘So what do ya say?’ she asked, straightening her blazer. ‘You're coming over tonight for a makeover? Should I buy that light blonde dye?’

‘Alright’, Allie agreed, ‘but not tonight. Paul is off work until Wednesday so I promised him couple of days ago that we would binge-watch “The Walking Dead” on Monday evening.’ Her look drifted
off to the side, avoiding Bea's. 'I'm not on speaking terms with him right now, so postponing our family night would only make it worse.'

Bea's eyes suddenly lost her spark.

'You shouldn't be quarreling with him', she rasped out in a rough voice, 'that man is good for you. And he clearly worships the ground you walk on. You will be always safe by his side.'

'Maybe I don't want to be safe', Allie defied.

'I need you to be safe', Bea said solemnly.

Allie took few steps that parted her from Bea and leant heavily into her front, pushing her backside into her desk.

'I feel safe with you', she murmured against her lips.

Bea pushed back lightly but decisively against her shoulders.

'We're friends, Allie. I don't know what are you trying to pull off right now, but that's all we are and ever will be. I care about you so much and I love spending time with you, but can't offer anything else. I'm a wreck for anything else. If my friendship isn't good enough for you, then maybe we should lay off of seeing each other outside work.'

Allie shuddered at the prospect of losing Bea's affection. Bea's grave look spooked her so much that at this point she would have agreed to anything, just to calm the redhead down.

'Friends', Allie lied in a firm voice, holding Bea's gaze until she assured her. 'Should I drop by tomorrow for that haircut?' she changed the subject abruptly to the safer topic.

'I can't tomorrow', Bea replied. 'Boomer finished those shelves for Fridge and I agreed to help install them tomorrow after work.'

'First of all, Fridget - so cute. And yeah, Booms told me she'd finished them', Allie confirmed, 'Although she didn't tell me the neighbourly joint work is taking place tomorrow'.

'Well, there's no need for you to bother coming to help. It's more of a two-women-work anyway.'

'I'm glad you're all bonding with Boomer though.'

'How could we not? She has the biggest heart', Bea smiled. 'So what do you say about Thursday? On Wednesday I'm taking my niece out to dinner.'

'Thursday sounds good', Allie nodded.

'Alright then', Bea exclaimed, 'now that's settled, let's get back to work before we lose our jobs'.

They came back from lunch early, to make up for the time they lost earlier to chatter. Just after one their office phone rang - Bea was being summoned to the HR.

It would be an understatement to say that Bea came back unnerved. She explained to Allie that they were forcing her to take the annual leave for the rest of the week. Apparently she hasn't been on vacation for so long that it will soon become illegal for the company to keep her in her work place if she doesn't take some time off. She paced up and down the office, huffing, and Allie tried to reassure
her that the leave won't take its toll on their project. In the same time she felt her heart dropping at the thought of not working with Bea for the whole week. At least we're gunna see each other on Thursday, she sighed.

It is only a week, she repeated to herself several times an hour, yet she couldn't bring herself out of a bad mood that took over her. Around two her necessary work for the day was done: not that she couldn't busy herself with less urgent matters, but she didn't want to. She pulled out her chair and rolled it over to Bea's.

'I'm finished for the day', Allie said, placing her left hand on Bea's right shoulder. 'Do you mind if I watched you draw? I've always wanted to.'

Bea turned her head slightly, piercing her with her eyes. 'You're free to stay, but be silent.'

Allie only nodded.

Bea's drawing pad was actually an oversized drawing tablet, attached to her computer via cable. As she sketched on it with a special pen, the image she created appeared both on her pad and on one of her two desktop monitors. Her fingers were very skilled, moving fast across the electronic device. You could almost see wheels turning in her head, as she contrived one shape after another. After the pencil sketch was done, Bea changed the software options to colouring so she was now painting the room and furniture she’d previously drawn. She erased the colour of the drapes three times, not finding any of the combinations quite fitting, and paused a bit to reflect upon it.

'Try pale peach', Allie suggested softly.

Bea mixed up the nuance on her electronic palette and added it as colour of the drapes. Then she turned to look at Allie, 'Good eye’, she smiled proudly and kissed her temple as a reward.

Allie sighed happily and let her head down on Bea's shoulder. No matter how much Bea insisted upon them being friends, in moments like this it felt like they were soulmates.

Each of Bea’s room designs consisted out of three files: the first was her coloured drawing and the second that same drawing, only that each drawn object was covered with a image of an actual piece of furniture she found in online catalogues. The third file was exactly the same as the second, but contained a comment next to each object with information about furniture house that was selling it, model number and price, as well as the link to the website from which it could be ordered. Bea hated when she had to type it all in so Allie made herself useful doing it for her. She was a fast typist and by five o'clock they managed to roughly finish that room's design. Bea had to look at it again, of course, once she comes back from her leave, but it was a substantial achievement for three hours work.

Allie didn't want to be late home tonight, in order not to worsen her domestic circumstances. They both followed all previous seasons of “The Walking Dead”, but as the sixth season started last October, Paul was so busy at the hospital, with such an irregular roster, that he couldn't follow a single episode, and Allie didn't want to watch it without him. He didn't even say hello when she entered the house, but he had their pasta cooked and served in the lounge in front of the TV. They ate and watched in silence. During episode 4, Allie started to think how this might very possibly be the last time they share an evening together so she snuggled up against his chest, feeling the separation pain but knowing she will have to let go. Paul on the other hand draped his arm tight around her and stated with conviction:

‘This … fascination … of yours, it will pass, Allie’, he said kissing the crown of her head, 'and I am right here to help you go through it, and will be right here once it fades out.'
Could Allie's working day be any more boring without Bea? If yes, then that would be hardly imaginable. She fidgeted in her chair, she paced the room as she spoke on the phone, and she left Tess pretty pissed after their usual weekly meeting. She took a prolonged lunch and drove to the beach where she ate a hot dog and lay in the sand in her business suit, not caring the least for curious looks thrown her way. After she returned, she carried her laptop over to Bea's desk and threw herself into Bea's chair, amusing herself with stray red hairs she found in the black chair padding, winding them around her finger.

Tess brought a Blu-ray for Bea: the client had finally sent blueprints for bungalows. Allie knew Bea would be excited to see them so she decided they were a perfect excuse for her to go over to Franky's and give them to Bea. They will all be there anyway, even her Boomsy. I might find some way to make myself of use to Fridge, she smiled to herself, remembering how Bea’s full lips playfully curved, as they pronounced the new compound.

At five she ran out of the office like a dog out of its leash. She lowered her car windows and sang to the music on her player, tapping to the rhythm on the steering wheel. She was on her way to see her Bea and nothing could bring her down. She parked her Mini Countryman on the street in front of Fridge-House, right behind Boomer's truck. Bridget let her in with a broad smile on her face and saw her into the lounge. Her hungry eyes searched the room for a familiar red haired figure, but she only found Franky and Booms on the sofa in front of the TV, with two PlayStation joysticks, racing two cars against each other. They were like zombies she was watching last night, barely acknowledging her existence, their eyes glued to the screen. 'So Bea is running late, huh, we're behind the schedule?’ she asked Bridget after she served her a coffee and a juice and sat down next to her to keep her company.

‘Actually, Bea called in last night to ask whether she could use her spare key to let herself and Boomer in this morning. Her being off work, it suited them both better to build in the shelves earlier during the day. By the time I got home, it was all finished.’

‘I see’, Allie uttered.

‘I didn’t know you were coming too, otherwise I would have notified you.’

‘Bah, I wasn’t planning to’, Allie waved off with her hand, ‘but this material came to the office today for Bea’, she motioned to the Blu-ray lying in her lap, ‘so I thought to drop it by for her and see whether I can help you two with something.’

‘Thank you, Allie, but those two busy bees beat us all to it.’

‘It was worth it’, Boomer said with full mouth, ‘it was for our friends, but even if it wasn’t, it would’ve still been worth it only for the stakes and biscuits Franky made us’.

All women laughed, then Franky added, her eyes still fixed on the game:

‘Bea went home to work on her bike. If sweaty and greasy sound appealing to you, you can find her in her workshop.’

Allie stayed at their place another half an hour. She wanted to see Bea, but the three women proved to be a too pleasant distraction. When she stood up to leave, Franky passed her joystick to her wife, offering Allie to show her the freshly transformed attic. Allie gladly accepted.
‘Boomer has outdone herself’, she was amazed to see all the walls covered from ceiling to the floor with custom tailored metal shelves.

‘She did a splendid work’, Franky’s fingers skimmed over the metal edges. ‘Now there’s only one matter left: how to talk her into letting me pay her for the expenses.’

‘Just leave it, Franky’, Allie said honestly. ‘She’s bonded with you, she will be offended if you keep insisting. And she’s doing really well with her shop, she’s not struggling, so let her do something nice for her friends.’

‘I’ll have to do something nice for her too, then’, Franky smiled, ‘just to show her how much it means to me what she’s done here for us’.

‘She would like that’, Allie reciprocated the smile and turned her back to leave.

‘What Boomer is not as good at’, Franky started, thus forcing Allie to face her again, ‘is at being subtle. I came home couple of hours early, so that I could prepare them a meal, and all the while before Bea left, Boomer tiptoed around her, fishing for information about … Sunday?’ she looked at Allie questioningly.

‘You’re not very subtle either’, Allie retorted. When Franky didn’t budge, but instead stood in the doorway, blocking her path, Allie respired loudly.

‘Nothing happened’, she said in a frustrated voice. ‘She took me to that soccer match she invited me to as my birthday gift, we had a great time so we stayed up downtown until Sunday morning and Paul made a bit of a deal that I didn’t show up home all night. But now we’re good’, she shrugged her shoulders. ‘Let me pass?’ she smiled suggestively.

‘That’s not all’, Franky shook her finger at her. ‘Remember, I’m a prosecutor, I know when a defendant is covering up the truth.’

Allie continued to glare at her, her mouth firmly shut.

‘Besides’, Franky licked her lips to continue, ‘Bea blushed. Every time Boomer raised a question regarding Sunday - she blushed’.

‘Yeah’, Allie raised her hands in surrender, ‘that’s a pretty telling trait of hers. Remind me not to ever call her to be my witness at the stand’, she joked. ‘It wasn’t on Sunday’, she confessed finally, ‘it happened yesterday in the office. I thought about kissing her, twice, and she must have noticed, because she told me, very firmly, that we are only friends. I agreed, as she didn’t leave me much choice. So, really, there is nothing to tell, we've been friends, and we will remain so.’

‘You remember what I told you on Rock Island?’ Franky asked in a low voice. ‘She doesn’t date and, especially, she doesn’t kiss. Five years ago, a good friend of mine - very smart, very pretty, just like you - tried to kiss her, here in our own backyard. Bea totally flipped. She made me choose between the two of them and I chose her, even though she drove me insane with anger that evening. I know we only recently met, but Bridget and I have bonded with you girls, we don’t want to lose you and Boomer. And you, Allie, you don’t want to waste Bea’s friendship on something that is nothing more than a passing crush. She’s such a worthy friend to have, and, besides, let’s say she didn’t stop you yesterday - I bet you couldn’t have gone all the way? You just don’t have it in ya. You’re only a bit taken with her, but you’re not sexually attracted to women.’

‘How can you know that?’ Allie wondered. ‘I didn’t figure out myself whether I am … attracted … to her that way’, she swallowed hard and lowered her gaze.
Franky nudged her shoulder, ‘Hey, I’m a walking gaydar. If you were any bit into women, you’d be crawling all over me by now.’

‘Is that so?’ Allie laughed.

‘Gay women always do’, Franky winked at her.

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Around half past six Allie left Fridge-House in very high spirits. Regardless her making peace with the friends-thing, her heart thumped a bit louder as she was approaching Bea’s house. She left her car at Franky’s and went on foot over to Bea’s. As she passed her gate, she could see the garage door widely open and all the lights in it lit, as always when Bea was in there, due to her fear of dark and closed spaces at night. Good, I caught her at her handiwork, maybe I can finally learn how to oil my engine.

She was quick on her feet up the driveway. When she almost reached the garage, a sudden scream startled her. Her first thought was that Bea got hurt on some of her many tools so she hurried over those couple of metres until entrance. Stopping there, she realised that those screams didn't come out of Bea, but out of a black haired woman that was leaning with her elbows on an unfamiliar green bike, and that those screams were not screams of terror but vocalisation of pleasure. She looked about thirty two, and beautiful, probably of a Korean descent, just like Bea's mate Kim. She was doubled over the bike, right in front of Allie, wearing nothing but an unbuttoned shirt, her full breasts fallen out, her pants thrown on Bea's sofa. Her eyes were tightly closed, but she opened them upon hearing Allie enter, yet she wasn't in any predicament to stop her fast approaching orgasm or change her position due to the unexpected guest. She was gripping with her both hands firmly at the seat of her green bike, to steady herself under thrusts that kept coming at her with surreal vigour. Bea was the one thrusting into her, standing tall behind the half-bent woman, looking somehow mean in her black biker outfit. Her hands were resting firmly on the other woman's hips, while her own hips went into overdrive. Over her pants she had a harness attached, and she drove a black dildo in and out of the other woman, who closed her eyes again and screamed one last time before she climaxed. Bea's eyes weren't closed but they were firmly fixed on the bare buttcheeks in front of her and she didn't even register Allie until the woman beneath her started wiggling out of her grip, pointing with her chin towards the entrance.

Bea lifted her head to meet Allie's shocked gaze, she herself lithified at the sight.

'We're all adults here’, the black haired woman spoke first, 'no need to make a big thing out of it’, she said in a pleasant voice, a little too sweet for Allie's taste. It may not have been a big deal for her, but to Allie it seemed like her world was crumbling down at her. Bea had in fact told her that she didn't give up on sex, but in her drunkenness on the redhead, Allie never really believed her. The black haired woman gathered her clothes from the sofa, then she unfastened the harness off Bea and brought everything into the bathroom with her.

Being left alone, Bea raised her eyebrows questioningly at Allie.

'Blueprints for the bungalows arrived for you today', Allie mumbled insecurely, 'just thought to bring them over'. She walked towards the redhead, handing over the Blu-ray to her.

'A dog ate your mobile, Allie?’ Bea said sternly, obviously fuming inside.

'I thought you were at Franky's, installing those shelves’, her eyes watered, 'then Franky sent me
over, saying you were working on your bike’.

Bea softened realising how upset Allie must be. 'Remind me never to lie to Franky again’, she half-joked. 'She's leaving now anyway so, please, you're welcome to stay.’

'No need’, Allie replied coldly, 'I only came over to give you that Blu-ray so I'm gunna go too’.

In that moment the bathroom door opened and the refreshed woman came out of it. She opened a drawer in Bea's coffee table, visibly full of condoms, and placed the washed dildo on top of them. Then she stood up and approached Allie.

'I'm Tina Mercado’, she said, shaking Allie's hand. 'I kind of know you from around the office, sorry to meet properly under such circumstances.’

'I'm Allie Novak, Bea's co-worker’, the blonde uttered; gathering all of her strength, she added, 'As you said before, no biggie, we are all adults.’

Tina smiled at her, pushing her sweaty bangs up to rub on her forehead. 'So, I guess I'll see you at work.’

'Tina is the journalist I told you about, the one who works in the sports’ magazine one floor under us’, Bea explained.

Allie nodded, indicating that she remembers.

Tina got on her bike and put on a green helmet.

'Nice to meet you, Allie. Talk to you later, Bea’, she said before she revved her engine and drove off.

With her, all the cheerfulness left too, and a dark and heavy mood befell both of the remaining women.

'Your girlfriend is very pretty. And pleasant. Too bad we didn't meet under more normal circumstances’, Allie said after couple of minutes of uncomfortable silence, wanting to make a casual conversation, but sounded, in fact, caustic.

'She's not my girlfriend!’ Bea spat out. 'I told you several times I don't date.’

'So what is she then?’

Bea shrugged her shoulders indifferently. 'She's one of my crew mates’, she husked out, 'and occasionally we have sex, that's all.’

Allie bit her lip, 'How long has it been going on?’

'Three years. Maybe more. I'm not really sure.’

'Three years!’ Allie exclaimed. 'Call it as you like it, but I'd say you have a girlfriend.’

'It's not like that. She isn't looking for a relationship and I certainly couldn't stand one. There are no emotions whatsoever. And we're not exclusive. We're both…’ Bea paused looking Allie straight in the eye, 'we're both encountering other people… sexually.’

Allie felt the earth spinning around her head. She knew Bea was a player, but she couldn't have imagined that it was at this scope.
'Didn't you say a Tina was in love with Kim? Was it this Tina you were talking about?'

Bea nodded, 'They both are in love with each other. They are just not ready to commit yet.'

Allie raised her eyebrows. 'I believe when someone is truly in love, they cannot stand the mere thought of being touched by anyone else.' She's headed for the entrance, 'But what do I know about it?!

Bea went after her to see her out.

'See you Monday', Allie said at the gate, not even bothering to look at Bea, hurrying down the street to her car which was left parked in front of Franky's house.

'Allie!' she heard Bea shout out behind her back. She turned around, seeing the redhead was closely following her. 'This was weird, alright', the redhead said under her breath, 'but it shouldn't change anything in our friendship, aye? We're still good for our jogging on Sunday? And the cut and colour beforehand?'

Allie looked at her panicked face. Bea has been honest with her intentions with her from the start, and Allie had no one to blame but herself.

'Sure', she said dryly. 'I'll come over as agreed to.'

'Good', Bea smiled at her, her body visibly relaxing. 'I have already bought a perfect dye for you. You're gunna love it.'

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Allie drove slowly down the beach road and towards her home. At last alone, she didn't feel the pressure anymore of having to put a bold face. Instead, she could finally process all that has just happened, all that she saw. It was all replaying like a nightmare before her eyes. She couldn't see the road before her, but she could clearly see every single drop of sweat that travelled down Tina's face. It was clear how much she enjoyed having Bea pressing into her body and Allie felt jealousy eating her from the inside like an acid. Tina's screams echoed through her soul and poured out her ears. She rolled down all the windows to let those screams out and some fresh air in, but the atmosphere in the car still felt stale. She had a feeling she was going to suffocate. She unbuttoned two buttons on her office shirt and massaged her sore throat. Most of all, she kept hearing Bea's laboured breathing, she saw the hands that were cupping her cheeks only two short nights ago now pressing into supple flesh of other woman's backside, and felt like she was robbed of something, something that was always meant to be hers but was now wasted on a passer-by. In her mind she followed the curve of Bea's lips as they clenched close together succeeding one particularly strong thrust into Tina so she didn't follow the curve of the road, missing the car from opposite direction by a mere decimetre.

Shaken, Allie parked her Mini by the road side, and got out of the car. Still feeling like she was gunna suffocate, she left the car door open and went down the path to the deserted beach below the road.

Chasing after the salty air, she came to the edge of the ocean. Tidal waves were very high by now and they kept coming at her - each time they hit the shore, it felt like they were crashing what was left of her already crumbled world. The contrast of her prospects when she was coming down this road earlier in the afternoon and when she was leaving it now couldn't escape her. She went to see
her Bea, but Bea was never hers. Tears began to flood her face, as the waves were flooding her shoes. She opened her mouth and screamed in anger and desperation against the tide.
Sailing off into the Unknown

Chapter Notes

A fair warning: She who cannot take slow burn anymore, should really skip this chapter.

Allie didn't know how long she was standing on the shoreline, she didn't notice how it was slowly getting dark around her. She cried until she ran out of tears, but even if her face dried off by now, her soul was still letting out silent whimpers of pain.

She felt a light touch on her shoulder, but she still startled and almost screamed. Turning around she came face to face with an police officer.

'Is that your car up there, ma'am?' he asked her in a serious voice, but taking another look into her puffed face, he became worried, 'Are you alright?'

Allie started to come to her senses.

'Officer… I'm fine, I will be fine… I'm better now', she raved incoherently. She looked up to the road: other cars were driving around her Mini, a small queue being formed behind it. 'Yes, that's my car. Oh God, I'm so sorry.'

She hurried up the hill to get to her car.

'Is your vehicle broken?' the officer asked, hot on her heels.

'No, no, sorry, I just left it there for couple of minutes.'

'Well, in that case, I have to inform you that leaving a vehicle in the middle of the road is a traffic offence. You're endangering other drivers.'

Having reached the peak and crossed the street, the officer leant on Allie's car and held out his pad to write her a ticket. He lifted his gaze to look at her again. Seeing her standing there indifferently, lost in her thoughts, her eyes all red, he sighed and closed his pad.

'Look, ma'am'...

'Allie', the troubled blonde uttered.

'Allie', the officer repeated in a kind voice, 'you don't strike me as kind of person who would knowingly endanger others. Why don't you tell me what happened?'

She looked up at him, her eyes starting to fill with tears again. She only found the strength to tell him the second half of the truth.

'I almost had a car crush. I missed the other car by centimetres. I got upset and had to pull off and cool down.'

'Okay', the officer said after a minute of consideration. 'I believe you, Allie. I won't write an official
report. But I can't let you drive off in such a state either. Can you call someone to pick you up?’

Allie nodded and took out her phone to dial Paul.

Paul showed up fifteen minutes later. He came with a taxi so that he can drive Allie's car home. He only looked at her with concern, not saying a word. After thanking the officer, they both got into the car and headed home.

Once inside the house, Paul still wasn't trying to ask any questions or reprimand Allie. Allie only dully sat in the armchair in her lounge so he sat on the floor next to her and started taking off her soaked shoes. He helped her out of her clothes and after they took a silent shower together, Allie put on her pyjamas, while Paul disappeared into the kitchen. He found Allie sitting in the same armchair in the lounge, her toes tucked under her thighs as if still cold so he brought her a pair of socks and a blanket.

'I made you a cuppa’, he said bringing a tea out of kitchen. Allie smiled at him gratefully, her shaking fingers taking the mug out of his hand.

Paul turned on the TV. He wasn't intending to interrogate her. She was still fragile and needed time to collect. He wasn't stupid. He knew something must have happened to her beforehand, something that caused her to almost smash into the other car.

An hour later he warmed up dinner and after clearing her plate, Paul saw the colour finally returning into Allie's cheeks.

Then he dared asking. He needed to know.

'Did you have a quarrel with Bea?’

Allie's eyes shot up to him.

'Why would I have a quarrel with Bea?!’ she snarled at him.

'Well, something obviously happened between the two of you. You were on the road that leads from her house.’

Allie puffed.

'We didn't quarrel. We're good. I don't want to talk about it, okay?!'

'Okay’, Paul said pensively.

After another hour of watching sitcoms, Paul got up.

'You're coming to bed?’ he asked. 'I have to be at hospital at seven.’

'I'll watch some more TV’, Allie answered, her eyes fixed on the screen.

So he couldn't do anything else but to kiss her temple goodnight and leave.

Hearing him switching off the lights upstairs, Allie turned off the TV and transferred to sleep on the sofa. She wrapped her blanket around her, having no intentions to go upstairs that night. She needed to be alone.

She shivered heavily under the blanket, replaying once again the dreadful scene she witnessed that afternoon. Well, it was dreadful to her. To some other person, to whom Bea didn't mean as much, it
would have been awkward to walk in on a private moment, but it would've soon be forgotten. Allie was aware of that, she was also aware she was to be blamed for walking in unannounced, but that didn't stop her feeling sorry for herself. She tossed and turned half a night, then she got up to take something for her headache. Returning to her bunk for the night, she hugged the sofa cushion and buried her face into it. It was too harsh to bear, too harsh. So she turned for comfort to 'her Bea’, or at least the memory of all of their previous gentle moments. In her head, she replayed them all from the start, and when she reached last Sunday morning and them sitting in the Gosch's Paddock under that big, old plane tree, she hugged Bea's legs again, letting her tired head rest on her knees, and she was finally able to fall asleep.

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Allie has been playing with her food dejectedly for half an hour now, having put almost nothing into her mouth so far. She was sitting in her office building’s canteen, following the client's meeting, during which she was asked several times by Mrs Rodgers and Ann Hagurson whether she was feeling unwell.

'You mind if I joined you?’ she heard a clear voice. She looked up, only to face her nightmare. ‘Tina’, she uttered. 'Please, take a seat.’

She was watching the other woman eating her soup and rice, trying to keep up the small talk the best she could. She asked her about her job and Tina seemed to be enjoying the subject, as she enjoyed being a sports journalist. Then Tina asked about Allie's engagement ring so Allie talked about Paul.

'And you? Are you planning to settle down any time soon?’ Allie turned the tables, the tone of her voice not without an sharp edge.

Tina sighed.

'I was thinking about it… But it's such a big step.’

Allie finally started to chew properly on her food. She felt like she was gaining her ground again.

'Bea is under impression you want to settle down with Kim, eventually’, she continued with a smug face, content to see Tina losing her cool for once.

'Oh, she told you about it?’ she mumbled, her face and neck all pink. 'I didn't think she knew.’

'Bea's pretty smart’.

Tina nodded in agreement.

'It's just… Kim is so great. I know she likes me back, but I fear, once we start to date, I will screw it up. I only had two real relationships before and I was no good at it, it was over before I knew it. Meaningless sex is so much easier.'

Allie squinted, 'Is this what Bea is to you?’

Tina looked her straight in the eye.

'Yes. And no. She's my crew mate so it's all part of one incredibly exciting package, one I'm not
ready to give up yet and settle down.’

She took out her phone. Going into her pictures app, she opened the folder named 'Angels’ and slid her chair close to Allie's to show the blonde the pictures taken on their Saturday gatherings. Some pictures dated from couple of years ago and Allie watched them all curiously.

‘You recognise Kim here?’ Tina smiled with affection, showing Allie a picture of a woman with short blue hair. ‘She was going through a phase’, Tina laughed.

'I'd say!’ Allie laughed along.

'And here's one with all of us - Kim, Bea, Mel and I’, Tina held out her phone to Allie.

'All of you?’ Allie raised her eyebrows. 'So, you're like a separate group within “Angels” or what?'

'We're, like, foursome’, Tina smiled, not having a clue that it will affect Allie.

'You m-mean…', Allie stuttered, 'y-you're all having sex with each other?'

'Well, me and Kim don't sleep with each other, I want to be with her properly one day, but all other combinations go. It is just for fun, we're not exclusive or anything, but honestly I can't remember when was the last time that any of us had sex with anyone outside the group. It just works for us, I guess’, she shrugged her shoulders. 'Do you find it shocking?’

'Well, if it works for you, it's a free country’, Allie shrugged back.

'It totally works for me. At least I know I wouldn't be dragged off to meet her parents’, Tina pulled a yucky face.

'Her parents are dead', Allie got defensive.

'Oh?’ Tina's gaze shot up. 'Sorry, didn't know that.’

Allie sighed.

After swallowing down some more food and thinking for herself a couple of minutes, Allie asked her how was it possible that, in three years of being intimate with someone, she didn't bond the least.

'You don't know that side of Bea’, Tina said with hesitation, 'I don't want to trash her here so just forget it.’

'You wouldn't be trashing her’, Allie tried to convince her, as she really needed to know. 'I may not know that side of her, but I am one of her best friends and I only wish her well. You can tell me’, she assured sweetly.

'Bea’, Tina started warily, 'is impossible to bond with. She's a sport alright, and very reliable as a crew mate, but that woman has no heart whatsoever. She fucks you and feels nothing. She puts your orgasm first, but she never ever orgasms herself. And she's all about rules.’

'Rules?’ Allie wondered.

'Yeah, rules’, Tina nodded. 'She's a total stone butch. Once she starts shagging ya, you're not allowed to hug her anymore, only her friends get to tap her shoulder or kiss her on the cheek. If she fucks you, you're not to touch her anymore in any friendly way. During sex, she never takes her clothes off and she only ever uses her dildo, never anything personal like her hands or lips. She never caresses you, solely holds her hands on your hips to keep you from falling off. She never looks you
in the face, she only wants to shag you from behind. Oh? And did I mention, she's never the one at the receiving end? She gets to fuck, but she never gets fucked. How disturbing is that? How could one bond with a person like that?'

Allie inhaled sharply, struggling to understand all that she's just heard.

'So why do you stay in such a toxic affair?' she wondered after a brief pause.

'It's not toxic’, Tina replied, 'it's fun. I don't care for her either so it doesn't affect me. And damn! You saw it yourself, she's bloody terrific at it - one gets easily used to mind-blowing orgasms. And when I need some sugar to spice it up, there's Mel, she's a total cuddler, so she evens it out', she shrugged.

'As I said’, Allie fake-smiled again, ‘as long as it works for you folks’.

Tina smiled back, not even suspecting that this blasé, straight, engaged twenty-six-year-old could ever have a hidden agenda.

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Allie returned to her office and went straight to the window to take a few deep breaths of fresh air. Then she plumped down on Bea's chair. Taking her head into her hands, she tried to make sense of all that she's witnessed and heard in the last twenty four hours.

After she went five times over her talk with Tina, she started to feel a little better. She began to realise that what she witnessed last afternoon wasn't of such an importance after all. That what was going on between Bea and Tina and the other two women must not mean a lot, since clearly they have never been able to see beyond Bea's mask. Tina suggested Allie didn't know Bea that well, but no matter how often or how long Bea was shagging her, it was actually Tina who didn't know the first thing about Bea. To know her and call her heartless, that was impossible, Allie thought with contempt. The woman who's keeping stranger's stuff in her home for eight years now, in order not to expose a widowed father to additional costs. The woman who bartered half-ton of pure steel under price just so that two teenagers can enjoy swings in their backyard. The woman who's always there to help her mates when their bikes break down or their household need some handiwork. To claim to know her and not know even that her parents have passed away! At that last thought Allie's eyes filled with tears. She caressed the arms of Bea's chair as if she was caressing Bea's arms. It's not important what's happening when Bea encounters those girls, Allie concluded. It's no different than her going to the gym twice a week. It's just another sports activity for Bea. She doesn't even touches them, for God's sake, let alone caresses them.

Feeling her spirits rise, Allie returned to her desk and worked productively until the clock stroked five.

She dropped by by the florist’s on her way from work. She picked out a big bouquet and wrote a 'happy retirement’ card, which she put into an envelope with ten hundred dollar banknotes she has prepared and carried in her wallet ever since Monday. Then she drove off to the beauty salon she's frequented for ten years to say her thanks and goodbyes to the kind woman who has skillfully and professionally attended to her hair ever since she was a teenager.

***
On Thursday Tina sat at her table at the canteen again. Allie welcomed her, but made a mental note to make an effort and go to a nearby restaurant the next day. They discussed everything under the sun except Bea, and Allie found the change refreshing and the conversation interesting. She's also learnt a bit about Yamaha motorcycles, which Tina seemed to prefer. So they parted on really friendly terms.

Around three her phone rang. 'Hi', she heard Bea's raspy voice and shivers went down her spine. 'Just wanted to double-check if you're coming after work.'

Allie played hard to get for couple of minutes, letting Bea supposedly talk her into it in the end, where, in fact, going over to Bea's was all that she could think about ever since she's opened her eyes this morning.

She passed Bea's gate at quarter past five and was pleasantly surprised to see Bea waiting on her in the garden. The redhead looked a bit insecure and she searched Allie's face for any remnants of disturbance that affected their relationship two days ago. The thought was still present in Allie's features, but it seemed to plague her less than before. Allie didn't kiss her though, didn't hug her, and even though she smiled as they greeted each other, Bea felt her heart sink. She's probably disgusted by me, Bea thought downcastedly, she thinks me too dirty to be worthy of a kiss.

'I set it up in the gazebo', she led Allie across the grassland and set her in the chair. She started combing her hair, but she was so disturbed by her depressive thoughts that her hands shook. Allie was waiting on her to calm down, but when she didn't, she caught her right hand with hers and brought it to her lips. At that Bea came around and just sank into Allie's lap. She hugged her like she was never going to let her go. Allie let her calm down in her embrace and then she said decisively, 'It is alright, Bea. You don't owe me any explanations. You're just continuing to live your life from before me.'

Bea replied with her face still stuck into Allie's neck, 'I won't apologise for being a sexual being, but you should have never caught me doing it.'

'I am not a child, Bea', Allie said sharply. 'You don't have to shield me and tell me about birds and bees.'

Bea tried to chuckle, but her voice got stuck and lost somewhere deep within her throat. She propped herself against Allie's shoulders to see her face.

'Your eyes are sunken in their sockets', she murmured sadly. Allie, after all, didn't take it as well as she claims.

'In the future I'll make sure to call before I barge in', Allie tried to shrug it off, but her expression came across sad. Bea's heart fluttered at the sight. Without a second thought, she caught Allie's head between her palms and started kissing dark skin under Allie's eyes then her eyelids. At first, Allie threw her head back and let herself enjoy the sensation, but then her hands started to wander over Bea's back, pulling her in. She returned the kisses, her lips covering every centimetre of Bea's forehead, temples and eyes. Bea's hands grabbed at her hair, her shoulders; they were like two wrestlers fighting for dominance in a passionate embrace. Allie pulled away first, she held Bea firmly so that she can look into her eyes. A tender excitement overflowed them both. Allie smiled and stroked Bea's cheek then leant forward to join their lips. For a split second Bea gave in and they almost kissed, but then she saw a pair of pitch black eyes staring back at her from Allie's face and she startled so much that she screamed and fell off Allie's lap. Allie jumped to her to help her up. Bea shook in her embrace, 'I'm sorry, I'm sorry', the redhead ranted into her shoulder, 'I'm a total fuck-up. And I'm a shitty friend. It's the second time I did to you what friends not ought to be doing to each other.'
Allie stroked her hair. She didn't know what was troubling the redhead, but she knew she won't contribute to her problem. If Bea needed time, she would give her time. If Bea needed friendship, she will keep her hands to herself. She had nothing but love and patience for this woman.

'I know you didn't do anything intentionally', she murmured into her ear. 'And you're not a shitty friend. You're the best.' She felt the redhead shaking her head left and right against her chest. 'Yes, you are', Allie repeated, 'I love your kind heart'.

Several minutes later Bea peeled herself off her. Still holding onto her hands, she looked up at Allie and gave her a faint smile.

'Cut and colour and a show? How's that for a salon?'

Allie smiled and squeezed her hands, then let her go back to her combs and hairpins. This time Bea combed her hair in a jiffy, her strong hands now very steady and gentle. Then she fastened a hairdressing gown around her neck and applied dye on her hair.

'Let's eat while we wait on the colour to take in’, Bea said once she was done, 'I've made you dinner’.

'You shouldn't have gone into a trouble.’

'It wasn't a trouble. I like eating healthy. I have a cooked meal each day.’

'Okay then’, Allie agreed so Bea took the dye with her and disappeared into her house. She returned several minutes later with the soup and then she went back to fetch plates and meatballs. Allie felt a bit silly eating with a waterproof gown on, but she had to admit that the food was delicious and has helped her recuperate from all day's work. Bea rushed her in the end, saying that her hair would turn green if they waited any longer. They brought the chair into the garage bathroom and Bea washed out the dye in the basin. Then she left Allie to wash her hair with a shampoo in her shower. Once done, Allie put on her clothes and got out to find Bea sitting on the sofa. She sat down next to her to check her phone. She heard it chiming while Bea was washing the dye out of her hair.

'It's Paul’, she said to Bea. 'He will be home earlier this evening.’

'I'll hurry’, Bea said quickly.

'Relax, he still won't be home for another two hours.’

Bea brought some papers to cover the ground, then put the chair in the middle of them.

'Step into my salon’, she joked.

She put the hairdressing gown on Allie again and started to cut her hair with precision and skill that left Allie in awe. At the end, when she kneeled in front of Allie and combed two front strands together to even them out, she told Allie to close her eyes so that tiny pieces of hair don't get into her eyes, but Allie just dismissed her with a mischievous smile and continued to stare into the beautiful face in the near distance to hers. Next she thinned her ends a bit, then cleaned her neck with a brush, to what Allie giggled. After she’d cleaned away the papers with cut hairs, Bea washed her hands and returned to Allie with a round brush and a hairdryer. She really took her time with this part. It felt more like caressing than blow-drying and Allie couldn't fight closing her eyes this time. She felt more heat in the pit of her stomach then on her head and that heat spread throughout her body so that Allie had to clench her thighs to keep them from buckling and press her lips together to hold her moans in. When Bea said that it was done and blew couple of remaining hairs off her neck, she felt nothing short of an explosion in her brain. After two months of being confused and astound, she could finally
see clearly and name her feelings what they were: besotted, in love, aroused. Bea nudged her to stand up and go have a look in the mirror, but as she tried, she felt that her legs were too weak to hold up her weight so, to hide it, she pulled Bea down to her lap and showered her with small pecks on her cheeks. Bea was straddling only her left leg so Allie could feel her warm core against her thigh. How are such things even possible, Allie wondered while electric currents ran through her brain. Although she could now precisely identify her fascination with Bea, her emotions for that woman were still stronger than her urges - remembering the fright she gave Bea earlier that arvo, she tried to control her instincts and she fought her needs. Instead she concentrated on her feelings and held the redhead in a gentle, motionless embrace until she cooled off a bit. Besides, somewhere across town there was a man hurrying home to her and to that man she owed a talk before she could move any further with Bea. Now that she has finally faced the truth, she couldn't bring herself to cheat on him, not even if Bea got buck naked in front of her.

'Paul will be waiting for me', she said in a quiet voice, bringing Bea out of her haze.

'Of course', Bea said in an even lower tone and got up on her feet. Allie squeezed her hand before she passed her by. Entering the bathroom, she headed right towards the toilet, happy that she could relieve some of the remaining tension between her legs. She was so lost in her thoughts and feelings during the last twenty minutes they sat in each other's arms that she's completely forgotten why she came over to Bea's in the first place. When she came to the basin to wash her hands, she startled from her reflexion staring back at her.

'Oh Bea’, she ran out of the bathroom and hugged the redhead one more time, 'I love it! You truly are an artist!'

Bea smiled and kissed her forehead. She saw Allie to the gate and waved at her as she drove off. Once inside the garage, she went to the bathroom herself. Her underwear was soaking wet - Allie truly did a number on her. She inhaled sharply several times, holding herself up against the wall, then got out, went straight to her phone and dialled a number.

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Allie was parking in front of her house, her mood dark and serious and her heart breaking for the talk she was bound to have. She was aware that she will most probably never get together with Bea, but she didn't want to be with anyone else. And Paul deserved to be with someone who will love him completely, the way she loved Bea.

She threw a look at the house. It was dark outside, but all the lights were still out, meaning Paul was still at the hospital. She reached in her bag to call him, but she couldn't find her phone. She slapped her forehead, remembering that she never dug her phone out of Bea's sofa cushions. Damn it, she cursed, and turned her car around and towards the beach road.

She stumbled up Bea's driveway, carefully threading in the dark. She didn't possess any flashlight besides the one built in her phone so she walked slowly towards the light that came out the garage. Several metres before the entrance she stopped in her tracks, the redhead coming to view. She wasn't alone, yet again. Bloody hell, Allie inwardly cursed, I wasn't even gone for a whole hour. Based on the pictures Tina showed her, Allie concluded this one must be Mel. She looked very small, tiny even, and she fitted right into Bea's arms. She was only loosely clinging onto the brick wall near the entrance, so Bea was practically holding her up in the air, hugging firmly under her thighs, while thrusting into her.
Allie knew she should turn around and leave, but she couldn't. She wasn't shocked or frozen on spot, like she was on Tuesday, but she was glued to the sight before her. More than ever, she knew this meant nothing to Bea, in fact, she was painfully aware that the act before her was probably her own doing. She must have left Bea turned on as she was herself so she needed to release the tension. Allie was curious whether Bea was right now imagining her in her grip instead of Mel.

Bea had dialled Mel out of two reasons. Firstly, she lived only a minutes’ drive away from Bea and Bea was feeling like she was gunna explode. More importantly, Mel was warm and kind, and after her afternoon encounter with Allie, she was left with a yearning for more tenderness and kindness like the one Allie abundantly showered her with. Well, it wasn't possible or wanted to get such a tenderness out of another person, but holding a kind girl in her arms made it easier to imagine Allie's caresses again. She held her eyes firmly closed, feeling Allie's soft pecks all over her face, as she thrusted vigorously but gently into the unsuspecting girl. She never went that far to imagine Allie in Mel's place, she only repeated the afternoon scenes in her head and it was enough to make her insatiable. She was glad she didn't act on her urges towards Allie: she was protecting Allie's future; this way she wasn't hurting anyone.

Allie stood there for good three or four minutes, half-envious, half-aroused. Bea seemed freakishly strong and Allie's pulse was quickening just by looking at her tensed muscles. When she felt throbbing between her legs, she knew she overstayed so she quietly turned around and sneaked out and into the street.

The further Allie drove away the more laboured her breathing was becoming. She kicked off her shoes and hurried upstairs to cool off in the shower. When she quickly undressed and was about to enter, she collided with Paul who was coming out of the bathroom, wearing nothing but a small, short towel around his hips.

'What are you doing in the dark?' she asked in surprise.

'I came home couple of hours ago and slept through until few minutes ago.’

So he was home earlier, Allie thought to herself. She saw the way Paul's eyes were raking over her naked body, his hands soon enough finding her backside. She couldn't fight it, not when she was that much aroused already. No matter how wrong it seemed, knowing what has to come, Allie pushed him on the bed and ripped the towel off him. Paul’s instantly got an erection, this was a side of Allie he’s never seen before, the hastiness of her movements convincing him her needs and wants finally lie back where they belong, back with him. He flipped them over, laying his body heavily on top of hers. He couldn't get enough of kissing it, she finally being more than a meek participant. When he entered her, she was so unbelievably warm and wet, so ready for him, that he squealed in excitement and gave himself fully to his thrusts.

Allie kept her head buried against Paul's collarbone, her arms gripping firmly under his armpits and into his shoulder blades. She pressed her eyelids tightly so that she can visualise the scene she watched half an hour ago. Mel wasn't a loud one, unlike Tina. Her moans were quiet but enticing and Allie could repeat those sweet sounds in her head. She let herself moan alongside Mel, copying her rhythm, and as a surprised Paul sped up his thrusts, she imagined it was Bea thrusting into her. She half-screamed as they came together. It wasn't an orgasm like she witnessed with Tina, for someone it wouldn't be much, but for her it was the strongest she's ever had. Thanks to Bea, she thought sadly. She softly rejected Paul's attempt to cuddle, as well as his advances for another round between the sheets, so he got up and went for another shower.
Having come out, he found Allie dressed in jeans and a t-shirt, sitting on the bed composedly, all the lights in the house lit.

'We need to talk', she said.

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Firstly, Paul tried to fight it off. He tried to talk her out of it, persuading her yet again that her feelings for Bea were nothing else but a schoolgirl's crush.

'We have a history, Al, and we still have the spark’, he pleaded. When Allie didn't budge, he added, 'Well, I'm not leaving, especially not after tonight. I'm gunna fight for ya. You're just confused, but you care for me, right now, in bed, I could feel how much. It was the best we've ever had, you can't deny it.’

Allie looked him straight in the eye.

'Right now, in bed, I was imagining Bea on top of me. That’s why I came.’

Paul shrank back, the look of shock and hurt painted all across his features. It broke Allie's heart when she confessed what she confessed but she knew he needed the naked truth to pull him out of his delusion and give him strength to move on in all of the future moments when the wish to get back together with her will take over his better judgement.

He stumbled off the bed, as if drunk, and went to the closet to pull out his suitcase. Allie watched him pack his things and, as much as she wanted to hold in the tears until he left, she couldn't. She loved this man so dearly and she had to let him go away. It wasn't fair to keep him by her side just because she needed a security blanket, a family member to fill her empty home with chatter. She was brave enough to sail off into the unknown and not regret that she was leaving the safe shore behind. Yet, tonight, in spite of all that she was aware of, all she could feel was being broken in two.

She slid down the engagement ring that once belonged to his grandmother and put it in his wallet.

'I'll come over on Saturday for the rest of my stuff”, he said at the door.

'Where will you stay?’ she asked in a trembling voice.

‘At my parents’, until I find my own place.’

'I am so sorry, Paul, I never meant for this to happen…” she started.

'Don't’, he cut her off, pressing his keys into her hand and walking out of the door.

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Bea was woken around eleven by the sound of ringing. She grabbed her phone but the screen was black. After it stopped ringing, it only began again so she got up. Turning on all the lights as she went from room to room, she followed the persistent sound. As she reached the garage, she
understood that Allie had forgotten her phone. She was reluctant to answer somebody else's phone, but when it start ringing for the third time, she knew she had to. The woman introduced herself as Linda, Paul's mum, and then she asked to speak to Allie. Bea explained that Allie had forgotten her phone at her place earlier that afternoon so Linda asked her to pass Allie the message to call her back as soon as she retrieves her phone. The woman sounded a little on the edge, and that got Bea worried a bit, but there was nothing that she could really do about it, since neither she or Allie were in a possession of a landline. She knew the most important thing though - that Allie wasn't the one in distress. Besides, if it was a matter of life and death, Linda would not have passed the message for Allie to call her back tomorrow, she would simply drive herself to Allie's now. Having come to that calming conclusion, Bea returned to her bedroom, carrying Allie's phone with her. She lay down and pulled her red blanket over, Allie's mobile still in her hand. The phone wasn't locked, but she was too well-mannered to snoop around. She only entered the pictures app, because, on that particular night, she was missing Allie way too much anyway. She was surprised to see that all the pictures in there were of the two of them last Saturday or from that Rock Island weekend. She smiled briefly at one particularly funny picture of Fridge, then she paused on the next one: a close-up portrait of Allie that Bea took herself. It was taken after lunch they all had on the beach in Rock Island, Allie was wearing a straw hat and her eyes looked incredibly blue against the ocean and the sky behind her. Bea zoomed her face with two fingers, then laid the phone against a spare pillow she kept in the corner of her headrest so that she could face the picture while lying down. She was awake for quite a while, staring at the picture, thinking, then she finally succumbed to sleep.
I want to thank everyone who left me comments on Author's Note. Your words of consolation have meant so much to me. Some are amongst the kindest things ever said to me and have really brought me comfort. I have deleted the Author's Note, but I have kept a screenshot of your supportive messages to keep them in my pictures folder. I had thought that I was mentally prepared for Gran's death, but it turned out I completely wasn't. She was my safe place, as I guess, your grandmothers were for you. My parents were away on business a lot after I was born so I have been living with Gran for the first six years of my life. She taught me manners, she taught me to have self-confidence, to be modest, to be honest. Perhaps the most important thing that she taught me was to tell stories so, I assume, without her there wouldn't be any story that I've ever written, including this anonymous one. This story is very important to me, if I skip any Saturday in the next month and a half, it is because of my obligations following Gran's death. Thank you all for your support and encouragement.

Next morning, around nine thirty, there was a knock on Allie's office door.

'Come in', a hoarse voice was heard from the inside.

The blonde was sitting at her desk near the door. Looking up to see the visitor, her face showed a clear surprise.

'Why do you knock on your own office door?' Bea heard her ask.

'I didn't want to startle you', Bea smiled at her.

'Well, come in quickly, before HR sees you!'

Bea obeyed, closing the door behind her and leaning against it.

The blonde was looking at her reproachfully:

'What are you doing here? You know you're not supposed to get back to work until Monday.'

'Relax', Bea replied, her eyes happy to be able to take in the familiar figure in person, after a long night of pining. 'I only came to return your phone. By the way, Paul's mum called three times last night, I hope that you don't mind that I answered your phone eventually. She wants you to call her back.'

Allie sighed, 'Linda…'

Bea looked more closely at Allie. Something was seriously wrong with the blonde. Her hair was a mess and her eyelids were swollen. She looked enervated, dehydrated even. Combine that with her hoarse voice, Bea concluded that she spent her night crying and probably didn't take any breakfast. As she handed over Allie's mobile, she understood why. That shiny piece of jewelry, that was flashing from Allie's finger whenever she moved her hand, wasn't poking Bea's eyes this time.
Bea approached even nearer, her fingers playing nervously with papers laid out in front of Allie.

'Where's your ring, Allie?' Bea asked in a feeble voice.

'I broke up with Paul last night', Allie replied, her own voice suddenly whiny. 'He moved out.'

Allie's eyes filled with tears and Bea felt terror coming upon her.

'Why did you do such a thing, Allie?!' she shrieked. She felt her legs tremble so she leant even heavier on the table.

'You know why', Allie brought her hand over Bea's and stroked her fingers.

Feeling chill going down her spine, Bea rashly pulled her hand back.

'That's a shame', she retorted bitterly and stormed out of the office.

***

Bea made it into her car, but couldn't start it, as her shaking hands couldn't put the keys into ignition. She gave up and leant her forehead onto the steering wheel.

_You know why, you know why… _echoed inside her head.

She felt so guilty.

In Bea's head, Allie had this perfect future Bea planned out for her. Since she's met Paul, she was convinced he was the right person for Allie to spend her life with. He was a good man, smart, strong and healthy, and he clearly adored Allie. He was reliable enough for Allie to grow old with, shielded from the monsters of this world in his embrace. Where is she supposed to find a person like that again?

Bea bumped her head against the steering wheel, as if to punish herself.

Once! She only slipped once! Yesterday afternoon. And it wasn't a real slip: she merely allowed Allie two embraces and few pecks on the cheeks. But look what it led to…

A disaster, Bea sighed. Nothing short of a catastrophe.

She was so sure Allie and her had a solid friendship. After Allie’s birthday she even started to think it might last until the end of their days. She's started trying harder with Allie, because she felt they had a lasting connection she could build on. And now Allie went and ruined her life because she’s developed some sort of infatuation with her?!

How did they so completely fall off the track?

Sure, Allie was attractive, beautiful even, and that sometimes caused confusing feelings in Bea - like yesterday afternoon - but that attraction was supposed to be only Bea's problem! Bea was the lesbian one, not Allie, and she couldn't stay indifferent when a beautiful girl like that pulls her near as Allie sometimes did, but it was a minor issue Bea could easily shake away and was sure it would stop appearing when the novelty of it wears itself off.

Bea knew she wasn't a relationship material, but with Allie she could completely relax, she didn't fear her touches, her affection, because she was so convinced a relationship with her was out of
question for Allie, the last thing on Allie’s mind. When Bea was completely honest with herself, then she would admit her friendship with Allie was made of a different fiber than pure and strong bond she had with Franky and Bridget. It contained an allurement of a budding romance, a magnetic pull that made it impossible to stay away for long. But it was harmless, it was chaste, it was purely platonic.

It was safe for Bea.

Allie was straight, engaged, in love. Bea could enjoy her forever, without any fear of Allie shaking her carefully built world. She felt secure with Allie, their friendship was like ivy and climbing roses which brought joy to her daily routine like the ones in her garden embellished her grey walls. All of her walls seemed indestructible, until few minutes ago Allie came crushing them like an overgrown ivy sometimes gets out of hand and crumbles the stone that supports it.

Bea suddenly felt like she was in the middle of an earthquake. Allie has just become dangerous, Allie was a threat.

Hastily, she started her Jeep, wanting to escape the premises as soon as possible, to get away from Allie.

*You know why…*

She didn't want to know why. This was intolerable. This needed to be fixed, and Bea was gunna fix it. All that history with Paul could not be erased so easily by one evening's imprudent decision. People break up, but people also make up. There must be a way to bring those two together again. She will talk to Allie once she calms down, she will make her see sense. Allie will have her perfect life back and Bea will have her perfect friendship again.

***

Paul's mum came over that Friday after work. She tried to make her feel better, but she only managed to bring Allie into another crying fit, as she was now mourning the loss of her future in-laws and the sense of belonging to a loving family.

She got almost no sleep that night too, and having come on Saturday morning to collect his things, Paul found her pale and exhausted on her veranda, waiting on him.

His heart shrunk in his chest seeing her like that. He knew she cared deeply about him, she just wasn't in love with him anymore. At this point he doubted she was ever really in love with him, she only believed she was and he believed what he needed to believe. But he was wide awake now and when he thought back, he knew Allie has never had the expression on her face when she looked at him as she had when she looked at Bea. He knew she couldn't help it and he needed to accept that and move on, but it was still too soon. For the time being, it was a sore wound and it hurt like hell.

One particular scene kept playing in his head every time he only tried to close his eyes and rest for a while. That picnic on Rock Island… He finally got Allie for a few minutes only to himself, he was eager to share a particularly funny mishap that happened to him during his ferry trip over there, yet she was listening with half an ear, her stare fixed on the distant, laughing figure in red, her lips smiling with her. It was a memory that burnt him, but one of those that will eventually make him heal.
Allie came to life as Paul came to her threshold. She spent her evening ironing and carefully packing his shirts and suits. Then she spent half the night putting his belongings into the boxes she bought after work. She offered him coffee, he refused. Breakfast was fixed, but he didn't want to touch it. She felt so small. She desperately needed his approval, his forgiveness. But she knew there was no point if she asked, as he wouldn't give it to her. He wasn't rude, he wasn't even cold, but he was full of pent-up emotions, nervous energy radiating off him. He avoided her eyes, he went about his business dodging her. He silently accepted her help, but cut short her every attempt at conversation. Their eyes met only once. He had rented a small truck to load all of his things, but mostly because he was attached to his study desk and especially his ergonomic chair so he wanted to take them with him. Allie helped him bring out and load in the desk and when they put it down in the truck, she caught his gaze and knew it was the end to an era.

She knew that was a moment that would stay with her forever. His broken gaze carved into her heart and it hurt more than she could have ever imagined.

Yet there was another image inside of her, to which she was more loyal…

And that pulled her through that heartsickness.

'Paul’, she dared speaking as he was closing his truck to leave, ‘may I call you sometime, y'know, to catch up, check upon each other?’

He was walking to the cab like he had no intention to answer her.

‘Damn it, Paul’, she shouted in sudden anger, 'we've known each other since Adam!'

He paused, changing his mind and getting out of the cab. He walked towards her, very slowly, and when he came to stand before her, he looked her directly in the eyes and asked composedly:

'Tell me one thing, Allie. You never lied to me so don't lie to me now.’

Allie nodded, her tongue dry in her mouth.

'Did you cheat on me with her?’

Allie shook her head.

'I didn't. I never even knew it was a sexual attraction until Thursday afternoon.’

Paul's eyes examined her face, an open book like always.

He sighed, 'Then we're good, Allie. You haven't done anything wrong. It was like a hurricane heading our way - I saw it coming, but I couldn't do anything to stop it. At least you respected me that much to be honest with me and not to make a cuckold out of me.’

'I would never’, Allie choked out, her eyes full of tears.

'Don't let it be for nothing, Allie’, he found a strength to say, wiping her cheeks. 'You got yourself in a real mess with that woman, but promise you'll fight for what you want. Otherwise, this, you and me, you tearing us apart, it would all be for nothing.’

His eyes got watery too, as he cupped Allie's cheeks and waited for her response.

'I promise’, she forced out the words.

He kissed her forehead and turned to leave.
'I'll call you tomorrow', she sobbed behind his back, making him turn around and say:

'Don't. I will call you when I'm ready. Give me time.'

Allie could only nod, her tears threatening to suffocate her. She watched him drive away, then she returned to her empty home and cried her heart out.

Once she got it out of her system, she started to feel a bit better though. Her biggest fear was Paul discarding her out of his life, and he half-promised he wouldn't, so she calmed a little. She felt completely drained, as if she cried out all of the tears she was given at birth. She dragged herself to kitchen and forced herself to finally eat something. Then she did the only thing she was taught to do when she was sad: she went to her piano and played Chopin's preludes. Image of her father floated before her eyes: sitting on that very spot, behind that exact piano, playing the same preludes hour after hour, day after day, as she sat in a nearby chair, a lonely little girl no one paid attention to.

***

The same Saturday morning Bea was no joy to be around and the impact of her wrath spread upon every single one of her crew members.

After she'd won fair and square, she was yet again accused of foul play by a poor excuse of a human being that went by the name of Lucy Gambaro, but was usually addressed simply with 'Juice'.

Bea was usually amused by her impotent, spiteful remarks so she sometimes laughed in her face, but mostly ignored her, Juice boring her out of her mind. However, today she seemed to be having a short fuse and, after years of trying, Juice finally succeeded to drive her up the wall.

'You wanna be the top dog?!!' Bea shouted in her face. 'Well, be my guest! You and me, again up there!'

'Now!' she yelled in her face, when Juice was too shocked to move. Bea put her helmet back on, and Juice slowly did too. They pushed their bikes to the start line and pulled down their visors.

To everyone's surprise, Bea didn't start her bike right away. She gave Juice a head start, then roared her engine, getting nearer and nearer, until she was almost glued to Juice's rear wheel. She never tried to overtake her, she kept threatening her rear end, making Juice sweat under her helmet. When they were approaching the finish line, Bea accelerated a notch, making their tires meet. She chuckled, seeing she has scared the pants off Lucy. Then she leant her bike to the right, almost touching the tarmac, and elegantly drove past her, taking lead. Then she opened the throttle wide and let the clutch out completely. She left Juice in the cloud of dust behind her, crossing the finish line and showing off by popping a wheelie before she stopped.

She jumped off her bike, leaving the helmet behind and taking Tina by her hand, dragging her towards the prep house.

'You crazy bitch!' she heard Lucy hollering behind them, fear still very much present in her voice. This made Tina snicker and Bea joined her.

Bursting in the lounge of the prep house, Bea locked the door, while Tina was quickly unbuttoning her pants, her limbs already trembling with anticipation. She got massively turned on just by watching Bea taking Juice on like that, and if there was anything Tina liked, that was being with a
winner. After few thrusts she knew she wouldn't last. Her vision went blurry, she was screaming out of her lungs, ready to release herself, when Bea suddenly pulled out of her, saying a thing she never said before, 'Sorry, I just can't today', then quickly got out the door.

***

Bea was genuinely surprised to see Allie stretching out in the park. She seemed angry though and was eager to run herself down, until she expulses all of her demons.

So she let her.

She let her run, hot on her heels, until Allie couldn't feel her legs anymore. Allie threw herself on the grass, fighting for air. When Bea let herself down next to her, she scoffed, 'Go on, go without me. Leaving me behind - that's certainly one thing you seem very good at'.

Bea knew Allie was referring to her storming out of the office last Friday. Having nothing to say in her defence, she only patiently sat next to Allie, keeping her company, until the blonde got up and tried to run again. But she had no stamina to continue her spurt so they ended up slowly walking the trail.

Bea watched Allie moving her legs as if they were made out of led.

'I'm tired', Bea said after a short while, plopping herself down on the nearest bench and tapping on the spot next to her.

'I know what you're doing', Allie frowned, but set on the bench anyway.

Bea let the silence befall them, knowing that Allie's anger will disperse more with each passing minute. When she caught the blonde stealing glances at her, her expression more amicable than before, she dared asking about her whereabouts in the last couple of days.

'Did you call Linda back?' she was beating around the bush.

Allie nodded.

'She came by too, on Friday afternoon’, she suspired.

'Did she try to talk you into getting back together with Paul?' Bea asked hopefully.

Allie shook her head.

'Surprisingly, no. She just wanted to make sure I was okay.’

'Wow’, Bea said dumbfoundedly. 'She is something else.'

'She has always treated me like her own’, Allie's voice was full of melancholy. 'I'm gunna miss her. I'm gunna miss being part of that family.'

'Surely it's not too late to mend things with Paul, Allie. People like that don't come around every corner’, Bea started her agenda.

'Oh, it's too late’, Allie's eyes were fixated on a river in front of them. 'I've made sure we could never
'H-how?' Bea's lips trembled.

Allie turned her bitter look towards the redhead.

'I confessed him things no one wants to hear, to ensure he would never want me as his girlfriend again. I burnt the bridges. It is better for him, in the long run.'

Bea was lost for words. Allie's explanation what happened between them shredded her hopes and plans.

'But you love him', she uttered finally, her brain still struggling to understand.

'I do love him, I love his family too. But that is just it - I realised I love him more like a brother than like a future husband and I just couldn't stay in that relationship, no matter how comfortable it was. I'm not in love with him, simple as that', she sighed.

When Bea wasn't responding, she continued:

'You know what his mother said to me? She said she would never dare interfere in such a personal matter, but she'd always felt Paul and I never had what she had with her husband. And she'd always wanted more, for both of us. So she wasn't bummed that we broke up, she was just concerned how we shall initially take it, but she is convinced we will realise over the course of time that we made the right decision.'

'Extraordinary', Bea marvelled at Linda's wisdom.

'If it's not meant to be with Paul', Bea stated a while later, 'someone else will come along for you, you'll see'.

'Or has already come along', Allie winked.

Bea rejected her insinuation:

'It certainly didn't. I know no one worthy of you.'

***

On Monday Bea returned to work. Days were rolling out as usual: breakfast with Allie, work, lunch with Allie, work, going home or wherever to she wanted to go. She may have been seeking her girls out more often than usual, as an attempt to put a barrier between her and the young blonde. She made sure she never touched Allie again, not only for Allie's sake, but out of that wild fear that kept coursing through her veins, dreading anything even remotely relationship-like.

With each passing day, she, however, relaxed a bit more. Allie seemed lost in her sorrow that she doesn't get to even hear Paul's voice: even though she was the one who ended things and didn't show any regrets, she was having a hard time getting used to his absence. So she wasn't showing any signs of having any intention of going after Bea. Bea started to wonder whether she'd imagined the whole thing. 'You know why' could have meant a range of things after all. Allie was only a friend, just like she was before, and Bea lost fear that she'd make a move if she hung out with her again, but still
avoided her like a plague after work.

Allie was never alone after work though. Boomer and Regan hung at her place every single arvo that week, to make sure she was alright, much to Allie's annoyance. On Friday evening they insisted upon them all going out and letting their hair down. They dragged Allie to 'Brown Alley', never suspecting that was a favourite going-out-place for certain members of the Burnt Angels. Allie was finally having some fun, for the first time in ten days, when sometime after midnight, she bumped into Bea. And all of her girls. And Doreen and Nash. Allie's little face turned green. She uttered a hello to everyone, noticing how Mel's eyes curiously lingered upon her. 'That's her?' she thought she read Mel's lips, as she nudged Kim with her elbow and Kim slowly nodded…

Bea dragged Allie to the side to talk a bit in private, but once Allie started taking her hand, Bea flinched and disappeared into the crowd.

Allie stood dumbstruck, looking into the void Bea left behind. Regan and Boomer, who witnessed the whole exchange, were now looking at each other, silently deliberating what to do. Then Allie felt Regan's hand soothing her back, 'Righto, ice cream on Allie's couch is our next stop, girls!'

Allie was practically kidnapped into the confinement of her own home, having to endure what turned out to be the messiest sleepover in years. She stayed completely sober, even though both of her friends were pretty tipsy. They kept asking her questions about Bea, until, around 4 a.m., she finally cracked, and confessed what they've already been suspecting for quite some time - that she was crazy in love with Bea. Once that dam broke though, there was no stopping Allie. She could talk about Bea for hours. And she did, until both of the other girls passed out onto her sofa cushions.

***

After lunch her friends left, so Allie cleaned up a bit, then decided to take a nap to make up for last night. She was lying in her bed, a ray of sun coming through her window, falling directly onto her closed eyelids. She didn't wake though, but the sunlight must have triggered some unconscious memories, as she found herself in her dream on Rock Island, taking her hat off, taking a step closer to Bea, to look at the green of her brown eyes…

The breeze was lightly blowing Bea's locks back, as she stood before her, in her cream dress, with brown flowers printed all over it.

She gulped as she glanced at the swell of Bea's breasts, her shaking hands finding those three brown buttons, she unfastened them…

***

Judging by the way they spoke with each other during their jogging session on Sunday, one would never guess those two even met on Friday night, let alone had that little odd moment that threw them both off big time.

Bea invited Allie to lunch, to the same tavern by the river that they've got so used to it in the last couple of months, but Allie had to pass. It was the last Sunday of the month so she wanted to hurry home to take a shower and dress herself nicely so that she can go visit her mother somewhere around one.

To Bea it seemed Allie was the sun on that somewhat cloudy and windy late summer day. It was like her happiness was radiating off her and warming Bea inside. It was so long ago, but she could almost
feel it, that joy of having a mother awaiting you. The smell of freshly cut flowers in the vase, the smell of clean laundry, the steam coming off the hot soup on the table. The perfume of her mum as she pulled her into her embrace…

***

Allie's hand was full of sand. She slowly released it, letting it drip on a deserted beach. No one but fish and birds and them. No people around them on a beautiful island. She took Bea's straw hat off, her fingertips finding her perfect lips. She wrapped her arms around her waist, so slender in that cream-coloured dress, and let her lips trail down her neck, across her collarbone, and along that bare shoulder line…

***

Friday after work Allie was parking in front of Fridget-House. She didn't really want to come, especially knowing that Bea was not gunna be there. Bea has apparently spent her last three afternoons taking apart a crew mate's bike, a pastime only she could enjoy. During lunch she informed Allie she was gunna assembly it tonight so that it will be ready for their race tomorrow. And Allie could swear that those dark eyes glistened with excitement.

Passing the unbearably harmonious couple's gate, Allie heard a sound of a pickup truck parking behind her back, signalling that Booms has arrived too. She waited half a minute on her to join her, and Bridget was already coming out of the house to greet them.

The four ladies were having a poker night. Unlike Booms, Allie wasn't very proficient at poker. She knew the rules, but has rarely played it.

It was rather funny though. They played for Raffaello cookies Franky had baked instead for money, and Allie couldn't really complain as they were her favourite. Booms was having a hard time concentrating on the game though, not being allowed to eat the cookies until everyone wins or loses their share, and she suspected Franky did it on purpose to throw her off her game.

It was a battle to life and death between the two brunettes, while Bridget and Allie regularly folded and sat back, leaving to those two bickering creatures to entertain them.

Allie's face turned pretty melancholic during the course of evening. Her focus alternating from the pile of Rafaellos she's already won to Allie's glazed eyes, Boomer gulped and took out her phone.

'Hey Red', Booms said into her microphone, surprising the rest of the table. 'I'm over at Fridget's, we're having a poker night. I'd hate to ruin everyone's fun, but I think I ate something rotten… Yeah, yeah… I know I shouldn't… Anyhow, I was wondering, could you please come over and take my place? I'm feeling like such a party pooper. Please? Thanks, you're a lifesaver, Red.'

Franky put her cards on the table, face down. She cut through Boomer with the look she gave her, 'You ate something rotten in my house?!!'

'I never said it was in your house', Boomer stretched out her tongue. She stood up, thanking them for the invite, her eyes glued to the cookies.

'Yes, yes, you can take as much as you like with you', Bridget laughed, causing Boomer to plaster a big, loud kiss on her cheek. She grabbed a plate and hurried towards her truck, so that Bea wouldn't
catch her red-handed when she's supposedly having a sick tummy. Allie was hot on her heels.

'What do you think you're doing, Booms?' she asked pretty upset once they reached the truck. 'You were so obvious back there. You understand a concept of a secret, do you?!

'Don't you go off on me, Allie Novak! I do know how to keep a secret, otherwise you would have been known as Miss Wet Pants all your academic career long!'

'Lower your voice, Booms!'

'Oh, afraid your lover girl will come along and hear all about your little mishap, are ya?' Boomer mocked her. 'I was having a perfectly good evening there, and I abandoned it for you, knucklehead. So the least you can do is say thanks.'

'I was good. Thanks!' Allie retorted ironically.

'Yeah, I could see that. Sitting there like a lost kitten in the pouring rain. She will be there any minute now, I really gotta go or I'm in trouble. Go put some lipstick on, fix your hair, it's about time you do something, woman!'

Having shoved Allie towards the house, Boomer got in her truck and took off.

***

An open and honest face. Allie Novak. A shitty poker player, Bea chuckled to herself. But that's what she loved about her.

'It's not fair', Allie pouted as she put her cards on the table. 'You don't blush when you play poker!'

'No, she doesn’t’, Franky muttered throwing her cards in frustration, as Bea grabbed her cookies, threw back her head and laughed.

Bridget was the only one smart enough to fold in time to save most of her cookies. She was now biting on one while smiling at her wife. 'Just admit it, babe, you were outplayed twice tonight.'

'Bullshit’, Franky muttered grumpily, 'I was way better than Booms’.

'Whatever you say’, Bridget’s smile got even larger, as she gave her an open-mouthed kiss, sharing the cookie with her.

'Right, I got to go, that repair won't finish itself’, Bea stood up from the table, leaning with her both palms against its surface, thus unintentionally showing off her chiseled muscles, her arms being completely bare in a greasy tank-top. She ate one of her cookies, adding, 'I leave my winnings with you, Allie, and it's up to you whether you choose to share them with this sore loser or not.'

She rolled her eyes after Franky scoffed at her, and just like that, she was gone. Without her, all of the excitement went through the window, or at least that's how Allie felt. Franky turned on the TV, while Bridget brought them two bears and a glass of white wine for herself. They all settled on the sofa with their feet up and eyes glued to the sitcom before them.

Allie stayed there for another hour. It was nearly nine and she really should be going home, but she was reluctant to get up. It wasn't only that she was so comfortable nested between two generous souls, but because she was trying to build up her courage to ask Bea what she's been dying to ask her all week. She just never found the right time, or the right moment…
Her heart pounded like crazy when she went up Bea’s driveway. She was scared shitless, yet she knew Boomer was right - it was about time she did something. For a moment she hesitated before she reached the entrance, but then she remembered what she’d promised Paul. It will matter, Paul, she mumbled in her beard, taking those final steps and knocking on opened garage door.

‘You done?’ she asked softly, pointing with her chin towards the unfamiliar bike Bea was polishing with a rag.

‘Almost’, Bea replied, wiping a fine sheen of sweat off her forehead, completely unaware she was leaving a big smudge on it with her dirty fingers. That image caused a fit of tenderness in Allie, but before she managed to clean it, Bea dodged and asked her sternly:

‘What did we say about you barging in without a phone call, Allie?’

Allie shrugged her shoulders, her smile still tender.

‘In my defence, you did say you were gunna be alone in here.’

She approached the bike Bea was leaning on and skimmed over the soft leather of its saddle with her fingertips.

‘Did you need something, or did you just come here to admire my handiwork?’ Bea smirked at her, unable to stay mad.

‘I need to ask you something’, Allie said bravely, taking a step closer. When Bea just stood there, awaiting with her eyebrows raised in expectation, she just spilled it:

‘Go out with me, Bea.’

‘Sure’, Bea replied casually. ‘When?’

‘Not like that’, Allie elaborated patiently. ‘I meant on a date.’ She slightly lifted Bea’s chin with her finger to look her in the eyes. ‘Would you go out on a proper date with me?’

Bea took a step back, her eyes wide with disbelief. Then she shook her head and laughed.

‘Damn Franky put you up to this, didn’t she? Tell her it’s a good one.’

‘I'm not joking, Bea. I like you, for quite some time now, as more than a friend. I'd love to take you somewhere nice to dinner.’

She was affected by Bea's expression of a pure shock.

‘Wha-what?’ Bea stammered.

‘You heard me right’, Allie tucked a lock behind her ear, making Bea stumble back. The redhead looked like her touches were suddenly terrifying her, and Allie felt her heart sink, sensing this won't end good.

She went to sit on the sofa, giving Bea some space.

After a few minutes, Bea approached her carefully, lowering herself down on the furthest end of the sofa.

‘Look, Allie, you're confused. You just got out of a serious relationship so it shook you. Maybe you think you missed out in your college years and now want to experiment. But once you come to your
'Don't tell me what I feel', Allie frowned.

'We're friends, Allie, excellent friends. Don't ruin that on a whim.'

'It's not a whim, if you only gave me a chance…'

'I don't do relationships, Allie', Bea cut her off.

'Yeah?' Allie snipped back. 'And how do you call your little foursome?'

'That's just fucking, Allie. It’s all I’d ever have to offer.'

Allie's eyes lingered on her lips as she spoke. She found herself strangely aroused.

'I can live with that’, she unconsciously licked her lips.

'W-what?’ Bea stuttered for the second time that evening.

'If you don't want to date me’, Allie said coolly, ‘then let’s just have some harmless fun’.

Of all the things she wanted from Bea, sex was among last on her list, but if that was the only way to get through to Bea, then be it, Allie thought. She will start from there and build a relationship over time. Cause she was sure Bea cared about her.

Bea's expression slackened, she looked like she's just got a slap across her face. She felt like Allie was crushing all that was precious between the two of them, and she needed to save it. She got up, on very shaky legs, and stood by the door.

'I'll walk you out, Al, and just forget all that you said. Let's skip our practice this Sunday, alright? I'll see you at the office. This evening - it never happened.'

Chapter End Notes

There will be another update on Saturday. I'd appreciate all kinds of comments and thoughts on this chapter though, as it was a struggle to write it, with a touch of the writer's block.
Saturday March fifth was not a good day for Allie. She awoke early but remained in her bed, thinking. By now she's realised what Saturdays have meant for Bea: trill of a ride, closeness of a pack, adrenaline during race which makes her blood pump and her sexual appetite rise to the sky.

Who will it be today, Allie asked herself. Mel again? Kim? Tina? Or all three of them perhaps? Be as it may, some girl will get lucky today with Bea, and that won’t be her.

Allie sighed.

What was it why Bea turned her down last night? Yes, everyone avoids shagging an office mate, like, you know, don’t crap where you eat stuff, but Bea never even brought that up so I guess it wouldn’t be much of a big deal for her. Is it that I’m younger than her, Allie questioned further. No, she shook her head, I can see how that would be an issue if we met when I was sixteen and she was twenty four, but at this age it doesn’t matter, I’m already twenty six and I’m pretty sure Mel is closer to my age than hers.

Maybe she doesn’t like blondes. Or she is simply not attracted to me, Allie sighed again.

She got up, picture of nervousness. She walked in in her ensuite and remained in the shower long after she'd washed her hair and body. There was something in the sensation of water running over her head which has brought her comfort.

Why am I so crazy about her, why can’t I stay away, Allie scolded herself. I just can’t help it… When she walks into the room and people turn their heads and she doesn’t even care. When she throws her hair back, when she laughs. How she parades around the office in those tight pencil skirts. Allie felt throbbing between her legs, as always when she allows herself thinking about Bea’s appearance. She smiled sadly and wrapped herself in a towel.

Entering her bedroom Allie threw herself on her bed and looked at her ceiling.

She was so consumed with Bea that it seemed to her Bea’s chocolate eyes were painted on that ceiling, burning into her skin. Allie could see those perfect cheekbones as if they were in front of her, those full lips moving… And that hair, God, falling from the ceiling down to my face, smelling like coconut…

Allie pushed her hand through the folds of her towel to reach her core. It was soaking wet, but Allie rightly guessed it wasn’t from showering. Oh Bea, she stroked her core sadly, why don’t you want me. Her inexperienced fingers couldn’t give her much release, being the first time that she tried it. Allie sat up, feeling like she was gunna lose her mind from desire.

That woman spurred her on and on for two months and when she drove her completely crazy, she rejected her?! What the hell was that about?

Allie thought about how she envied Kim, Tina and Mel. Especially Mel. How petit she was so Bea could lift her up in her arms, while she was banging her. If I could trade places with her, just once, Allie thought, get inside her body, to feel Bea the way she feels her…

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An hour later Allie decided it was enough with moping around the house and lusting after Bea.

She decided to call Regan to see what she was up to. They agreed to meet for lunch half an hour later at the pier so Allie put on a casual sky blue dress and her white tennis shoes. She didn’t feel like applying makeup so she put on only some cherry lip balm, which reddened her lips a bit. She tied her hair in a cute updo and stood for few moments in front of a mirror, satisfied with what she saw. She’d always really liked this dress, how it flattered her figure and brought out her eyes and youthfulness. The dress had three tiers below the waist and ended seven centimeters above her knees. Allie adjusted thin straps on her shoulders and turned her back to the mirror to check. A flirty scooped neckline that was echoed in her back spiced up her look from innocent to seductive, and Allie nodded in satisfaction. If she didn’t feel well, she at least looked well.

'Well hi there, you sexy thing!' Regan exclaimed excitedly when she saw Allie. 'Isn’t she a Mattie, honey?'

Allie was surprised to see Regan brought her boyfriend Tom along. Not that she minded, Tom was pleasant enough company.

'She certainly is', Tom shook Allie’s hand, 'but if this is a test, babe, then I want to state for the record that I only have eyes for you.'

They all laughed together, Allie locking her car remotely and heading with them toward the small restaurant.

They spent there almost two hours, Allie getting her kicks from entertaining Tom with stories about high school cheerleader Regan. Tom happened to think that Paul was a great chap and that Allie had made a big mistake dumping him, but he refrained from mentioning him. He understood this was a situation where you just have to pick sides, and that his girlfriend would always pick her childhood friend. So he had to pick Allie too and forget about playing any more shoots with Paul.

The three of them took a little stroll afterwards and before they knew, it was five o’clock and the couple said their goodbyes to Allie.

'I had the best time', Regan said as she hugged Allie in front of Tom’s car. 'And I’m so glad you two got to know each other better.'

'I am happy for you, Regan, he seems like a nice man and he is really into you.'

'Good', Regan smiled, 'cause I’m sooo into him too. We’ll see where it goes, aye? Talk to you soon', Regan kissed Allie on the cheek and got into the passenger seat next to awaiting Tom. Tom waved Allie goodbye and just like that, they were gone.

Allie didn’t feel like going back to her empty home. Her friends made her feel so good today, but also very lonely, seeing how they cannot take their eyes off each other, still wrapped up in their honeymoon phase bubble.

She decided to take a walk down the pier and she spent another hour watching children play in the sand, couples walking by, single people passing by, some walking their dogs, some skating, some throwing lustful glances towards her, some completely ignoring her. Yes, so many people, and none was the one she longed for.

It was half past six, when Allie concluded it was time for her to return home. She unlocked her car and sat behind the wheel.

Good, she said, I got through this day. And the worst has passed. By now Bea has had her fun and is
safely home; I just have to survive over tomorrow, and then on Monday I will have her all to myself, from our early breakfast to five o’clock in the afternoon, and no Tina or whoever will get to share our office time together.

Allie drove back absentmindedly, wondering what she could do tomorrow to pass her time, parked her Mini spotlessly even if her mind was distracted and got out of her car. She had a feeling that something was not right though, and as she looked up, she was astonished when she realised that she was standing in front of Bea’s house.

She slightly opened the gate and peeked through. She saw a light coming from the garage. She imagined Bea all sweaty and dirty, stuck under a motorcycle again. She shivered and that familiar throb, that she couldn’t properly get rid of the whole day long, returned to her core with revenge.

She heard her phone ringing. She looked, it was Boomer. Allie let it ring to the end, then turned off her phone and placed her bag on the front seat. I can’t let you disturb me, can’t I?, she said to her phone, as she was locking her car and passing through Bea’s gate.
Allie knew what she was doing was ill-advisable and probably demeaning to her pride, but as she took the straightforward path that led through Bea’s garden and to her house, she didn’t care.

She didn’t care about her pride, she didn’t care about tomorrow. All she knew was that she wanted that woman and that Bea wanted her back, no matter what she claimed last night, and this time, Allie swore, the hell if I let her intimidate me away.

Allie paused on the threshold of Bea’s garage. The redhead was alone and turned with her back to the entrance. She obviously didn’t hear Allie and Allie kept standing for couple of moments there, just watching her. She felt like her heart was gunna beat its way out of her mouth. Bea was wearing a tight black singlet and her black biker pants. Her long hair was tied back in a high pony and was swinging left and right as Bea moved around the garage, bringing back her tools to their usual spots. She was humming to some tune and Allie couldn’t stop the throbbing below her mound from intensifying. She was in such torture she must dare to enter.

Hearing a knock on her door frame, Bea turned around, expecting to see Franks, but instead she was appalled to see the familiar blond figure leaning against it. Didn’t she get the hint yesterday, Bea deemed in desperation. How will I get through this, she panicked, feeling her blood pressure rise from the mere look at Allie’s long, naked legs. She never saw them like that, Allie always wearing either pants or stockings under boring business skirts or cocktail gowns down to her ankles. Bea shook her thoughts away, lifting her gaze directly to Allie’s.

'Why are you here again?' Bea asked in a beat down voice. 'What do you want from me?'

Allie didn’t blink.

'You know what I want.'

'Well, you won’t get it here, thanks for the effort though', Bea said sarcastically.

Allie gulped.

'Did you have fun today?' she bit back. 'Any of the girls besieged you with more pleasure than I could?'

Bea swallowed her saliva:

'How rude of you, Allie.'

Bea turned her back to Allie, in a slight disdain, and that act pierced through Allie’s heart like a knife. She lost self-control, spilling words she never in her life thought her mouth could say.

'Was it Mel again, Bea?! Maybe Kim?! Or that fuckin’ screamer, that slimy Mercado cunt?!!'

Bea was gobsmacked. She felt her anger rising. She came dangerously near Allie and said in a threatening voice:

'Don’t you dare talking like that about her. She is a nice girl who was nothing but pleasant to you!'
Allie felt the injustice of her words about Tina, but she still couldn’t beat her jealousy.

'Maybe it was all three of them then, Bea, huh? Or was it none? You couldn’t do it, couldn’t ya? You’re so wet for me, admit it, other women don’t do the trick for ya anymore.'

Bea flinched at those words.

Allie was not far from truth. Bea has had sex numerous times since she’s met Allie, but she couldn’t enjoy it quite as before. In the last ten days she even interrupted the deed twice, when she caught herself imagining Allie instead of the girl beneath her.

Bea was furious at Allie, and scared to her bones, and that combination drove her to hiss at the young blonde the following venomous words:

'It is you who does not do the trick for me. If you must know, today at the rally premises, first I got myself all worked up, real nicely, on the couch in the prep house, while I was watching Mel and Tina doing it with each other, for my exclusive pleasure, then I joined Kim in the locker room and banged her senselessly.'

Allie shook her head in mistrust.

'I don’t believe you. You're saying that just to push me away.'

'You can believe what you want, but the fact is', Bea spat slowly and with even more venom, 'that today I was satiated by three grown, experienced women, who know exactly what to do to please one, unlike you. And I am completely spent so I suggest that you skedaddle away now, little girl, and find some boy to play house with.'

Thus saying, Bea turned and walked back to the centre of the garage, starting to arrange her tools again.

Allie hardly restrained the tears that accumulated below her eyelids from falling. How could it happen that they, in five minutes, stooped down from mutually respectful friends to two adversaries, whose insults obviously stopped at nothing? It is my fault, I caused all of this, when I came here like a lunatic and started insulting Tina without a reason.

Allie composed herself and walked over to Bea.

Reckoning that she offended Allie enough to leave, Bea was shocked to hear her standing behind her back. She rashly faced her, in fear that she might try to touch her.

'I know that I’m not as experienced as those other women, Bea, but it’s not like I’m a virgin and I’m also a quick learner. Just give me a chance, please.'

Bea felt completely defeated by this girl’s stubbornness. She just couldn’t bear to hear her Allie begging like that and, nonetheless, begging someone who was so completely unworthy of her affection.

'You want a chance at what, Allie? To have a meaningless sex with an older woman, who doesn’t give a rat’s arse about you? That’s what you want?!

'Stop overthinking it, Bea', once again aroused Allie said. She walked over to Bea’s coffee table, in whose upper left drawer she saw Bea's strap-on being deposited, that time when Allie caught her with Tina. The dildo was lying there, already attached to harness. She took the dildo out. The drawer was full with condoms so she opened one and put it on the black toy. Then she returned to the centre
of the room and fastened the harness around Bea’s rigid body. Allie thanked her good fortune that harness was more than simple: one broad leather strap went around the waist and had a buckle clasp above right hip, which Allie hurriedly snapped in; the other strap, the one which carried a dildo fastened to a ring, was supposed to be slipped between the legs and attached to the loin ring with a small lobster clasp. In one swift move Allie pulled that string through to the rear side, too afraid of Bea’s reaction to enjoy the act, and secured the lobster clasp.

She then stood up and looked Bea in the eye.

'Just do to me what you do to those other girls.'

'No', Bea said in a weak voice, mesmerized by what Allie just did.

Allie put her hand on Bea’s cheek and stroked Bea’s lower lip with her thumb. Bea jumped back like she was burnt.

'I want you, Bea', Allie whispered, 'I want you inside me.'

'Well, I don’t want you!' Bea shouted at her.

Allie turned herself around facing the wall.

'This how you like doing it, Bea? Show me.'

When Bea didn’t move, Allie turned her head to look at her over her shoulder. She was desperate for this woman and she would stop at nothing now.

'Your mouth says that you don’t want me, Bea, but the way your eyes are raking over my body convinces me otherwise.'

Bea was out of her mind at Allie’s brazenness. She was having a hard time controlling her urges as it is, looking at this beauty throwing herself at her for the last fifteen minutes.

'Let me show you how much I want you, Bea', Allie whispered again, her voice heavy with desire.

Bea has had enough.

'Shut your face already, will ya?!

Some screw in Bea got loose, she couldn’t keep it in her pants anymore.

Bea placed Allie's hands on the wall and pulled up her skirt. With that revealing smooth white skin of Allie's backside, she shuddered with lust and anger. Her fingers went up and down her cheeks, then she grabbed at the seam on the side with her both hands and tore through white lace like a savage.

'Is this what you want, huh?!' Bea shouted into Allie's ear, as the tip of the dildo went between Allie's legs. 'Yes!' Allie shouted back, even more furiously than Bea. Bea pushed the dildo into Allie, groaning with anger towards the young woman. As she did so, Bea was surprised to feel how easily the dildo slipped into her, how much dripping wet for her Allie already was. That realisation shook her, and she stopped her movement completely, remembering who was in front of her and why. Feeling more lucid, as her anger was slowly leaving her, she was just about to step back and stop this nonsense, as Allie grabbed her hands. Allie felt panic that Bea was gunna abandon her there, so she placed Bea's hands on her breasts and moved them in circles with her own. She pushed her backside into Bea and moaned softly. Bea felt blood rushing into her head and her eyesight misting. She
thrust her hips once again into Allie, but with that she inhaled and found the strength to step back. Allie turned around so quickly like she was burnt and with her hurt look she pierced a small hole into Bea's soul.

'Look, Allie, just go home please.'

'I am having none of that this time, Bea. I am not uglier than those other girls', she whispered and started to untie the straps on her shoulders, as if to prove her point. Her dress, blue as the color of her eyes, fell down to her waist and was hanging only loosely on her hips.

Bea closed her eyes, trying to push the image of Allie's naked breasts out of her mind. 'Go please', she repeated. She heard a few footsteps and before she knew it, Allie placed her hands around her neck and pressed her body into hers. Bea tried to set herself free. 'Go away!' she said much more firmly this time and shook Allie off her. Allie felt tears starting to accumulate in her eyes again and stated: 'I know why you don't want to shag me. I am not stupid, you know. It has nothing to do with how I look.'

'Oh, and why is that, I beg your pardon?!

'You feel something for me.'

'No, I do not.'

'You do. I am special to you and you're afraid that, if you fucked me, you would fall in love with me.'

'You're delusional', Bea spat out.

'No, I'm not and I'll prove it to you', Allie said in a very low voice, approaching Bea again. She placed her hands onto Bea's cheeks and gently tried to pull her in into a kiss. But Bea turned her head to the side: 'I never kiss. Now let go of me.'

'Never.'

Bea felt her anger explode from the inside of her like a volcano:

'Just who do you think you are!' she shouted, as she pushed Allie off her.

Allie stumbled back, and held onto the bare wall bricks, to avoid falling to the ground.

'You know that we have something special, Bea. You're just too scared to admit it.'

With those words, Bea saw red. She launched herself into the blond woman and pressed her face roughly to the wall. She pushed her whole body violently into Allie, to punish her for her words, not caring when she saw blood marks that Allie's temple had left on the brick wall. She placed her lips on Allie's ear and groaned out: 'Do you want me to bang you? Is that what you want?!!'

'Yes', Allie whispered.

'I treated you like a lady, I treated you like a friend', Bea rambled, as she was pushing Allie's dress up
and over her head then throwing it across the room. 'But no, you’d rather have my dick than my friendship. So here it is', she said as she parted Allie's legs and pushed her dildo back into Allie. 'It's nothing special, you know, just like you're not special to me. You're nothing to me', Bea spat as she pulled the dildo slightly out and then pushed it back in more fiercely than ever before in her life. 'You're just like any other pussy, all the same from behind.'

Allie felt her heart breaking, even though she didn't believe a word of what Bea has just said. Maybe she didn't have any lesbian experience before, or much of a love experience for that matter, but she knew it in her heart how Bea felt about her and wouldn't abort this intercourse for the world, no matter how unfair to them both it would seem from the side. As Bea shut up and all that Allie could hear now was her heavy breathing into her ear, Allie let go of all that has happened between them that evening and went back in her head to that moment on Rock Island, when Bea hugged her from behind, pulling her into her embrace, just before she took her to the dance floor. In that moment she felt Bea's hands squeezing her breasts, and with that, she relaxed into Bea's body and started to rock her hips together with Bea's. It didn't feel unusual as one might think, being her first time with a woman, and first time from behind altogether. Just like everything with her and Bea, it felt right and warm. It felt familiar, like coming home.

After couple of minutes, Bea felt her anger leaving her. She was slowly becoming aware that her mouth was pressed against Allie's head and the smell of her hair started driving her wild. Bea held her eyes wide open, and she closely watched Allie's face in front of her. Her eyes were shut, and if it wasn't for her teeth biting into her lower lip, you could think that she was dreaming. Bea unintentionally moved her head even closer, as she was trying to inhale Allie's scent, and with that her tongue, stuck out a bit from her open mouth, accidentally licked Allie's ear. Allie let out a long moan, and startled Bea pulled her gaze away towards ground, scared of what Allie's expression awoke in her. She bent Allie a bit more, trying to avoid looking into her face. Unfortunately, that gave her a perfect view of Allie's full buttocks in front of her and her swinging left breast, as she was holding onto wall only by her right hand now. Allie's tit reminded her of fresh fruit and she grabbed it, groaning with pleasure. Soon she placed Allie's left hand back on the wall, so that she could grab both of her tits, as she swang into her. She massaged her tits gently at first but then with more and more fervour, as she felt passion consuming her body. She began to tremble against Allie and her mind went completely blank, letting go of her anger, her doubts regarding her feelings towards Allie. Bea forgot everything, even forgot why she was there, or where she was for that matter, and all that she could think about was how good looking and soft was that body beneath her. Her thrusts became even faster and she pressed her chin into Allie's shoulder to maximize the contact.

'Is this what you want, is this what you want?' she repeated into Allie's ear, in a low, sore voice, only this time without any traces of anger. 'Do you want me to bang you? Is that what you want?' she whispered with pure lust.

'Oh God, yes, Bea, please don't stop, please don't stop', Allie cried out and that cry drove Bea crazy. Feeling like she's lost her mind, she grabbed Allie by the hand and pushed her gently on the nearby sofa. She stood there for a moment, with her wet cock trembling with the rest of her body, as her eyes appreciated Allie's beautiful curves.

Allie half-lay there, holding herself up by her elbows, and looking into Bea's darkened eyes. She was afraid to move, scared that Bea will change her mind and leave her there.

'Turn around', she heard as she watched Bea's full lips move, 'I don't do it frontally.'

Relieved, Allie turned on her stomach, releasing the breath of fear that she was holding. She felt Bea's hands on her waist, pulling her gently nearer so that her pelvis could lie comfortably over the padded armrest. Afraid as she was that she could push Bea away, she still couldn't hold in a moan, as
she felt Bea's hand slip for the first time between her legs. Bea's fingers parted her folds gently and she felt her cock sliding in between them. She mourned the loss of Bea's fingers, as she pulled her hand back and placed it on Allie's hip. That was however short-lived, because, right off the bat, Bea started fast pushing and pulling, and Allie was soon feeling like she was gunna fuck her mind away. She felt like she was about to implode, realising with whatever little lucidity she had left, that she only thought she had orgasms before. What she felt now for Bea, the love and the passion, that was incomparable with anything she ever felt before. Bea was becoming perhaps too eager behind her, as she lost her rhythm for a second and her cock slipped out of Allie. Impatient to go back in, Bea hurried to adjust the dildo with her hand, and as her fingers grazed over Allie's swollen lips, she felt Allie's body stiffen and her coming all over her hand.

Allie felt like she has parted from reality and everything went black for one blissful minute.

Coming back to her senses, Allie could feel Bea shaking terribly on top of her. 'Did you come too?' she asked.

'I never come', Bea replied.

And maybe exactly because of it, Bea was feeling that the fire inside of her didn't extinguish so she impatiently pushed her dildo back into Allie and started to move her hips eagerly.

Allie was surprised when she felt Bea entering her again, and the ravishment she felt in that moment was overwhelming. Two happy tears rolled down her cheeks; happy that Bea finally wanted her, she lowered her head to hide them from Bea. This time Bea was moving inside of her excruciatingly slowly, and Allie could feel each thrust into her very soul. In spite of her slow pace, Allie rightly sensed that Bea's hunger was bigger now than before, and that sensation encouraged her to wiggle her arse back into Bea, in hope that Bea would snap and make love to her properly.

But that didn't happen.

Bea may have been aroused more than ever before, but she was too experienced in sexual encounters, and too inhibited psychologically, to allow herself to lose control. So she dragged the moment out as much as she could, determined to tantalise Allie as long as necessary for Bea to achieve mental release of her tension.

After several minutes of that precious torture, she could feel Allie squirming and writhing below her, and it was a feeling better than any before. The young woman was covered in sweat and Bea could see Allie's juices soaking the armrest. She smiled. She grabbed Allie's hair with her right hand. This time she wanted to see her face. She put her left hand on Allie's left breast, and smiled again as Allie's features crumpled into a panting mess. She inhaled the scent of Allie's hair again, this time breathing it in loudly, meaning to derange Allie even more. Allie shuddered once, fiercely, and cried out her name. Bea shuddered herself from watching Allie's face, which gave her an immense pleasure and was quickly becoming one of her favourite things. She squeezed Allie's left nipple between her fingers and with that Allie shuddered again and grabbed her by her underarm. Half-turned, Allie managed to look Bea directly in the eyes, and licked her lips in despair that she wasn't allowed to kiss her. She pulled Bea's right hand over to her left tit and immediately after she dragged her left hand to her right tit. In that way, Bea was holding her closer than ever before, her clothes getting wet from Allie's sweat, her mouth stuck behind her ear.

Bea felt a rush of blood pumping into the veins on her temples and her heart beating out of her ears. This time she didn't get angry with Allie for taking initiative, and as Allie threw herself towards the seat cushions, dragging her firmly with her, Bea went with it and jumped her backside so eagerly and tightly that she couldn't move.
With her left hand, Bea pushed strayed locks from Allie's face and tucked them behind her ear. She smiled victoriously. 'Say it', she whispered directly into her ear.

'Please, Bea', Allie panted out.

'Please Bea what?'

'Please fuck me, please… Oh my God…', Allie grunted as she felt Bea starting to push in again. Allie felt her whole body shaking as the feeling of fulfilment and belonging filled her soul.

Bea could sense Allie's stomach muscles contract below her palm. She was kicking off the sofa so Bea slipped her left hand under Allie's collarbones to hold her firmer in place and she glued her pelvis directly to Allie's buttocks. With her right hand she caressed the outlines of Allie's right breast and that seemed to be the very thing that would push Allie over the edge. Allie's stomach contracted violently and her eyes turned half white. She choked a little and Bea moved her right hand to Allie's chin, trying to lift her neck and ease her breathing. As Allie felt her airways clearing, she used the opportunity to take Bea's finger into her mouth. She sucked it. Overflown with desire, Bea bit her earlobe only slightly, but that was enough for Allie to climax, harder than the first time. Proud of herself, Bea smiled in satisfaction, and continued to push and pull slowly, riding her orgasm, riding her as she orgasmed.

Allie could swear she could see stars. For the first time she didn't feel alone. Bea was holding her tight to her own body, thrusting gently in and out of her, selflessly intensifying her orgasm. As soon as that orgasm wore off, Allie felt another one building under Bea’s relentless movement, surprised how such thing was even possible. Feeling the utter pleasure again, Allie's body relaxed completely, but to her surprise Bea was oblivious to it and kept thrusting into her, lost to the world. As she twisted her neck back, so that she could enjoy more of Bea's nirvanic face, Allie started to feel uncomfort between her legs, and that soon turned into pain.

'Bea, Bea, stop, you're starting to hurt me.'

Bea opened her eyes as from a dream, still not realising what was happening around her, her hips still pushing on reflex.

'Bea, I came a while ago, now it's only burning me.'

Bea came to her senses and jumped quickly on her feet.

'Shit, I didn't mean to.'

'Does it still hurt?' Bea asked a minute later, as Allie was still lying in fetal position, with hands wrapped around her belly.

'It's alright', she smiled, fighting the burning and itching in her vagina. 'It will pass soon.'

One of the things Bea wasn't doing anymore was touching with her fingers, but as she watched Allie trying to lift herself, with a brave, small smile, in spite of the cramp that took over her lower body, she felt guilty and touched and that feeling compelled her to sit on the end of the sofa, next to Allie’s feet.

Bea pulled her legs up on the bed and leaned her back on the armrest.

'Come in here', she told Allie, as she parted her legs. Allie crawled to her, placing herself between Bea's legs and leaning her back into her front.
'Is it better?' Bea asked a bit later.

'It'll pass. It's my fault, really, I was just overly excited.'

To that, Bea sighed. Sweet Allie, she thought.

Bea put her hands on Allie's shoulders, massaging them gently. After couple of minutes she could feel the tension leaving Allie's upper body so she moved her hands down her spine, stroking her from neck to the loin. Next she kept her hand solely on Allie's behind, caressing the top of her cheeks with her fingertips. Her fingers soon found Allie's breasts again, then her left hand wound itself around Allie's ribcage, while her right hand slipped between her legs.

'Just relax, breathe deeply', she whispered into her ear. Alas, Bea's raspy voice has always had quite the opposite effect on Allie and she felt the still burning sensation intensifying into frustrating pain again.

Bea curled her fingers into a half-opened fist and stroked Allie's mound with the backside of her fingers. After several minutes she moved her fingers to her groin and kept ghosting over her gentle skin with her fingertips. Then she palmed Allie's core, warming it. As her right hand rested there, and she felt Allie relaxing again, she moved her left hand back to Allie's breasts and cupped one then another, greedily.

'You have such perfect breasts, Allie', she murmured, then felt Allie started to writhe in her lap. Bea placed her chin over Allie's left shoulder, and pulled them both deeper down into throw cushions against the armrest. She lifted Allie's right leg over the sofa edge and started moving her fingers again through Allie's trimmed mound hairs. She admired their bronze colour and carressed them gently up with her forefinger. Allie shivered to that and Bea could see the goosebumps rising on her arms. She smiled. Her fingers started roaming more freely, and Allie melted even more into her. She moved her hand up and down Allie's outer lips, while her other hand revelled filling itself with white, soft breast. As Allie was starting to breathe heavily, her pelvis was starting lifting up, welcoming Bea's hand, eager to meet it halfway. Bea pressed her fingers into Allie's clitoris, and that caused Allie to moan. She continued pressing into and circling around Allie's clit, so the blonde couldn't hold her moans in any longer. Her breath hitched, her hips twisted back and forth and she soon started to whimper, arching her back even higher. That was Bea's cue to increase the spid and she held her fingers firmly together, barely touching Allie's overly sensitised clit, but still rubbing it rapidly. Allie lifted herself higher and higher into her palm, then put her leg down next to the other and pressed them tightly together so that she can come. This time Bea steaded her hand as soon as she felt Allie's body going limp and continued to warm her pussy with her palm.

Couple of minutes later, Allie stretched her arms behind her head and managed to capture Bea's neck between them. She used it to stretch her whole body like a cat after a long nap. Bea chuckled.

'Better now?'

'Completely', Allie replied and turned herself into Bea's arms. Now facing her love, she raised her puppy eyes to Bea and leaned in to kiss her lips.

Bea startled, and flinched.

Allie tried to put her hand on Bea's cheek but she turned her head away.

'Let me kiss you, Bea.'

'No.' Bea shook her head: 'Go, Allie, please.'
Allie's eyes filled with tears, only centimetres away from Bea's lips, yet so desperate after realising that nothing has changed.

As Allie was looking at her pleadingly, Bea's fear overwhelmed her. She was terrified of what she might feel for Allie, terrified that a part of her wanted to give in to this girl.

Bea jumped to her feet and went to collect Allie's dress. Allie was hot on her heels, but stopped half a metre away, not wanting to spook the redhead any more than she has.

'Bea, listen to me.'

'You listen to me. You're nothing to me. You're all the same. You wanted the same treatment as all the other girls, now ya got it. Root and boot. Now get the fuck out of my house.'

And with those words, Bea pushed Allie's dress into her arms and turned her back to leave. Then she stumbled over Allie's tossed panties, lifted them and went back to her.

'And don't you leave me here your filthy souvenirs.'

She put the underwear on the top of the dress Allie was hugging, left quickly and slammed the door which led to her house.

Left alone, Allie started to shake. She had to get out of there, and fast, in order not to completely fall apart there and then.

She put her dress on and tied up the straps. She looked at what was left of her panties, Bea’d ripped them so thoroughly that it wasn't possible to put them back on. Allie squeezed them in her hand, found her shoes and headed out of the garage.

It was completely dark outside, not a living soul to be heard from the nearby beach. Must be past nine already, Allie thought.

She hurried to escape this place, to get away from Bea.

As she moved, she felt how weak her legs really were, how raw her body still was from all the orgasms Bea gave her.

She hurried through the gate towards her car, but once safely outside Bea's wall, she crumpled to the ground and started to sob.

She cried silently for couple of minutes, remembering how gently Bea held her and how cruelly she got rid of her.

She heard footsteps hurrying towards her. Afraid that it was Bea, she flinched and started to shake out of fear of being caught during her weakness.

A person, then another one, threw themselves next to her, then a bright flashlight reflected upon her face.

'Oh sweetie, what have you done?' Bridget exclaimed and raised her chin to have a better look at her temple. She licked her thumb and tried to erase the blood from Allie's temple, but it was already too dry. 'Does your head hurt?' Bridget asked further, and Allie replied no. Allie’s car was parked far from the faint street lamps so Franky was still holding her phone’s flashlight on. She looked at Allie's sweaty hair and messy dress.
'You we're just on with her, weren't you! Have I not told you to stay away, Allie? She is fucked, she's not good for ya.'

'Want to come inside, love? You can warm up a bit, we can see if that head of yours need stitches', Bridget continued.

'I'm fine', Allie replied, 'I just want to go home.'

'The hell if I let you drive in that condition. Come on, I'm driving you home', Franky said and helped her back on her feet. As she tried to lean on Franky, her panties dropped out of her hand, and as Bridget picked them up, Allie felt incredibly embarrassed.

Realising what she was holding and in what bad state it was, Bridget shoved it quickly into her pocket, but not quickly enough for Franky not to see. Franky went ballistic.

'What did she do to ya, Blondie? What the fuck did she do to ya?!!'

Franky took her head into her hands.

She rushed to the gate, mumbling: 'I'm gunna bash her.'

'No!' Allie launched herself on her back. 'You won't hurt her. She didn't do anything to me that I didn't want, asked for it or enjoyed. We just had a little argument afterwards and that's it.'

'Is that why your head's bleeding, Blondie?'

'I banged my head myself, it was an accident. Bea had nothing to do with it. Now leave her alone. What kind of friends she has when you were so quick to believe that she was capable of such atrocities?'

'Look, Allie, Bea is a great friend, and I will always be loyal to her. But she's fucked up for relationships and you should just stay away from her, please Allie.'

'I'd like to go home now.'

'I'll drive you.'

'No, I got it. Thank you, Bridget, and good night', Allie said and got into her car.

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Bea was sitting in the window seat in her bedroom and as she saw lights turn on on Allie's car and heard the engine ignite, she hugged her knees and succumbed to loud sobbing.

Chapter End Notes

I invite you all to bomb my inbox with your different reactions
The Morning After

Chapter Notes

Or shall I call it 'The Mourning After'?

A thank you to everyone who haven't given up on this story after the last chapter. This chapter will shed a lot of light on what happened the previous evening.

Allie opened her eyes to the sound of ringing. She realised that someone was at her door. She looked at the bedside clock: shit, five past midday. She turned around and put the pillow over her head. She felt how swollen her eyelids were from half night’s crying and how badly her head hurt. If I just ignore them, they will have to leave, Allie decided.

Several minutes passed then the ringing was heard again.

'Bloody hell!' Allie exclaimed, as she jumped out of her covers.

Pissed off, she went downstairs in her pyjamas to get the front door, not bothering even to look in the mirror.

To her astonishment, she saw Franky and Bridget on her doorstep.

'Well, hi there, Blondie! Looking crash hot!'

Bridget glanced at Franky scornfully: 'Franky, you promised you were gunna behave.'

'I am behaving, Bridget. The girl is obviously in the need of a cheer up. Can we come in, Allie?'

Allie hesitated: 'I don't know, I'm a mess.'

Franky turned her charm up a notch.

'Bridget has made you a mean cheesecake, Allie.'

'Franky, I told you not to taste Allie's cheesecake!

'I didn't, baby, I didn't, I swear!' Franky jokefully covered her head to protect herself from imaginary beating. 'I just happen to know it's a mean cheesecake, because your cakes are always sooo goood.'

Bridget laughed and kissed Franky.

Allie also had to laugh a bit at their teasing dispute and said:

'Thank you, Bridget. Please do come in.'

'I'm afraid I'll have to serve you that very cheesecake, as I've been a bit irresponsible in the last couple of weeks regarding food shopping', Allie smiled at Franky’s satisfied expression, when she realised that she gets to taste the cake after all. 'Anyone for a coffee or a beer?'

While Allie was in the kitchen making coffee, Franky and Bridget made themselves comfortable on
the four seat sofa in Allie's lounge room.

Allie brought out plates and forks for the cake, then returned with coffees for her and Bridget and a beer for Franky.

Once she settled down in the armchair opposite them, and tried the cake, which was really delicious by the way, she thanked Bridget again, then sipped a bit of coffee and looked the pair directly in the eye:

'Let's cut to the chase, guys. You didn't come all the way up here and waste your Sunday just to feed me this cake.'

'First of all', Bridget started, 'we want you to know that we fully understand that this is none of our business. But Allie, after last night we've been terribly worried about you, and hardly got a decent sleep. So, if you can, please tell us what happened last night?'

'Did Bea hurt you physically, Allie, that is my main concern?' Franky asked, with an expression of anxiety and trepidation for both of her friends.

Allie exhaled the breath she didn't know she was holding.

'We had sex, guys, nothing else. Not proud to say that it was mostly my idea. I see now that Bea wasn't really ready for it, and it happened mainly because I pushed my luck. Afterwards she said some things to me, I was upset and cried like a girl. That's it, nothing more to say. I fucked it up, not Bea, now I'm good. Nothing more to say', she repeated and looked down at her hands.

'And what did you do or say exactly to provoke Bea into saying those things which upset you?' Bridget asked carefully.

Allie played with her fingers nervously:

'I tried to kiss her', she whispered. 'And when she turned me down, I tried it again.'

Both Franky and Bridget got a look of horror at Allie's confession.

'Oh Allie!' Franky exclaimed. 'I told you that's the very thing you're never supposed to do!'

'Don't attack her, Franky', Bridget stood up for Allie. 'She's having a hard time as it is.'

'Well, we're not in therapy, Gidge, and we cannot all be psychiatrists and perfectly know what to say and when. I say it as it is, she too is my friend, not only Bea, and I don't wanna bullshit her.'

Bridget ruffled Franky's hair:

'That's my wife - heart of gold and mouth of a pier worker.'

'I meant to say, Allie', Franky continued, 'you should have known it better than to try it. Bea cares about you, but she is in no place for wanting physical intimacy. Shag for sure, just no romantic touches.'

'It turned out', Allie said even quieter, 'that she doesn't care about me at all. She…', and there's where Allie started to sob, 'she said that I was nothing to her, that my pussy is the same as all others. She said I was to take my underwear with me and not to leave my filth in her house.'

At that, Allie remembered the scene vividly and started crying uncontrollably.
Bridget ran over to her and took her in her arms.

'Let it out, baby, let it out', Bridget repeated, as she was slightly rocking her.

Franky got on her knees on the carpet and took Allie's hands into hers.

'She told you some harsh stuff, love', Bridget said after couple of minutes had passed and Allie's sobs seemed to have toned down a little. 'But it doesn't necessarily mean she meant it.'

'Look, Allie', Franky spoke, 'I am best friends with Bea for eight years now. And I know her enough to see through her bullshit. Cause those things she told you last night, I beg your pardon, are nothing but pure crap.'

At that, Allie lifted her gaze towards Franky and started rubbing her eyes.

'How do you mean, Franky?'

Franky sighed and got up, then sat back to her place on the sofa and Bridget returned to sit next to her.

'I mean, she cares about you. A lot. I've watched her, Allie. When you're around, she doesn't notice anyone else. Whenever she came over last month, all she was talking about was your business: Rock Island Project this, Rock Island Project that…'

'So she's excited about our business', Allie brushed it off. 'Doesn't mean she likes me if she likes the project.'

'It's not so much that she talks about the project', Bridget noticed, 'it's more how she talks about it. She's always saying things such as: “And then Allie did this and Allie did that, and then Allie told them bla bla something, but then Allie came up with this incredible idea…” Etc. Etc. You get the picture.'

'Yeah', Franky said, 'you always come out as this corporate superhero, super sexy, super smart. Frankly, I don't know at those moments whether it's more unnerving or arousing.'

Allie started to smile slowly through her hot tears.

'She really likes you, kiddo', Franky briefly touched Allie's hand. 'If she was a normal person, she'd have been on your heels long time ago. Also, who wouldn't, right girl like you? Ouch Gidge!' she cried, when she felt Bridget's elbow in her ribs.

'The thing is, Allie', Bridget took over, 'it is a pity that you two didn't meet under different circumstances. But at this point in her life Bea is not in capacity to develop a normal relationship. For your sake, you need to understand that, and accept it.'

Allie looked beaten down again:

'Okay, I get it', she said, 'we all know she's a player. Who hates kissing and has somewhat unusual sexual preferences. But just because she doesn't want to commit now, you cannot claim that she will never want to have a normal relationship. Most womanisers eventually develop a wish to settle down. You just claimed she likes me, and deep down I always knew she does, so that gives me hope. And if I'm to decide to stick around and wait for her to be ready to commit, what is it to you? Why are you trying so hard to scare me away?'

Franky and Bridget exchanged looks. They both hesitated to answer. After a bit Franky said:
'Look, Allie, the whole time you've been looking at Bea the wrong way. I blame me for it, guess I should have told you right off the bat, but I didn't want to talk about Bea's private stuff. I saw right away that you were quite taken with her, but you were not a lesbian, you were engaged, and you know, generally ninety nine per cent of all crashes in the world evaporate soon. I couldn't have known that you will develop such a loyal adoration.'

Franky paused, as if still hesitating whether to reveal Bea's issue to Allie. She glanced at Allie's red eyes, Allie looked like she forgot how to breathe in anticipation of what Franky was going to say next. So Franky sighed and continued:

'Allie, you see Bea like a player, a womaniser, like someone who breezes through life, charms or fights to get what she wants. You think sex is a game for her, you think she seduced you for fun, only to leave you high and dry? Last night you obviously went for her, thinking she at least owed you a good root. Cause what is it to her, right? Nothing but a good time? Well, Allie, you got it all wrong. You don't know a first thing about Bea.'

Franky drank her beer up and continued, her pensive eyes fixed firmly on the empty bottle:

'Bea ain't no player. Bea had a trauma in her mid twenties which made her emotionally unavailable. When I said to you back on Rock Island that she was fucked up, I didn't mean to say that she was a player, but that she is so psychologically traumatised that she is not capable of having an emotional relationship you clearly want from her.'

Allie sat there in her armchair in utter shock. She never knew that there was any other sorrow in Bea's past except the death of her parents. She felt as if she was punched in the guts and lost all air. Her Bea… Why would anyone want to hurt her? What happened to her?

'What happened to her, guys? How did she turn out like this?' Allie finally managed to choke out.

Franky and Bridget looked at each other again, as if seeking consult, or approval.

'It happened back in Sidney', Bridget said, 'and no one here knows that it had happened at all, but us. And now you. And even we don't know in detail. What we do know, however, is not our place to tell you. Just be aware how far ago it had happened, Allie. Almost nine years have passed and she didn't get any better. She took therapy, but my colleague who worked with her told me she didn't make any significant progress. She has shut herself down to things which are truly important in life, but has achieved some balance and normality through designing and sports and friendship with Franky and I. Through her biker crew she gets a feeling of belonging and that is perhaps the most important part in her everyday functioning. She's having a sort of relationship with those three girls without actually having to be in a relationship. And that is good for her. Human contact, sexual relations, as long as she's capable of it, no matter if in this limited form, means that she hasn't shut down completely.'

Allie listened hard to Bridget and sighed.

'So what do you say, guys, how should I approach her then?'

'The best that you don't', the brunette blurted out.

'Franky!'

'What Gidge? I'm being honest here. What's in it for Allie? Years and years of waiting in the friendzone, of trying, and the chances are it will all be for nothing. And what about Bea? Allie has clearly disturbed her already. As you just said it, Gidge, Bea has a closed relationship with those
three girls and it works for her. Allie woke all these emotions and as much Bea tries to put a stop to it, Allie is not backing off, she is a threat to the world Bea has been trying so hard to build.'

Allie teared up again:

'I am no threat. I didn't know about her condition. And I want to help her. I can't just give up on her, I can't. I have to believe she will get better, I have to believe I have a chance with her. Because I feel I wouldn't know what to do without her.'

'Oh Allie', both women sighed simultaneously.

'Love, if you don't mean to get out, than you have to be prepared to put up with a lot of shit for a long time.'

'Yes', Bridget agreed with Franky, 'it is imperative that you accept her terms and never push her. If she ever gets ready, she will come to you. The only thing you could do is to linger around and hope she will stop seeing you as a threat one day. You also need to think through if you're capable of handling it, and especially, if you're really sure it is what you want to sacrifice so much of your romantic future.'

Allie sighed:

'I'll think about it all, I promise. Thanks, guys. I really appreciate it.'

Franky rubbed her knee.

'No worries, mate. By the way, do you know where your bag is, the one from last night, I mean?'

'I think I left it on the front seat of my car, why?' Allie got confused.

Franky got up and left the house, then she returned after a minute and threw Allie's bag at her:

'How do you mean we found your house, dickhead? Last night when you got into your car, your bag dropped on the ground, together with your phone and driving license. I waved for you to stop, but you didn't register me. Good thing coppers didn't pull you over, aye?'

'Shit, I didn't realise. Thanks, Franky.'

'All right, Gidge, shall we go now that this one’s got some colours in her cheeks? We need to catch up with some housework ourselves.'

'Franky, behave in front of people!' Bridget gave her a slap on the wrist.

'I don't know what you're referring to, darling, but I only meant good old dusting, vacuuming, and by any means, dishwashing. Now if you get some perverted ideas, that's aaall you, babe.'

And at that Allie laughed, happy that she’s gained such friends.
Hello! I just wanted to wish Sue, Helen and everyone who will be attending Meet and Greet the next weekend to have a good time. I hope it will be everything that you are wishing for. The rest of us will be with you in spirit :)

After taking a long bath following Bridget's and Franky's departure, Allie spent the rest of Sunday curled up in her terrace chair, looking into the distance and thinking about everything that occurred on Saturday, but also about everything that has happened since she's met Bea.

Allie stared in the thin air for an eternity, unaware of everything that surrounded her. She couldn't believe that strong, charismatic Bea could keep some terrible secret hidden from the world. Allie’s thoughts oscillated between disbelief and pain. She couldn’t help but wonder what exactly had happened to Bea but she knew she cannot ever ask, unless Bea confides in her. How could I have sat eight hours a day with her for two months and not even suspect it? Allie looked back trying to recall whether there have been any signs in Bea’s behaviour. She remembered occasional flinches, hand withdrawals, cringes… Small things could startle Bea sometimes, and Allie noticed during their weekend on Rock Island that Bea really didn’t like being close to another person when it gets dark.

Yes, there have been signs, Allie sighed, yet those signs are so subtle, no wonder I didn’t get the idea there was something lying underneath it.

But there was, of course, that incredibly odd thing with Bea not letting anyone enter her home, how could I forget that, it dawned to her.

Allie started feeling awfully guilty about how she pressurised Bea last night. It was not the part that she provoked Bea into sex that bothered her, for Bea was clearly more than capable to have and enjoy sex under her specific terms, but it was the fact that Allie disturbed her so much by trying to kiss her, trying to make her confess that she had feelings for her and thus force-bring her to intimacy that her fragile psychological state couldn’t handle.

She knew her begging for sex on Friday and Saturday was demeaning to her, but she couldn't regret it, remembering to what bliss it led her to. Her only concern was whether she disturbed Bea so much that she could make a regression in her recovery. And her only fear was that she might have lost her.

Several times she wrote texts to Bea asking if she was alright, but refrained from sending them out.

Allie replayed the scenes of the previous evening over and over in her head, trying to block out the fight that happened in the end.

She realised how big of a deal it was for Bea to get over her fears in order to use her hands and relieve Allie's pain. And the fact that she sat behind her while doing it was almost like she held her in her embrace. Allie thought about how much strength must have taken Bea to do such intimate things and she felt incredibly ungrateful that she pushed her even further afterwards, forcing her to kiss her when she wasn't ready. She won't be ready for a long time, Allie thought, and I have made it all even worse for her.
Monday morning Allie was awake at six and at twenty past seven already seated in the diner, in her usual spot, with eyes fixed firmly on the entrance. She had ordered two portions of blueberry pancakes and two orange juices and was now waiting for Bea to walk through the door. But no matter how hard she stared, she couldn’t invoke Bea to appear in front of her craving eyes.

It was twenty minutes past eight when Allie gave up hope and started eating. She had already drank up her juice and now she was drinking Bea’s - the orange tasted like bitter lemon in her mouth. She asked the waitress to pack up Bea’s pancakes. Young Molly put the pancakes in the microwave first, then she cut them with a pizza cutter and put them in a small paper lunch box.

‘Tell Bea I said hello’, she smiled.

Allie smiled back and walked out the door.

It was quarter to nine when Allie walked into their office. Bea was already at her desk, looking her best, no traces of any discomposure or agitation.

However, even at the first glance, she seemed eminently cold, and when Allie wished good morning, she just rasped out ‘hello’ and not even bothered to pick up her head let alone to look at her. Allie swallowed hard and approached Bea’s desk.

‘Molly says hello’, she said softly, after she’d put the paper box on her desk.

‘I have just eaten, thanks’, Bea replied curtly, eyes still firmly fixed on her monitor.

Allie sighed:

‘Look, Bea, about the other day…’

‘I don’t talk about my private business at work, and neither should you. We’re here to work so I suggest we concentrate on that, okay?’

Allie didn’t dare saying anything further so she took the advice and went to sit behind her desk.

It was an agonizing day for Allie, with Bea acting like she never existed. Every now and then she threw a secret look at the redhead, but the older woman’s face never changed, a terrifying coldness never stopped radiating off her.

Allie left the office at five to five and hurried to the company’s underground garage. Bea and Allie were assigned two joining parking lots so she leaned on Bea’s car door and waited.

The redhead wasn’t pleased when she saw she was still there. She said nothing when she approached her, just stood next to her with her hand on the handle and a bowed head, silently demanding that Allie frees the passage.

‘We’re not at work anymore, Bea’, Allie said in a low voice.

‘Yet still’, here Bea paused a bit and lifted her head, for the first time that day looking Allie directly in
the eye, 'I don’t have anything to say to you.'

Bea pressed the door handle so Allie reluctantly stepped back and watched after her as she drove away.

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Next morning Allie again ordered two plates of blueberry pancakes and again Bea didn’t show up. This time she just left Bea’s plate on the table, considering that yesterday she ended up eating the packed up pancakes herself, as throwing away good food was against her principles and Bea didn’t want to touch them. Molly noticed that and asked whether Bea was alright.

'Yeah', Allie replied with a sad half-smile, 'she is just fine, she’s just a little bit upset with me at the moment so she’s been eating elsewhere. But she’ll come around in no time.'

Something in Allie’s expression made Molly blink at her with compassion.

'I’ve missed you at breakfast, Bea', Allie dared to say shortly before the lunch break. 'Would you mind joining me for lunch? We don’t have to speak about the obvious elephant in the room. Let’s just forget about the whole thing and hang out like before. I miss you brainstorming with me, I miss your jokes, I miss your company terribly. Let’s just be friends again, please.'

Bea slowly turned her head towards Allie and articulated:

'You should have thought about how much you valued our friendship before you threw it away like it was nothing.'

Allie felt a small sting of injustice so she replied carefully:

'I admit it was mainly my fault, but I wasn’t alone there, Bea. Eventually you participated too.'

At that Bea pushed herself away from her desk and stood up. She looked at Allie angrily, and spoke while she was locking her monitor:

'Agreed. I was in it too. And considering that at one point I almost fucked your eyes out, it is safe to say our friendship is out the window. I just wish', Bea added with a hint of desperation, 'that December will come soon and that this project is done with.'

She took her bag and headed towards the door.

'You’re mates with Tina', Allie uttered quietly.

Bea stopped in her tracks and as she turned towards Allie, she had tears in her eyes:

'Tina never disrespected my boundaries, never insulted my other friends, never pushed me for sex when I wasn’t feeling like it, never made me say things that I don’t mean and am deeply ashamed of, never provoked me into violence.'

Having spilled that, Bea walked over to Allie and touched the still sore cut on Allie’s temple. Her fingers slid down to the bruised cheekbone underneath it, then moved further down her face until
they reached a little scrape on her chin.

'Aren’t you gunna be a pretty picture in client’s meeting, aye, Allie?'

'It doesn’t hurt me', Allie gulped.

Two tears glided down Bea’s cheeks.

'Well, it hurts me. So please don’t ever talk to me again about anything that’s not work-related, okay?'

Not waiting for an answer, Bea wiped away her tears and stepped out of the office.

Instead to lunch, Allie went to restroom and spent her free hour sitting on the closed toilet lid and struggling for air.

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Days have been passing by really quickly after that. Bea excused herself from their weekly meeting with Tess and instead of briefing Allie like she used to - chair to chair, elbow to elbow, leaning over Allie as she showed her her designs on the monitor, her warm breath hitting Allie’s face as she spoke her opinion and even warmer eyes melting into Allie’s as she sought her advice - Bea has now started sending Allie daily reports on her progress by email. She never asked Allie how did she do, as she could figure out the jist of Allie’s phone conversations.

Allie felt so alone and she didn’t have anyone else to blame but herself. If it wasn’t for their usual Wednesday meeting with their client, she would not have heard Bea’s voice for the rest of the week. Because after their little exchange on Tuesday morning, Bea even stopped saying good morning and goodbye.

On Thursday after five Allie felt so lonely after Bea had left her in the office that she decided to go and visit her mother, desperate for any consolation.

She examined her face in her compact mirror: apart from the crust on the left temple, other traces of Saturday’s events have vanished from her face. Reckoning she’s good to go, Allie packed her stuff and left the building.

She drove across town and parked in a garage near her mum’s convent. It was her mum’s contemplation week so she was confident to find her at the premises. Her mother’s apostolic community lived by a simple schedule: one week of working in the shelter, one week of working in the local soup kitchen, one week of cooking and cleaning in the convent, and one week was reserved for prayer, contemplation and reading. Visitor’s hours were on last Sunday afternoon of each month, but from time to time Allie broke that rule and showed up unannounced, using the fact that she once spent three months there as a child and that most nuns knew her from that period and fondly turned a blind eye. Allie did that not only because she missed her mother, but also as a form of silent protest why she decided to rejoin the convent and leave her alone in the world again, knowing how hard it was once before for Allie when she lost both of her biological parents. She was already in uni when it happened but still not being able to see your mum when you want, not even being able to call her otherwise than to convent’s landline phone and only in rare circumstances - Allie found it all so unfair. Since then Allie’s best time all around the year was the first half of June, because that is when her mother was allowed a small vacation. So Allie always booked those two weeks off work, and
made a little roundabout with her mother. Last year they went skiing in Victorian Alps and they fully intended on repeating it this year.

The convent was always open during day so Allie let herself in, scaddadling the familiar path to her mother’s cell.

Former social worker Karen Proctor aka sister Agnes was sitting on a narrow bed in her room and reading in her Bible. Allie knocked lightly, then entered and hugged her mother.

'Oh Allie', her mother said returning the embrace, 'you're causing me trouble again, you little urchin'. But her eyes and lips smiled in satisfaction.

The cell door opened again and half-kneeling Allie turned her head quickly to come face to face with mother Benedicta.

'Allie! Didn’t we talk it over the last time?'

'I am sorry, mother superior. Only ten minutes and it’s the last time.'

Mother Benedicta sighed:

'Well, I’ll take your word for it. And see that you eat better, you look even thinner than usual.'

Allie smiled a grateful smile at her and that melted the rest of mother superior’s heart. Smiling back she closed the door, giving little family the privacy they seeked.

Allie brought a chair from the table to the bed. It was a simple room, in accordance with the vows of poverty Karen took. It consisted of a bed, above which was a crucifix, a table and a chair, a closet and a shelf with personal books. On a wooden floating shelf close to the window there was a radio, because Karen was allowed to listen to informative or educational program, as well as classical music, on her three non-contemplative weeks of the month. This week, a contemplative week, was meant for personal growth and introspection, a sort of retreat from the worldly issues, so radio was not allowed during it, and speaking, even though not strictly forbidden, was not encouraged. Next to the radio was a small framed picture of Allie and next to it a pot of rattail cactus. Those three things on the shelf, and those dozen books, were all of Karen’s earthly possessions.

Allie took her mother’s hands between her own.

'How have you been?' she asked.

'Happy', Karen smiled tenderly, but soon her light blue eyes lost their cheer. 'Mother Benedicta is right, bubba. You look pale and exhausted. Do you work on your new project too much? Do you get enough sleep?'

'It’s not work, mum.'

'Do you miss Paul then?' the older blonde asked. 'You think you made a mistake?' she looked at Allie with concern, for ever since Allie told her about ending her engagement during her last visit at the end of February, she was half-worried and half-convinced that it was just a passing row between two people who were pretty much inseparable ever since grad school.

'Not at all, mum. In fact, I am in love with somebody else, even though I have no chance at ever being with her.'

'Her?' Karen repeated in confusion.
'Her', Allie confirmed, without batting an eye. 'Her name is Beatrice and I work with her on this project. And she cannot love me back.'

'Because she is not gay and you suddenly are?' Karen raised her eyebrows in wonder.

'Oh no, she is gay, but she is troubled by some things in her past.'

'Then maybe you should forget her. I see by the looks of you that this infatuation has brought you no good.'

'I can’t, mother', Allie started to cry, 'not even for the price of my life.'

Karen startled and let out a quiet cry. She pulled her daughter into her arms and held her until she calmed down.

'Allie, you know I’m a nun and how Church looks at homosexuality. I cannot advise you to pursue a gay lifestyle.'

Allie pulled herself a bit up and looked at Karen’s face.

'I haven’t come to seek a nun’s opinion, but my mother’s', she said angrily.

Karen’s eyes watered.

'Then your mother would probably say: If the person you love shows that she likes you, you fight for her. No matter how deep her demons run, light will always win, if one has enough faith in God.'

She hugged Allie tighter and kissed the crown of her head.

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The following morning, one hell of a rainy Friday, Allie wasn't looking forward to a prolonged weekend. On Monday was Labour Day, but she had nowhere to be and no one to be with. She was sitting in the breakfast diner, grovelling on the inside, hoping for Bea to show up. Molly approached and she ordered two portions of blueberry pancakes and two orange juices. Molly closed her notepad, not having written down the order.

'What do you say, love', she put her hand on Allie's shoulder, 'I brought you some omelette with black coffee, just as you like it for breakfast, or that club sandwich you order sometimes? And if Bea shows up, pancakes and juice will be on this table in no time, on the house.'

As Allie failed to reply, she squeezed on her shoulder, asking again:

'What do you say, aye?'

'Alright', Allie replied. She really hated sweets on an empty stomach and Bea was not going to show up anyway.

The whole day was dull, at least regarding Bea, because she sat so quietly in the office that one had to wonder whether she was a real person or just a pretty picture. As always, Allie felt better only by being in her presence, even if all that she could do was throw a few secret glances.
She tried to read on Saturday, but her mind hardly stopped wandering. On Sunday she dressed up in her running outfit and went to the park, hoping to meet Bea in their usual spot. When the redhead didn't show up, she just sat there on the bench. How pathetic you are, Allie, how utterly pathetic.

Later that Sunday she couldn't fall asleep for hours. She finally dared daydreaming about Bea, how it would be if she held her close, like she did eight days ago, but kissed her down her neck too. That pipe dream comforted her and she soon dozed off to dream about the redhead.

Monday was the longest day of her life. She sat in the bathtub, then played on her piano, then sat in the bathtub again.

The long awaited Tuesday found Allie dressing up as eagerly as Cinderella for the ball. She put on a navy blue suit and curled up couple of locks of her silky hair. She sprayed her new perfume and ran out of her house in nervous excitement.

Bea wasn't in the diner, but Allie was not really expecting her to be there. However, she frowned when she didn't see Bea in the office either. Around nine thirty she received a text from Bea, stating she had a dentist appointment and doesn't know how long it will take her.

Allie was disillusioned and to add to her misery, for the regular Tuesday meeting with her head office, Richard showed up, because Tess took a sick day.

After she shortly briefed Richard in the meeting room, she returned to her office and started updating future Rock Island hotel's Instagram page.

Her office door quickly opened and closed, and Allie lifted her head, eager to see Bea. However it was Richard, pretending that he forgot to ask her something, when in reality he only came to pester.

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Bea had a disappointing weekend and even worse Monday evening, when her tooth started to hurt. Luckily, her dentist concluded that it wasn't a caries, but only a tiny fish bone that stuck between her teeth and wedged into her gums.

Once freed of the tiny nuisance, Bea was happy to leave the dentist’s office sooner than expected and without a swollen cheek. She entered her office in almost a good mood, but only to find Allie pinned against the wall, with her face turned away in disgust from a tall man who hovered over her, with one hand on her buttock, and the other under her collarbone to restrain her movement as he tried to put his mouth on hers.

Bea saw Allie's thin hands trying unsuccessfully to push him back by his shoulders and that scene was too much for her not to lose her mind. She threw herself at Richard, pulling him with both hands by his neck. He dropped Allie in surprise and turned around rubbing at his neck.

'You crazy bitch!' he shouted. 'You scratched my neck!'

He moved towards Bea:

'Allie and me, we were having a bit of fun, but what would you know about it, you frigid lesbo?'

He put his arm on Bea's waist and leaned into her face: 'Why don't you go out with me already, let
Bea grabbed on his arm and twisted it behind his back until he had to turn away from her, then she kicked him behind his knee, thus forcing him to kneel, as she twisted his arm even more. 'I don't want to see your face near this building again, do you hear me?' she hissed. As he struggled back, she stepped with her heel on his calf until he squawked and nodded his head in surrender: 'Alright, you lunatic, now let go!' Bea pressed his twisted arm even more to his back, enjoying the pain that showed on his face. 'You touch her again', she threatened him in a raw voice, 'I will break your fucking arm!'

At that she shook him away, as she would shake off some dirt. After he stumbled through the door, she locked it behind him, to secure he wouldn't be breaking back in.

She looked at still shaking Allie, who had slid with her back down the wall, having an anxiety attack, and was now sitting in the corner, fighting for breath.

Bea found some paper tissues in her desk and soaked them with bottled water. Then she returned to Allie and dropped down next to her. She put one wet tissue on her forehead and then tried gently to remove Allie's hand from grasping at own throat.

'You'll hurt yourself, let go', Bea said quietly and when Allie loosened her grip, she moved her hand away and unbuttoned three buttons on her shirt. She put one tissue on her chest and one on her throat and the last one she kept in her hand and held it over Allie's mouth.

'Breathe in and out, sweetheart, slowly, in and out. That's right, relax, just concentrate on breathing, okay?'

After Allie's panic subsided and her breath got even, Bea said:

'It is already lunchtime, so what do ya say we go out a bit, fresh air will do ya good?'

But Allie's eyes went wide and she held onto her arms in a new wave of fear.

'Okay, okay, sweetie, we will just stay here, but you don't have to be frightened, he won't be coming back, that's for sure', Bea rambled, as she removed the wet tissues off Allie, and took her in her embrace. Once again, her worry for Allie made her forget her own fears and fear-induced rules, and she didn't even notice.

Allie buried her face deep into Bea's shoulder. The scent of Bea's hair calmed her almost instantly but she didn't want to move away. Bea stroked her hair with her fingers and didn't seem to want to let go either.

They sat like that for half an hour, maybe even more. Eventually Bea spoke:

'I beat him up for hurting you', her voice was bitter and low, 'when I hurt you the same or worse.'

Allie lifted her head in astonishment.

'How can you even compare that, Bea?' she asked the redhead sadly. 'To him I said no, and to you I said yes. No is a borderline that a decent human being would never pass. I was yours by my free will, because I wanted you. I enjoyed it immensely and I am not regretting it.'

Bea looked into her pained eyes. She cupped her cheek in her palm and rasped out:

'I am sorry, Allie, I really am. I'd love nothing more than to be able to return your feelings and make
you happy, but I'm not and I never will be. What happened between us, cannot ever happen again. I know it's not just sex to you and I am not such person to take advantage. Please forgive me for what I said to you that evening and let's try to be friends again.'

Allie threw another depressed smile at Bea, then glided her hands from Bea's shoulders down to Bea's upper arms.

'You said it yourself couple of days ago', Allie squeezed her muscles, 'you fucked my eyes out. I still tremble when I look at your hands, my knees go weak when I only sense you near me. I am no good as your friend, Bea.'

'Then let's at least be friendly until we finish this project, what do you say, no friends, no lovers, just friendly co-workers?'

To that Allie nodded:

'I would like that.'

She stood up and helped Bea get on her feet.

'Thanks for defending me, by the way. Where did you learn to fight like that?'

Bea shrugged her shoulders:

'I was a state judo champion at the age of nineteen. I also took some self-defense classes after college. Sometimes I box with Kim too, she's not much of a talker, but her apercute speaks for itself.'

'Wow, you're into sports even more than I thought', Allie mumbled, as she buttoned up.

'Will you file a complaint against the bastard?' Bea asked as she straightened her pants.

'I'd rather not', Allie murmured.

'How can you not? He harassed you at work. He should be fired, should have been fired a long time ago.'

'It's his word against mine…'

'And mine!' Bea cut in.

'... and Board can say that I have all the reasons to lie, being his assistant and going after his job. Even if they believe me, I don't want to be known as a woman who may or may not have been a victim or an opportunist.'

Bea nodded her head, a little disappointed in Allie.

I would gladly report, even sue his repulsive arse, Allie thought to herself. But the way Bea beat him up, and during their work hours, guaranteed that Bea not only was going to lose her job, but potentially do some time in prison, as she was a trained judyst and applied that knowledge as a weapon.

The best thing to do, Allie concluded, is to swallow my anger and protect Bea from consequences. He will not mention the bashing to anyone, as long as I don't file a formal complaint.
After the incident with Richard, things went smoothly between Bea and Allie, at least around the office. As they composed themselves around half two that Tuesday, Allie finished with the Instagram update, made two calls, then sat next to Bea, to see what she's been working on so diligently.

'Hope you don't mind', Allie said. 'It's much easier when you explain it to me directly then when I have to compare your emails with the files on your cloud."

'It's certainly quicker', Bea replied. 'And it will save a lot of time. Do you know that I spent almost an hour each day writing those email reports?'

'Wow, good thing we started talking again. Because business was really starting to suffer.'

'Agreed', Bea smiled. 'I don't want even imagine what horror the outdoor promotion next week would be."

The women ought to do an outdoor advertising for Rock Island Resort, with their promotion stand placed in business area downtown on Monday, and on the beach on Tuesday. Allie first opted for hiring a promoter, but their client disagreed in their weekly meeting last Wednesday, stating that it would be a waste of time and money to hire and train a promoter, considering that Allie and Bea look pleasant, have good people skills and certainly no one knows what the future resort will have to offer better than them. Due to the promotion their next weekly client's meeting was pushed to Thursday instead of Wednesday.

'That reminds me', Allie said, 'that I didn't exactly bring you up to date with what I have already arranged regarding the outdoor promotion."

'What do ya wanna say? Writing emails doesn't appeal to you as much as to me?'

Allie ignored the half-joke and continued:

'I have already obtained the necessary permissions and placed an order for a custom made stand. You remember that my friend Boomer owns a welding workshop?'

'Of course', Bea said dryly. If they weren't speaking for ten days, that still didn't mean Allie should talk to her like she lost her memory or was a complete stranger.

'Well, I googled promotion stands, picked one that I liked the most and sent the picture of it to Booms. She will make it at fair price and paint it white by Sunday morning and deliver it to my place."

'Didn't you say that you have like two metres front yard and no backyard?'

'True', Allie shrugged her shoulders, 'but it will fit.'
'Can you at least show me that picture, so that I can see what it looks like, when no one considered consulting the designer regarding the design?'

With a guilty face, Allie leaned in to bring Bea's keyboard closer and soon showed Bea which stand did she pick. It was round, almost full circle with only forty centimeters left for a passage in and out of the stand. From the ground part of the stand four thin poles raised to hold a metal ring, about thirty centimeters wide.

'It's cute', Bea said. 'We are lucky its designer is Norwegian and probably will never find out that we didn't buy his product but made our own rip-off.'

'Oh course there is. That's why you shouldn't have done it without me. Why don't you call Boomer and check whether she's started with the work yet?'

Five minutes later Allie found out that Boomer has already bought the material but wasn't planning on cutting it until Thursday, given the amount of other customer orders she had to do first. They agreed on Bea drawing a new design and emailing it to Boomer until tomorrow afternoon.

'We dodged that bullet', Allie leaned back in her chair with relief. 'Client would have been furious if such a lawsuit came in. Thanks, Bea. Now let's move to the new designs you wanted to show me.'

Bea opened a folder in her computer.

'I started working on the penthouse.'

The hotel was projected to have ten floors, with eight deluxe suits on the last floor and one extravagant penthouse on the roof. The penthouse was supposed to take up one half of the roof, where the other half was planned to be a helistop in case of emergencies.

'You don't like it', Bea said, searching Allie's face.

'It's not that I don't like it, Bea', Allie hesitated, 'it's just that I wouldn't ever pick it as an apartment in which I would like to spend my holiday, and especially not my honeymoon, for which purpose I believe the most people will book it anyway.'

Bea looked her in the eye, awaiting more explanation.

'The apartment concept is beautiful, Bea, but the colours you chose. One room brown and maroon, the other dark purple with black elements, dining room is dark grey, really? I wouldn't want to spend my week off surrounded by such murkiness, let alone a honeymoon.'

'I see your point', Bea said, 'I was in a dark mood while working on it. I guess neither of us does her best work when we quarrel', she smiled shyly.

Allie smiled back and got up:

'Keep the whole concept, all furniture, just erase the colours with your drawing software, and then close your eyes as you do when you think, and imagine a more pleasant atmosphere. But first the promotion stand please.'

'Alright', Bea smiled again. 'And I have another suggestion. I would like Booms to deliver the stand to my place instead to yours, because I would like to paint some landscape from Rock Island on it, make it a bit more appealing to passers-by, y’know?'
'I love the idea', Allie exclaimed. 'But it will take you your whole off day, and that's not fair.'

'Half', Bea said. 'And it's alright. I will enjoy it.'

The rest of the Tuesday the pair worked mostly in silence, but different to their last ten days, this silence was so comfortable, and broken only now and then by a friendly remark or a smile.

Bea has designed a cute stand, also round in the ground part, but a little higher, with built in cabinets on the inside for storing promotion material and a broad countertop on the outside.

'I thought that we could offer some lemonade or snacks for free, to allure more people. Then they could take a bite on the countertop, while we present the resort to them.'

'That would be cool, but of course client has to approve the budget first. We'll see what they'll have to say about it in the weekly meeting tomorrow.'

Bea nodded and placed the order online for a straw roof she planned to put on the stand. Namely, instead of a circle held up by poles, she drew a light roof construction and a hanging sign up front. The straw she planned to put on the roof should remind the passers-by of typical island cottages.

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On Wednesday the client's meeting went by swiftly. They approved the extra budget for catering and also approved Allie's idea to print out ten per cent discount vouchers for people who would seem genuinely interested in taking a holiday there next year. Vouchers were to be valid until June 2017 so in that way potential guests really had time to plan their vacation or a prolonged weekend on Rock Island.

Thursday at noon the ordered promotion materials and vouchers were delivered from a printing company to their office. Once Allie took a look at the material and approved it, Bea asked the delivery guys to help her bring the prints down to the garage and into her car. Truckies will pick up the stand from her house on Monday morning, so it would be best if the promotion material was already in it.

After the delivery guys left with Bea, Allie took her handbag and went to the canteen downstairs. There was no point to wait for Bea - since they agreed on being only co-workers and not friends, Bea didn't start having breakfast and lunch with Allie again. Without her, Allie was usually too lazy to bother to go to some of the finer restaurants in their block, she just ate whatever was on the menu in the canteen and it was fine with her, as the food they cooked there was tasty and healthy and she wasn't a picky eater. Also, some of the co-workers from the same floor, who knew her from the coffee lounge or from passing by, usually joined her so she was rarely without company during lunch. Those small talks did her good, especially during the period when Bea wasn't speaking to her.

She was just finishing the soup, when a familiar voice chirped out:

'I thought it was you! So good to see you. It's been a while!'

Allie looked up to see Tina holding a tray across the table.

'Hi Tina. Please do sit', Allie replied, with a look of guilt and a lump forming in her throat, when she remembered what words did she call this amiable girl during her dispute with Bea.
'So what's new with you?' Allie asked and soon regretted it, when Tina started gushing about the game she was covering on Sunday. Apparently, Tina's editor entrusted her with a serial of articles about some huge sporting event: first she ought to write several prepping articles about the odds and the players, then cover the game live on Sunday and do a summary of the game together with players' interviews on Monday. She was promised to have the cover page on Monday, if she pulls the interviews right and she was over the moon with excitement.

Allie understood how big of a deal it must be for her and she listened the best she could, but she really didn't know the first thing about football, she didn't know the rules and couldn't follow whether the players Tina mentioned were playing for one or the other team.

Feeling her head starting to hurt, the tired blonde tried to change the subject:

'So I guess with all of those obligations regarding the game, you won't be having much time for yourself this weekend, huh? You'll have to skip the race this time, aye?'

'I have actually bust my arse off in the last several days, pulling extra hours too. All pre-game articles I have already written', she smiled at ignorant Allie, 'or did you think we're writing them half an hour before the morning issue? My boss already edited and approved all four, here's the today's issue', Tina pulled out a magazine out of her bag and opened a page with her smiling face in the corner.

'I can relax until Sunday', she continued with a happy look, 'in fact, since I am working on Sunday, I have tomorrow off.'

'Good for you', Allie said sincerely.

'I will meet up with the gang on Saturday', Tina continued, 'and today I'm meeting Bea, so I can't wait.'

'Yeah?' Allie asked, faking a flat voice while her heart sank.

'Yeah', Tina confirmed, 'I'm in a need of some serious relaxation, if you know what I mean. Bea was always busy in the last couple of weeks, and last Saturday she said she was having her period and left right after the race. It's understandable, I guess, but it never stopped her before. She didn't even participate in the race, but just sat there on the bleachers. The three of us were discussing on Saturday that there's something off with her lately. You haven't noticed anything by the way, given the amount of time you guys spend together in the office, haven't ya?'

'No, not really', Allie lied. 'Same old Bea.'

'Well', Tina slightly took offense, 'you might only see her as this boring co-worker, who sits around the office with her head down in her drawings, but it's because you don't know any better. Out of the office, Bea is a force, trust me. The way that woman swings her confidence and her charm into your face, the way she rocks up on her Harley, wearing those tight pants, and when she removes her helmet and that flowing mane falls out into the wind, mm…'

Tina got so carried away in defending Bea from being declared a bore, that she was totally oblivious to the shade Allie's face just turned to.

'It's such a thrill being with a winner, y’know? Because others can win only when she lets them. It's not the bike, it's her who wins. She has a mighty engine but not the best in the gang. And there's Juice, a strong butch type, wannabe our leader - even if we function on the principle of equality, she doesn't stop trying to take over the gang. She already has followers, four large women she calls her boys. Well, Bea is a thorn in her side, Juice is obsessed with beating her, but can't. She bought
exactly the same bike, same model, colour and all. But she still doesn’t win. Once she was a whole
lap behind Bea and got so desperate that she drove her bike directly into Bea's back wheel, to stop
her from driving through the finish line. Bea managed to swerve so Juice completely missed her and
came a cropper, putting herself in a hospital for two weeks’, Tina laughed, while Allie shuddered at
the scene, retroactively frightened for Bea’s wellbeing.

'And then, after you see her winning like that, comes the real thrill… Who's hand she's gunna take,
y'know? I can't describe you that feeling, I don't think you could ever understand… Whom will she
take home… And even if she doesn't pick you after the race, sometimes your phone rings during the
week and she asks you to meet and your knees go weak. Or you call her and she rasps that ‘alright’
down the line. Once I just showed up, unannounced, in her garage, she just smiled, didn't say a
word, just took me', Tina shuddered.

Allie coughed a little, losing breath from the unwanted image Tina has just created in her mind. She
felt a sting of pain, comparing how she had to beg when she showed up unannounced, while Tina
got a smile, being, unlike Allie, a good surprise.

'Oh, sorry', Tina gushed out, 'didn't want to be indiscrete. But I'm in a serious need of a Bea-fix,
y'know. The last few weeks that Bea's got weird, I got it on more frequently with Mel, but it's just
not the same. We were just saying the other night it's like our rollercoaster broke, we started to fear
that she lost interest in us, so when she called me last night to meet today, oh my, I was happy as a
clam.'

Allie’s eyes were fixed on her plate, her chest ached, her jealousy spilling over the top.

Seeing how Allie kept silent, Tina felt uncomfortable and added:

'God, I’ve weirded you out, haven’t I? I’ll stop, I get it, you can’t imagine her that way, what fun she
is for us…'

'Actually, I slept with her too', Allie cut off, unnerved of Tina referring to Bea as a toy or fun factory.

'You did what?!' Tina gasped.

'Had sex with her', Allie raised her blue eyes and looked Tina directly into her face.

Tina was stunned for few seconds, then she laughed out loud:

'So you are the one who broke our rollercoaster!' Tina exclaimed, but her eyes didn’t laugh together
with her lips. She meant it.

'Hardly', Allie faked indifference, 'it was only a one-time-thing, and a while ago.'

'I thought that you were straight?' Tina’s dark eyes tried to pierce through her.

'I guess I wanted to try out some new things after I broke up with my fiancé, see whether I was
missing out on something.'

'And how was it for ya, not disappointed I hope?' Tina spat out.

'Just okay', Allie shrugged her shoulders, 'suits me better as a friend, to be honest.'

Or to be completely dishonest, Allie said to herself.

'It’s for the better', Tina relaxed. 'It’s nothing to me, with whom else she sleeps, as long she makes
time for me couple of days a month. She’s fun and all, but I told ya, once I’m ready to settle down, I’ll ask Kim out. That’s the kind of girl you’d bring home to meet your parents. And Bea… Bea is thrilling, but not a keeper.’

Allie felt her anger rising even higher if possible, as Tina continued:

'You’re better off, trust me. I don’t know exactly how to explain, but she’s seriously fucked up. The sex is brilliant for me, because of the moto racing, adrenaline, me being a lesbian, y’know? But you, who was only curious a bit, it would have bored in a jiffy. Same position, no hands, no intimacy… Sometimes, after being with Bea, Mel comes to me just to cuddle and hang out, y’know, she says Bea fucks like a machine but acts like a robot.'

Allie could swear steam just came out of her ears. She started chewing on the last piece of meat in her plate and asked coolly:

'How do ya mean “no hands”?'

Tina froze:

'She used her hands on you?!”

Allie continued chewing and nodded with a bogus detachment. She took a sip of water, satisfied with her petty victory, but almost spat it out, as Tina exclaimed excitedly:

'That puts my evening in a whole new perspective, Allie! If Bea’d loosened up, I get to enjoy a whole new experience with her tonight! Maybe a whole range of new experiences', Tina smiled, 'depending on how many things I get her to do to me. After shagging her for so long, I know exactly which buttons to push… Oh my! It’s one o’clock already, gotta run! Thank you, Allie, it was so good to see ya!'

And just like that, Tina was gone, leaving a still gobsmacked Allie to bemoan her imprudent boasting, which encouraged Tina to try to get out more from Bea tonight…

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Allie returned to her office, as if walking in a haze. When her eyes met Bea's, her look was still foggy and somewhat sad.

'All well?' Bea smiled. 'You look like you've seen a ghost.'

When Allie didn't reply, but just stared at her absentmindedly, Bea decided to drop it, fearing the underlying cause had something to do with her, and she really didn't want to go that road again. So Bea just ignored her and concentrated on her work.

After a bit, Allie started working too, choosing to answer some emails first until she composes herself enough to be able to make a very important call that was awaiting her. While she typed, she looked up once in a while, gawking at the red-haired woman, as if she sees her for the very first time…
Allie’s Thursday, having had such a slow start, picked up some serious pace as the working day was nearing its end. Bea was done for the day and left the office at five o'clock sharp. Allie was on the phone at the time so she could only watch with resignation when Bea waved at her and left. She silently sighed, feeling her heart dropping, like every time when Bea parts from her.

Ten minutes later Allie was in the elevator going down to the company's underground garage. She walked over to her car, surprised to find Bea's car still parked next to hers. She quickly looked around and soon her eyes found the beautiful redhead, leaning on a grey Hyundai Elantra, which was parked ten meters away. Tina Mercado was standing next to her, looking at Bea seductively, while twirling her hair. They both giggled. They are so busy flirting they haven't even noticed that I'm here, Allie thought bitterly. She started unlocking her car rather than using remote key, wanting to flee from the scene as quietly as possible and thus avoid being spotted by the pair. Yet she couldn't help but glance over to them, when she heard Bea saying: 'Alright, it's set then. I'll drop by at seven.'

'See you soon, gorgeous', Allie heard Tina reply and she felt a sharp sting through the heart, aware that it could be only described as jealousy, as Tina alluringly leant through her window, to blow Bea a goodbye kiss.

Allie got rashly into her car, her hands trembling as she was putting the key into ignition. Bea was already headed her way, and, as Allie was putting her seatbelt on, she heard Bea shouting out to her: 'So, the talk went by quicker than we expected. Did we get what we wanted?' With that she smiled friendly at Allie and was about to approach her, when Allie turned her head to her, then slammed the car door into her face and pulled the car out. 'What the heck, Allie?' a stunned Bea exclaimed, jumping quickly back, afraid that Allie was gunna drive over her feet. Allie threw one last pissed look at her in the rear mirror and drove away.

Bea was still standing there with her arms slightly raised in protest at Allie's behavior, her red locks dishevelled around her face from the jump. She looks so beautiful, Allie thought with pain, already in the street, with that wild hair, dark eyes, in that fitted cream little outfit. Yes, she is so beautiful, so sweet, and tonight she is going to fuck somebody else.

Allie parked into her garage and ran straight to the shower to cool off. She put on a simple cotton dress, whose pale green colour perfectly matched the paleness of her skin.

'These things are bound to happen, Allie', she said to herself aloud, as she was pouring herself a glass of milk, 'you were prepared for this. Bea has made abundantly clear that she doesn't want to have any more intimate encounters with you, and there is no reason why she should stop seeing her biker mates, fuck mates, however the hell does she call them. Even if you were a thing, you would have to accept to share her with the others, and you very well knew it and accepted it. So why did you start freaking out of a blue?'

Allie opened some cookies and took them and the milk out to the terrace. She sat at the table under her front window and watched cars driving by on her busy street. She never minded the noise, as she grew up to it, and this afternoon it even comforted her with its warm familiarity. She took a sip and put one cookie into her mouth. She was eating her favourite Raffaelllos, which she realised wasn’t the best choice, given how the coconut flour reminded her of the smell of Bea's hair.
In her mind Allie went back to that Saturday evening, to the moment before all hell got loose, when Bea still held her in her arms, smelling like coconut heaven. How she gently warmed her sore pussy, how she laid her chin on her shoulder and shivered lightly behind her back. Fuck you, Mel and Tina, Allie cursed, you seek out only her mechanics, no wonder you cannot see past it. My Bea has a warm heart, she is not a friggin’ robot.

Tina said, now that I’ve relaxed Bea a bit, she would probably get her to do new stuff to her too. How far will Bea take it, Allie asked herself further. She will probably be squeezing her boobies too, how could she not, cause Allie saw them boobies and they were bloody exquisite. And Bea certainly seems like a breast fan, if her actions last Saturday were anything to judge by. She might even use her hand? Tina mentioned once she has a waterbed? Allie felt cold sweat on her forehead. Painful images started running through Allie’s head and she felt like she was gunna throw up. ‘Over my dead body!’ she exclaimed loudly and startled neighbour’s dog, who belled after her even couple of minutes after she was gone with her car.

It was quarter to seven as Allie parked her red Mini Countryman at Bea’s gate. She didn't have time to come up with a plan what she'd do or say once she gets there, as she was only hoping she wasn't too late. Bea's car was parked there too - she clearly thought it doesn't pay off to drive it into garage when she was planning on leaving again shortly. Allie took a deep breath of relief. Her heart was still beating out of her chest though, and as she ran anxiously through the gate, she collided with unpleasantly surprised Bea whose hand was already on the gate knob. The unnerved expression on Bea's face was soonly replaced with angst, when Allie burst out crying and threw herself in her arms. Bea stood there, not knowing what to do. 'What happened, Allie?' she asked in panic. 'What has happened to you?'

But Allie just kept sobbing into her neck.

Bea got so scared, she pulled away and started searching Allie's face then body for traces of injuries or harm. She seemed fine physically so clearly something else must have happened. Not some bad news, I hope, Bea thought, and hugged Allie again.

'Sweetie, you need to tell me what's going on. You're starting to really worry me here.'

Allie lifted her gaze to her, and suddenly she felt so ashamed of why she was there, not knowing how to break it to Bea.

Bea was standing next to her, her strong arms still on her shoulders, all dressed up, in a teal, silk, sleeveless blouse, tight black pants and high heels. She had a fancy black clutch bag on her shoulder, with a soft black cardigan hanging over it. Allie was pained to see how much she dressed up for Tina, but yet again, it was understandable, as Tina was such a pretty girl.

At that thought her eyes started spilling fresh tears so Bea took her by the hand and gently brought her to sit in a chair in the gazebo. She sat next to her and put her bag and her cardigan on the table. Bea squeezed Allie's hand questioningly and at that Allie raised her watery eyes to her.

'Is it your mother, Allie?'

Allie shook her head fiercely.

'No, no, it's nothing like that. It's… It's…'

And she choked on her words. Was it because of her dress or because of all the grass and trees around them, but Allie's blue eyes
came across almost pale green. Bea smiled at her fondly:

'If it's nothing so serious, then we can fix it. Now share with me and stop crying, I see that you cried out the colour of your eyes already.'

Allie tried a small smile but her lips shivered.

'You will think me such a fool, Bea.'

'I can't imagine that.'

'I got so scared, I panicked. I don't know how I got in the car or drove here, but I couldn't let you go to Tina, I just couldn't.'

Bea felt like someone pulled the ground under her feet.

'What did you just say?' she asked in disbelief.

'I'm sorry.'

Bea raised herself up, putting her hand on the bag.

'Of all the things, Allie...', she said as she stepped out of the gazebo.

Allie followed and grabbed her by the wrist.

'Don't leave please.'

'You don't get to tell me how to live my life, now let go of me.'

'Never', Allie said and gripped her harder, as the fresh set of tears spilled.

Bea tried to pull her arm out of Allie's grip, but Allie held on tightly. With lots of strength, Bea managed to turn towards the gate, but Allie still clung to her so that her bag fell to the ground, spilling its contents, and Allie also landed on the ground next to it. Bea grabbed her car keys off the ground and hurried out, only managing to make two steps, as Allie threw herself at her and clasped her thighs with her arms.

'God, Allie!'

'Please don't go to her, please don't. I will do whatever you want, please.' Bea felt Allie starting to kiss her thighs and hips in desperation, hanging onto her like her very own life depended on it.

Bea felt trapped, like she was being attacked, and after the initial shock, she soon started defending herself. She managed to turn herself and pull one leg out but Allie grasped with both arms at the other so Bea lost her balance and fell down. Allie dropped in her lap and put her hands on her neck.

'Please, Bea, I know I don't have any rights over you, but just stay with me tonight. 'Cause if you discard me once again now, like I was really nothing to you', she whispered, 'I think I might just break, irreversibly.'

Bea inhaled sharply and stopped struggling in Allie's unwanted embrace. How is it possible, she wondered silently, that this insecure mess was the same woman who only yesterday walked all over client’s unreasonable requests, in a true business shark manner, friendly but relentlessly bringing the client to realisation what was in their best interest. Brilliant young manager Allie Novak. Bea hated the effect she had on the young woman, reducing her to a bunch of hormones, mixed with fears and
raw emotions.

Allie sensed the change in her body language, so she was now sitting only loosely in her lap, holding herself up by her blouse. She looked deeply into her eyes, as if she got completely lost in them.

'I know it's my fault, Bea, and I don't want to hold you from anything you like, but I just don't know how to get out of the way I feel. I fear I will lose my mind if I lost you.'

Bea sighed.

'First of all, Allie, this was the second time that you tried to take away my personal freedom by restraining me physically. If you once more, just once more, restrain my movements like that, know that I will do whatever is necessary to set myself free and that I will never want to see you again, ever. Secondly, why do you care so much?'

At that, Allie pulled herself back on her heels and sat on the grass, having set Bea free. Her chest shuddered from stress and she took her head into her hands.

'God, Bea, I didn't mean to, I only now realise that I was doing it, I'll never do it again, I promise. I would never hurt you.'

'Deep down, I know you wouldn't, otherwise I wouldn't be letting you near me. And I would never want to hurt you either, Allie, but you keep coming at me so I keep hurting you, and I don't know how to help you get over this unexplainable infatuation.'

'Just help me make sense out of it. Don't leave me alone in this mess.'

Bea opened her mouth to say something, but she was interrupted by a ringing sound, coming from the spot in the grass near to them. Bea got up to find her phone, and as she answered it, she saw how Allie's head sank a little bit lower than before.

'Oh hello Tina! I was just about to call you. I'm not feeling crash hot now, sorry you'll have to excuse me for tonight. Yeah, yeah, a shame. But I'll see you Saturday at the race, ok? Bye.'

As she hung up, she noticed the look of relief on Allie's small face, and couldn't understand why this woman suffered so much over her or why she herself suffered alongside her, like she could feel every single pain that ripped through Allie's sweet heart, as her own.

Allie was kneeling on the ground, gathering Bea's trifles and carrying them over to the gazebo table. She took Bea's bag and cleaned some grass and leaves that caught up on it, then she started picking up few condoms that were stuck beneath it. She gulped as she did so, it pained her, especially when she took the last spilled piece into her hands - Bea's black dildo attached to a black strap-on and put it on the table, next to the other stuff.

She heard Bea saying to Tina that she couldn't come and at that she walked out to sit on the grass again, shaking with relief.

Bea returned to sit next to her.

'So… How shall we go on, Allie? I see now that it wouldn't be good for you to simply cut you off, like I thought until now, but I don't know what to do. What do you need, Allie?'

'I need you. I need your company.'

'But that's not fair to you. I will never be able to return your feelings, Allie, to have a normal
relationship, I'm damaged good.'

'No, you're not. You're not', Allie said and, seeing Bea was about to protest, added: 'And if you were, I'd rather take one damaged you over ten normal others.'

Bea was moved by those words so much she felt her own eyes watering.

'You have to understand, Allie, that it will never be good with me. I've done it all, I've tried religion, numerous psychotherapies, alternative medicine. And I gave up. The only thing which makes me feel better is riding with my gang, that wind in my back gives me a feeling of freedom and carelessness, and my gang gives me a feeling of belonging. I like my work, I do, and I don't live a fruitless life. But relationships, intimacy... I can't do that. I can't. I don't need it and I fear it and if I'd try it, I know it would soon crush my world, everything that I have built in the last eight years. So I can't allow myself that. My girls from the gang know it, and they don't look for a relationship either, and that's why we function so well together. But with you, Allie, is different: you want love from me, a commitment, and I would like nothing more than to give it to you, I would, cause you deserve the world, Allie, but I know that I can't and that I will never be able to, so letting you believe that there is a slightest bit of hope, would just be leading you on.'

Allie stared at the distance, while two hot tears travelled down her cheeks.

'Thank you for your honesty, Bea. I accept it as you say it. But to say that I will be ok if I lost your company now, would be a blatant lie.'

'I'd be happy to give you my truest friendship, Allie, for a lifetime.'

'I could never be next to you and see you only as a friend, Bea, as every time I lay my eyes on you, I undress you, every time I look at your fingers, I imagine them inside of me, every time you move your lips to speak, I imagine kissing them and how would it be if they kissed me back.'

Bea shivered from the pictures Allie was creating in her mind.

'You see', Allie said, 'you only think you could be my friend, but in reality you want me as much as I want you. We have this chemistry, Bea, that we cannot deny.'

'So what shall we do?' Bea whispered sadly, 'cause I am only capable of doing it in just one position, I can't do kisses or even look you in the eye during it. I fear such intimacy, Allie, with primal fear.'

'Have you ever...?' Allie asked.

'What?'

'Kissed, made love or simply had sex like regular folks?'

'Sure', Bea smiled, 'a lot actually. But then some things happened that I am really not ready to talk about so please don't ever ask, ok?'

'Okay', Allie replied, feeling her heart aching for Bea.

Allie looked around searching for a more comfortable spot but reluctant to sit back into chairs. That seemed too formal, like she would lose a hard gained position. She pulled herself half a metre back so that she was now sitting leant on Bea's elm tree.

'Want to go inside?' Bea asked.
'Into your house?' Allie whispered hopefully.

'No', Bea lowered her gaze. 'See? That is one more thing I cannot do. I meant the garage.'

'I'd rather stay here then. And I don't mind. It's such a lovely evening, so warm, and you look just incredibly beautiful in the sunset.'

Bea blushed. Allie smiled at the sight and tapped the ground next to her: 'Come sit with me.'

Bea relaxed after seeing Allie finally smile and sat next to her, lowering her head on Allie's shoulder.

Couple of minutes they sat in silence, then Allie asked:

'Bea?'

'Yes?'

'What did you mean by that you can only have sex in one position? Other than the obvious fact that you can only have sex in one position?'

'I meant', Bea sighed, 'that you can have any man or woman in this city, who can give you anything that you need, sexually, emotionally… Sex with me, the way I'm capable of doing it, will always remain the same, and in couple of weeks, when it loses its novelty, it will bore you.'

Allie intertwined their fingers, but let go of them in matter of seconds, knowing by now better than to spook Bea with her loving emotions.

'Bea', she said seriously, turning towards her and looking deeply into her eyes, 'the other Saturday you've given me, in one encounter, more pleasure than I have ever experienced in all of my adult years. I've only ever slept with Paul, and you guess what? We also only ever did it in one position, which was my fault really, cause I've never felt turned on enough to try oral or different positions. I realise now that I never gave him the loving that he deserved and it wasn't fair that he put up with it because he loved me. I only ever had an occasional weak orgasm, so what you're giving me right now, sexually, is already much more than I have ever hoped for.'

'But eventually I will turn you into my Paul.'

'I can't imagine that. But if it happens, I promise you that I will tell you.'

'And I'm not ready to leave my girls. They give me such a great energy boost and they are loyal to me, you know.'

'Look, Bea, I’ve flipped out today, I know I have, but that was only because I feared that I would lose you to them. If I know that you will find time for me, no matter what else is going on in your life, I will be fine with your gang. I don't expect you to change anything in your life for me, I know you are not my girlfriend, so you can be with whomever you want. As long as you keep it safe and don't tell me anything about it, ok?'

'Okay', Bea replied. 'This would seem like an very odd arrangement to normal people.'

'Then luckily it's our life and not theirs.'

Bea smiled broadly and snuggled her face back to Allie's shoulder.

Allie sighed happily and watched the sun, so orange in the sky, its ray beams falling over the wall on the bunch of red roses Bea planted in the corner and reflecting its light off the leaves of four
handsome silver birches across the yard. Bea's garden was so beautiful and with Bea leaning on her in it, Allie felt bliss.

Several minutes later Allie spoke again.

'Bea?'

'Mhm', Bea murmured against her bare shoulder.

To her surprise, Allie got up and soon returned caring a dildo and a condom, which she opened with her teeth. She put the condom on, then started fastening the strap-on around Bea's hips, who was confused with the sudden turn of events but also immensely aroused.

'One thing I didn't confess yet. When you were inside of me, that Saturday night…'

'Yes…?' Bea panted out, her breath shortening.

'For the first time in my life I didn't feel alone. I felt you inside each cell, each nerve. I felt you filling me to my very soul. And, honestly, I can't wait for you to do it again.'

Bea looked at Allie lowering the straps of her dress, then pulling the dress over her head, and felt weak in the head by the sight of Allie wearing nothing more but red sports bra and red panties.

'But if you want to do it again, then you'd have to take over now.'

At that, Bea shivered and moved closer to awaiting Allie. She went behind her and gently lifted her arms up. Then she removed her bra over her head and Allie helped by wiggling out of her panties.

She positioned Allie onto her hands and knees, taking in the perfect view her shoulders, her back, her plump ass provided. She crept nearer and soon placed her cock in. She held Allie by the waist, stroking her smooth backside. She could get a glimpse of her boobs, remembering how much pleasure they provided for her not so long ago. But after their honest talk this evening, she feared that Allie and her have already got way too close and feared to expose herself to sexual sensations which would be too strong for her to handle. Cause Allie's breasts, that Saturday... they made her feel things she never felt before.

So she kept her hands firmly on Allie's slender waist and found much pleasure in occasionally squeezing the smooth buttcheeks that kept thrusting back into her.

Bea took her time, wanting to remain as long as possible in this perfect moment, and by the time she decided that she has tortured poor Allie enough, she had her having to bite her fist, in order for all neighbourhood not to hear.

Allie collapsed on the grass, laughing in delight. Her hair was a dishevelled mess and covered her eyes and the rest of the face almost completely. Among two blonde locks, Bea could see somewhat of her bright smile, and smiled back.

Although she herself never came physically, Bea loved the effect she had on Allie during intercourse and she felt an immense self-satisfaction for being able to provide her with those pleasures. She herself felt fully fulfilled too, as if she had a sort of mental orgasm. She stretched her arm out to push Allie's hair off her face and smiled into her satisfied eyes. It got completely dark in the meantime, street lights were on, Bea looked at her phone: it was twenty to nine. She removed her harness and lowered herself to lay next to Allie, putting a hand on her waist.

'How do you feel?' she said tentatively.
'You know how I feel', Allie whispered and tucked Bea's hair behind her ear.

'I can't let you lie there for long, you know. Even though it's mid-March and it's still twenty degrees in the evening, you're all sweaty and can easily catch a cold. Come into the garage, if you'd like.'

'It's alright', Allie replied, 'I've completely forgotten that I need to finish my financial report on projected price of advertising on National Geographic Channel.'

'Shit! That's for tomorrow?'

'Yes. I have to send it to Mrs Rodgers first thing in the morning, but don't worry, I've already written it, I just need to go through it one more time. By eleven I'll be in bed.'

She raised herself and started collecting and putting on her scattered clothes. Bea helped, then found her cardigan and put it around the young woman's shoulders.

'There you go', she said.

Allie's hand went up and down the soft black sleeve:

'God, it's so fine I just might forget to ever bring it back.'

'Ya doofus!' Bea ruffled her hair. 'You're free to keep it.'

'Guess I'll see you tomorrow morning then?' Allie smiled back.

'You know what? If you're in the mood, you can also come over tomorrow evening. It's Friday so we can have a few drinks, maybe not have sex, but just hang out, y'know?'

'Am I so terrible at sex that you're sick of me already?'

Bea shook her by the shoulders and laughed. 'I too had the best time in years. Both times.'

'Really?' Allie teared up.

'Really.'

As Allie was still standing speechless, Bea continued:

'I just meant, you don't have to feel obligated to have sex with me each time we meet, y'know. We can just do regular friends' stuff if we feel like it.'

'Like pick up on our running routine next Sunday?'

'You don't know how to run!' Bea slapped her on the upper arm.

'Come on, Bea. A walk is a great exercise too.'

'Okay, I guess. I kinda found it boring without you in the last two weeks anyway.'

'See, babe?' Allie winked as she reached her car, 'That's that Novak charm, it creeps up under your skin.'

Bea laughed at the top of her lungs:

'Crept up my thighs tonight, for sure!'
'That is actually a very good place for me to awoke feelings in you, Bea', she winked again, then she closed the door and left a very blushed Bea behind.

***

That night, Bea woke up to the sound of laughter in her bedroom. She startled at first, but then realised it was actually her who laughed. She lay back on her pillow, remembering the look on Allie's happy face, her witty banter, her honest confession, their burning desire, the smoothness of her skin. She went through the whole sex scene again in her head and felt sorry that she couldn't prolong the moment eternally. But at least, she thought, I will always remember it, even when she gets sick of my problems and moves on, I will have last night to remember her by.

Chapter End Notes

Merry Christmas to all who celebrate!! I know this chapter wasn't very chaste and pious, but there was no way around it, unless I decided not to update, which I suspect wouldn't sit well with you. You'll have three days before Christmas to cool off and purge your naughty thoughts :) At least they've made up for real this time and that's kind of in a Christian spirit.
The atmosphere between the two of them has changed. Both women felt it, most pleasantly, to their bones. They sat next morning together at breakfast, exchanging looks that confirmed that things between them have become better - more solid and more fluid at the same time. Coming to each other's terms the previous day left them both at ease. It was as if they were again able to enjoy their firm attachment, without fear anything will endanger their bond. The terrible secret they kept for half a month, of the rough encounter they had in Bea's workshop, has since yesterday turned into an intimate agreement. It was exciting, it gave them a feeling of conspiracy against the world. And concurrently it was warm, it was cleansing, as they both felt that guilt and burden have fallen off their shoulders.

During their run-in previously this month, their period of silence, both women had been missing each other's company terribly. They may have known each other only for a quarter of a year, but they were already so used to each other that staying away had physically hurt.

It was actually Bea who invited the blonde over, but Allie carried her laptop to her desk like it was the most common thing. They spent their day working shoulder-to-shoulder, mostly very busy and silent, but happy to be close again. Allie seemed to understand Bea's predicament and was showing no signs of wanting to disturb her. She appeared to have no romantic expectations, made no effort to touch the redhead, so Bea rewarded her by completely relaxing in her presence. They shared quite a few laughs throughout the day and at knocking-off time, while making their way to their cars.

'Are we still on for you coming over later?' Bea asked leaning on her Jeep, trying not to sound too eager.

'Do you still want me to come over?' Allie asked back.

Bea nodded, gulping.

Allie insisted on bringing take-away food so that Bea wouldn't be bothered, but since Bea already had a cooked soup at home and chicken legs ready to be put in the oven, Allie offered to at least bring a salad and a dessert. Bea consented without further protest, leaving them both to marvel at how they seemed to agree so easily about everything today.

Allie came with a taxi, as she really wanted to taste the wine she was bringing. Bea welcomed her with a broad smile, dishing up their dinner on the gazebo table, and Allie felt at home… She joined
her there, placing the food and wine she brought on the table. They started working around each other so comfortably like they've been doing it for years…

Later on that evening they were cosied up under a silk throw on the swing in the tent and played a game of ludo. Allie's dices just loved her and Bea had no chance to win. After Allie'd captured yet another of her pawns, Bea leant back in surrender, mumbling, 'You're so lucky tonight'.

I know I am, was all Allie wanted to reply, but bearing Bridget's advice in mind, she refrained from saying it aloud. She was in it for a long game.

The evening was turning into night, but both of the women pretended not to notice. They were sipping on their wine and nibbling on the chocolate scotcheroos Allie bought on her way over. Surprisingly, Bea wanted to know more about the diverse friendships Allie has invested in throughout her life so Allie talked a lot about how it all began with Boomer, Regan, Paul and Todd.

'Did you ever lose a friend?' Bea asked curiously.

Allie nodded sadly.

'Three of my earliest friends, but that's too sad of a story for tonight. You?'

'I cut ties with two of them', Bea replied, putting her head on her knees.

Allie really wanted to stroke her hair for comfort, but she knew she couldn't. She wasn't Bea's friend anymore.

***

Sunday, first thing in the morning, Boomer delivered the promotion stand to Bea's place. Bea was delighted with Boomer's craft so much that she made the large brunette melt at the spot. After sharing a cup of hot cocoa, Bea invited her to join Allie and her on their weekly routine, promising that they would limit their activities to walking only, but Boomer was having none of it.

'I don't need to be thin to be fabulous, thank you', she retorted before she got in her truck and drove off.

There was something in Allie's eyes that morning, something Bea hasn't seen for years in another human's gaze. It made her feel like a teenager, because it reminded her of the day when she saw it for the first time.

She took it easy on Allie, who has clearly fell out of form in three weeks of inactivity, and made sure they only had brief periods of running in between long walks.

They didn't mention the previous day: Bea's race, Bea's crew, Bea's girls - Allie acted like they never existed and didn't want to ask. Bea, on the other hand, seemed to have forgotten that anything else existed beyond the blue-eyed present tense.
Bea had a lightness to her step she could only explain as joy that dark clouds above Allie's head have disappeared. She couldn't get enough of watching her young face: for the better part of the month it was so pale and filled with gloom, and now all she could see were smiles and sparks in her eyes. Her cheeks were rosy and she looked healthy again.

During lunch in their usual tavern, Allie even ordered two main courses, as if she wanted to compensate for all the previous weeks she hadn't been having an appetite. Bea was watching her the whole time with an expression of utter satisfaction. 'Sweet cheeks', she said to a confused Allie, as she used her napkin to remove a sauce smear off her chin.

They went to a Bunnings Warehouse and bought several cans of acrylic paint in different colours. Allie persisted it was only fair that she helped with painting their promotion stand and even though it was implausible that she could actually be of any real assistance, Bea didn't need much persuasion, as she really wanted to spend her day with the blonde.

Like that day on Rock Island, Bea has still found a way to include Allie in her work. While she herself has been painting the right side of the stand by directly applying colour on the metal surface as if she was painting with oil on canvas, she has drawn an outline drawing with a blue chalk on the left side and gave Allie a brush to colour inside the lines.

'I feel like a child with a colouring book', Allie giggled.

'That was the idea', Bea met her smile with one of her own.

After the work on the stand was done, Bea ended up lying in the grass on her belly, using her makeup crayons to depict flowers and butterflies on Allie's face. Allie was stretched on her back, her arms under her head, her lips curved into permanent grin. She doodled an incredibly ugly teddy bear in the corner of redhead's eye, it looked more like a rat, but Bea refused to erase it long after the jovial blonde was gone, in fact she only washed it the next morning when the time arose for truckies to come for the stand and for her to get in her Jeep and follow them downtown.

They started setting up their stand at eight, wanting to catch the attention of the people who were heading to their offices. The early start has paid off, they have given a dozen mini-presentations before nine, and even handed out five vouchers to individuals who seemed to be really keen on visiting Rock Island.

After nine not a soul was to be seen in sight so they took a little break for breakfast. Allie had made them sandwiches at home and they helped themselves with juice and coffee off the promotion stand, as the catering company had delivered finger food and beverages to the stand in the meantime.

'This is fun', Allie grinned, 'we're having a picnic outside and are being paid for it. Wish we could do it every day.'

'You're a shark in a business suit, Allie', Bea retorted, 'you wouldn't last long before you started to miss your career. And I would pine after my drawing pad.'

'This can be a drawing pad too', Allie took one of the promotion leaflets and showed to the white backside.

'Sit still', Bea accepted the challenge and grabbed a pencil. Twenty minutes later Allie saw a beautiful sketch of herself staring back at her. It was her, but like an enhanced version of her. Her eyes were slightly bigger and had an expression Allie never saw when she looked herself in the mirror. Her complexion had an almost angelic glow to it and her smile was as tender as the touch of sunshine on a winter morning.
‘Is this really how you see me?’ Allie asked in amazement, but before Bea had a chance to respond, a hand stretched out across the countertop of the stand and grabbed the leaflet from her hand.

‘I’ll take this one, thank you’, a man winked, his dazzling smile aimed at Allie, before his eyes returned to appreciate the beautiful drawing in his hands.

‘It’s not for sale’, Bea plucked the leaflet out of his hands. She shot him a deadly glare and packed the leaflet securely into her bag.

He opened his mouth to chat up Allie, but Allie beat him to it:

‘Sorry, we’re on a break’, she shut him down even before he spoke.

The man closed his mouth in disbelief, not used to being turned down, and walked away.

Bea’s eyes followed his steps, her look still hostile. Allie took her by the chin and turned her head towards herself.

‘If that smile of yours doesn’t reappear, I’m gunna miss it the whole day long.’

Bea smiled hesitantly into her pleading face, and then Allie smiled herself.

‘See? The day is brighter already’, Allie winked.

When Bea blushed, Allie put her hand into hers, which were lying comfortably in her lap, and Bea felt a jolt shooting up her thighs and straight to her core. She hastily withdrew her hands.

‘We have to set some ground rules, Allie’, she said sternly.

Allie sobered up, her expression turning serious in a matter of seconds.

‘I’m listening’, she fixed her eyes on Bea’s.

‘We’re not dating’, Bea repeated the obvious whopper once again like a broken record, Allie barely withholding from rolling her eyes, ‘so for starters no hand-holding, nor kissing’.

Allie kept looking at her expectantly so Bea continued:

‘No face-to-face sex’.

Allie nodded.

‘I’m never taking my clothes off.’

She briefly paused to think then added in a low voice, ‘I get to touch you, but you don’t touch me, okay?’

Allie looked at her flushed and suddenly pained face and said most solemnly:

‘I accept your terms, Bea.’

She stood up and gathered the wrappings of their sandwiches to bring them to a nearby bin. She watched Bea from afar, Bea’s state still feverish. She took her phone out of her pocket, giving Bea some time to compose herself.

She’s been texting back and forth with Bridget in the last couple of days, letting her know she’s made
some progress with Bea and asking for a quick guidance. So now she typed out quickly:

'Bea has just recited me her rules for our relationship. It's a much shorter list than Tina's.'

'What did she omit exactly?' Bridget's response came through quickly.

'She never said she will not touch me :)' 

'It's because she knows she cannot always resist her own urges when it comes to you. Those are all very good news, Allie, just thread carefully, don't forget she tends to make a regression after progression. Be patient with her.'

'I will. I'll let her set the pace from now on. Gotta go back to her, xoxo.'

Their day got so busy, with a bunch of people always gathering around them, they didn't even have time for lunch. Shattered and hungry, they couldn't wait for the truck to come and pick up the stand. When they finally arrived shortly after five, they informed the women that tomorrow they will be busy all day with a long-distance delivery so they cannot pick up their stand until eight o'clock in the evening. When the women started to protest, the older of the truck drivers soon cut them off.

'Unfortunately, ladies’, he said in a tired voice, ‘there’s nothing we can do about it except give you a discount for waiting. Or you could hire another company for tomorrow.’

Bea and Allie stepped aside to take a quick consult. They both agreed it would be a bigger nuisance to spend this arvo looking for another moving company, especially both being so tired.

'You're hired for tomorrow too’, Bea said to the older truckie. 'You don't have to give us discount, just don't come later than eight p.m.'

'That's very nice of you, ma'am’, the man replied. 'If you want, we can keep the stand in the truck overnight, since you are our last customer for today and the first one in the morning, and drive it directly to the beach tomorrow, without having to bother you at home at the crack of dawn.'

Bea looked at Allie, as if to check whether that was alright.

'It would be great if you could do this, guys’, Allie agreed without a second thought, wanting to spare Bea as much as she could.

After the men have left, the two women agreed to have dinner together, since Bea now didn't have to follow the truck. They found a restaurant nearby and ordered a large portion of mixed vegetables each.

Having witnessed all day how conversation was wearing Bea out, Allie suggested that they take it easy tomorrow. Almost all vouchers were already given out to potential customers so they didn't have to try as hard as today. It will be hotter on the beach than on the downtown plateau shielded from the direct sunlight by trees and tall buildings all around so Allie wasn't planning on them giving out food and drinks anyway, as she feared they might go bad quickly. That meant less work for the two of them and, wanting to spare Bea another exhaustion, she offered to do all the talking by herself tomorrow.

'What would I do then?' Bea asked.

'You can do quick portraits of potential customers, if you'd like. That could be our thing tomorrow to attract customers instead with food.'
'That would be cool', Bea's lips parted into a huge grin, 'I will be role-playing a street artist tomorrow'.

'Never done it?' Allie asked with her mouth full.

'Nope', Bea shook her head. 'It will be my first. Can't wait.'

As they were waiting for their coffees to arrive after they'd finished off their meals, Bea asked Allie about her plans for the upcoming extended weekend. Bea herself was picking up Melissa early in the morning on Good Friday, they had booked their flight to Newcastle for nine a.m., and wasn't due returning to Melbourne until late in the evening on Easter Monday.

'Christmas was always reserved for a family time with Paul's parents and brother', Allie said nostalgically, 'so we used to spend our Easters with my family. We always went to aunt Liz’s and I quite liked it, even though that meant I had to sing right after lunch, by popular demand', she smiled.

'I know how you hate any kind of activity after a meal', Bea smiled herself.

'Damn right I do! Who in the right mind wouldn't? It's not natural to jump around when all you want is to curl up and let the food settle. But it's once in a while and they are so happy, it makes it worth my while. They've been so worried about me after the break-off of my engagement, aunt alone already called me three times to confirm I would come, and Sophie and Art wouldn't stop texting. We agreed to meet in front of mum's convent at noon, we're gunna do a family visit, since it's the last Sunday of March, and then we'll head off to their place.'

She waited for the approaching waitress to leave the coffee mugs on the table, then she carefully took a sip, to make sure it wasn't too hot, and continued, sighing:

'I'm lucky to have them, I guess, otherwise I would have ended up alone for holidays. Wouldn't be the first time', she smiled sadly, 'my dad used to leave me home alone all the time, and especially for holidays. But then Kaz adopted me and my life changed for the better: suddenly I had a mother who was there for me no matter what, two younger cousins, an aunt and uncle.'

Bea leant in and brushed her thumb across Allie's cheekbone:

'You know I would never allow it for you to spend holidays alone, right? Had it turned out that you didn't have plans of your own, I intended to invite you to join me for my trip to Newcastle.'

'You're not to blame that I broke up with Paul, Bea. You don't have to make up for it.'

'This has nothing to do with Paul', Bea replied sharply. 'I just care about you, plain as that. Maybe not the way you would want me to, but I do care’, she spit out with fire.

Allie took a moment to look into her riled up face, then said in a soothing voice, 'I know, Bea, I know.'

***

They had about as much fun the next day as they had work the previous day. Looking at Bea’s radiating smile, which pretty much hasn’t left her lips since they arrived to Altona Beach that morning, Allie has congratulated herself several times on her idea to release Bea of presenting duties. She gladly did all the talking herself, stopping only now and then to get a sip of water, because that meant Bea gets to respite.
Twenty five degrees was measured that day at the weather station, but down on the beach it was easily above thirty. Thinking ahead, Allie had their stand set up that morning in the middle of a long line of Norfolk Island Pines, where they have got a decent shade.

People were lining up to get a croquis from a beautiful redhead. Bea's smile was so bright that day, her appearance so glowing that she inadvertently attracted anyone who was only passing by to halt and take another look. She did her quick sketches mostly in funny poses and all had a good laugh about it. Even though it was evident how much she has enjoyed herself, Allie noticed how she didn't respond to attempts at flirting, even the most desultory ones, from people who had no other agenda but to be fleetly liked by a delightful woman. Bea who Allie had met three months ago used to charm her way through meetings, gatherings, coffee shops, banks, bakeries. This Bea who was sitting in front of her was stealing glances at her, as if fearing her reaction, every time one would make somewhat bolder advances, and especially if it was a woman. Oh, Bea, Allie thought to herself, letting out a quiet exhalation of amusement.

Around four o'clock they closed off their stand and headed to grab a quick bite. Since the moving truck couldn't show up before eight, they have agreed the previous evening to bring their swimsuits and make the best use of their afternoon.

Surprisingly, Allie was the first one to get out of the changing cabin. She applied some sunscreen, then headed straight to the shoreline. Some kids were playing ball in the shallow waters, one of them eventually breaking off from the others and coming to stand next to her. He was a too curious but clever eleven-year-old and Allie actually found his persistent questions rather amusing. At least that was the case until she saw Bea walking into the strand and the boy instantly lost her attention.

Bea was wearing a short-sleeved, knee-length swimming costume, the kind that one would wear for a triathlon. The whole day long Allie was looking forward to see Bea in a bikini, but as she stood there in the middle of the beach, her dark eyes still unsuccessfully searching for Allie among crowd, Allie couldn't be disappointed in what she saw. The black wetsuit clung to Bea's body like a second skin, accentuating her biceps and outer thigh muscles.

Finally Bea saw her and waved.

’That your girlfriend?’ the boy asked Allie curiously, following the drooling look she couldn't help but direct at the redhead.

Allie nodded, ‘Yes, she is, she just hasn't realised it yet’.

’How could she not know?’ the boy grinned in amusement.

’Hell, I also didn't know we were dating until yesterday when she told me we weren't dating.’

The boy looked completely confused now, ‘Huh?’

’Women are like that, complicated. You'll get it one day, when you get a girlfriend of your own’, the blonde added and smiled.

’Girls are gross’, he grimaced with disgust.

’We'll see what you'll think in a couple of years’, she ruffled his hair goodbye and followed her heart in the direction of the toned redhead.

’You usually wear a wetsuit to the beach?’ she smirked.

’No’, Bea replied most seriously, ’but with you around…’
'I see.’

Bea started to look quite uncomfortable so Allie motioned to the ocean, ‘We better go swim off the temptation then’.

Bea rolled her eyes at her cheekiness and followed her into the water.

Chapter End Notes

So what do you think, has Allie become delusional? She thinks they're dating :) albeit not exclusively but still dating.
Let me know if you think Allie ate some funny mushrooms.

HAPPY NEW YEAR EVERYONE! May you all be happy and healthy and successful in everything you do (unless you wanna destroy the world - in that case, please fail :)

The next day wasn’t so cheerful for Allie. For the first two hours she was fidgeting in her chair, frowning, sighing. Bea was trying not to react, but when the blonde switched from pen spinning to pen tapping on the table, she took out her headphones, put them in her ears and checked herself mentally out of the office. Any other day such annoying behaviour would have driven her crazy and she would have told the blonde to cut it off, but today she was in such a good mood that even Allie’s sulking couldn’t spoil it.

Her mindset was still tuned with their light-heartedness from last afternoon. She could still feel it all: sand under her bare feet, the splashing of water in her ears, Allie’s melodic voice calling out to her… From time to time she would dare closing her eyes for a few seconds and each time she would see Allie’s smiling face as she came out of the water for the last time last evening, the sun setting behind her back, its orange rays giving Allie’s blonde hair a warm glow. She walked towards Bea in her wet, red bikini, water drops dripping off her, and Bea could feel getting wet herself. Her face got so dangerously close as she pulled Bea up to her feet and, for one eternal moment, Bea lost herself in those blue eyes…

‘Boo!’ she was startled by a sudden shout into her ear. She turned her head to see Allie holding her right earpiece and bending towards her. ‘Lunchtime, nerd!’

She looked annoyed with Bea for having been ignoring her, but how could Bea be mad at her when the memory of her yesterday’s sweetness was so vivid in front of her eyes?

‘Hey, mischief’, she spoke softly, ‘what’s up your arse today?’

Allie went back to her desk and dropped into her chair, her face in her hands.

‘Nothing’, she sighed, ‘it’s me. I’m mad at myself.’

Bea was patiently waiting for her to elaborate.

‘I have so neglected my body; apart from taking strolls with you on Sundays, I’ve done no workout in years, and am in such a poor physical condition that a bit of swimming last afternoon really took a toll on me. I woke up with a severe muscle inflammation, my shoulders are so sore that they’ve been giving me a headache, it hurts me to sit, to stand, I can’t even turn my neck to the left’, Allie whined.

‘Did you take something for the pain?’ Bea asked.

‘Panafen Plus, I was just about to take another one’, Allie replied while searching through her purse.

‘How many did you have?’

‘Two at eight and one at eleven’, Allie’s face brightened up when she finally managed to find the blister. She started to pour some water into her glass, but then was surprised to see Bea getting up and pulling the tablets out of her hand.

‘You’ve had enough’, Bea said firmly. ‘Water you can drink.’

Allie flipped:
'Why are you being such a dickhead, Bea?! I need something. I called my masseuse half an hour ago and guess what? She can’t fit me in on such a short notice so those tablets are my only friends now, Bea.'

She propped herself a bit to pluck the blister out of Bea’s hands, but Bea was quicker.

'No’, she said pocketing the medicine, 'you’ve had enough.’

She moved behind pouting Allie and put her hands on her visibly stiff neck. Her fingers started moving in a circular motion, applying only a gentle pressure. After few minutes she moved to her shoulders. Allie's muscles were in spasm and it was clear that that couldn't be a product of only one day’s activity. She sits too much at this computer, Bea frowned, it's about time for her to start some sports if she wants to be able to move when she's sixty. But with Allie being in pain and nervous, it wasn't the time to be laying into her so Bea worked in silence. She could feel knots in Allie’s muscles and did her best to break them.

'Where did you learn to do this?’ she heard Allie asking after few minutes. It was only an incoherent mumble, but Bea could tell the grumpiness has left Allie's voice. Smiling, Bea rasped out:

'If you want to, you can come over after work for a proper massage.’

Allie half turned in her chair:

'Really?’ Her blue eyes were suddenly sparkling with joy.

'Sure’, Bea smiled, 'just make sure you wear some rags you won't feel sorry for when being ruined with massage oil.’

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Allie showed up shortly before six, wearing a short cotton dress of a washed out blue colour, which looked more like an oversized t-shirt, and thongs.

'It’s the oldest thing I’ve got’, she said to amused Bea.

'I believe you’, Bea smirked, 'you look like a true bogan.’

Allie smiled back thinking Bea didn't look much better in her three quarters cut-off jeans and a white a-shirt, then proceeded to the garage.

'Actually, I set it up over there’, Bea pointed towards the tent. She was just in process of examining her roses, sighing at the thought it will soon be the time to prune them. She inhaled their sweet, saturated smell one more time and followed Allie into the tent.

She found Allie standing at the entrance, admiring the sight. Bea had spread a thick doona across the grass and put a requisite basket next to it. She unhooked the tent curtains on each side so that they could remain in a closed space.

'Imagine you're somewhere in the Orient’, Bea chuckled.

'Not hard to do with all the trouble you went through’, Allie turned towards her. 'Thank you, Bea, for doing this for me.’

'Well, we can't have you in pain and cranky in client's meeting tomorrow, aye? I'd like us to keep our
jobs, y'know.'

Allie giggled but then remembered something and her face got serious.

'Sorry for being such a bitch this morning, Bea. I shouldn't have taken it out on you.'

'Long forgiven', Bea smiled, 'and it wasn't that bad so wipe that guilty puppy look off your face please.'

She shook Allie's face by her chin and as Allie lifted her eyes off the ground and looked at her with her innocent ocean blue pools, Bea could swear her heart stopped for a moment. A thought entered Bea's mind and she headed outside.

'Where are you going?' Allie asked anxiously.

Bea turned to look at her again.

'I'll be right back', she uttered, 'I'm just gunna lock the garden gate. I don't want anyone to see you.'

'Relax, no one's gunna come. And if someone would, we're closed away in a tent.'

She gripped Bea's arm to pull her back in, but Bea freed her arm gently and repeated, looking her directly in the eyes: 'I don't want anyone to see you.'

She sized up Allie's body with a look so darkened that Allie shivered, then disappeared into the outer world.

Bea came back to find Allie standing in the same lithified position, her expression soft and void of any of her usual mischief. Bea left her clogs at the entrance and approached Allie barefoot. She squatted in front of her, removing her thongs to the side. Not saying a word, her hands glided under her dress, up her thighs, until they reached the hem of her underwear. Allie could barely hold in a gasp, she looked down at the wild red mane and shuddered again. Bea hooked her fingers under her panties and pulled them slowly down, freeing one leg, then the other.

When she stood up, she could see Allie's look was glazed, almost lost in space and time - she didn't say anything, painfully aware that she wasn't faring much better. Remaining close and not looking away from those beautiful blue pools, she let her hands find the bottom of Allie's dress and pull it slowly over her head. When she dropped the dress onto the grass, their eyes remained firmly glued to each other’s and they both could feel their pulse quicken and a throb forming high between their legs.

It was only a week since she last saw Allie naked, but somehow it seemed too long. Her eyes yearned to lower themselves and rake all over her gorgeous body, but Bea didn't let them, knowing too well to what it would lead to, and she really wanted to help her heal and not take advantage.

Bea finally separated from the young woman and went to sit in the corner of the doona.

'Come here', she said in a hoarse voice.

Allie approached tentatively, still very much self-conscious, and sat in the middle of the white fabric.

'How do you feel?' Bea asked. 'Does your head still hurt?'

Allie nodded with a sad smile.

'But my neck feels much better since you massaged it’, she added gratefully.
'Have you taken any more medication since this morning?'

'No', Allie shook her head, 'you never returned them.'

'Well, they are right here', Bea took them out of the basket together with a bottle of water. 'You can have two for the headache.'

After Allie drank them, Bea took out a hair-band from the basket and moved behind Allie to tie her blond locks in a high bun.

'I stopped by after work to buy you this’, she pulled out a horse balm from the basket.

'What’s that?’ Allie asked curiously.

'It’s a warming gel for muscle pain and sprains. It will help you a lot, but it burns like hell first couple of minutes.’

'I can cope’, Allie said, laying herself down on the doona.

'Please turn around on your stomach’, Bea begged, desperate not to look any longer at those beautiful eyes, long neck, full breasts, that short-trimmed bush which seemed to have already been damped with arousal.

Luckily, Allie did as told, and Bea could feel her lungs finally filling with air, as she took a deep breath of relief.

First she applied the balm to Allie's neck and back, then wiped her hands clean and moved down to her feet, massaging her soles, while she waited for fifteen minutes burning effect on Allie's back to pass. Occasionally she would inadvertently tickle her, and each time she revelled in Allie's sweet giggle and wiggling of her cramped foot. God, you're adorable, she thought to herself, wishing nothing more than to be someone else, someone completely sane, with a sound mind and no hookups, who could simply say to this wonderful person: date me, go out with me, be my girlfriend. Just as simple as that. That someone would ask and Allie would give her reply.

Bea sighed. That someone could never be her. She's barely capable of taking care of herself. Imagine Allie saying yes to her, and instead of satisfying her sexual needs she would expect Bea to fulfill her emotional needs… imagine that chaos, when Bea's fear overwhelms her again, imagine the hurt in Allie's eyes when that fear pushes her away. I will never allow it, I will protect her from myself, Bea replied to her inner self, and I will protect me from breaking down. I am only here for her until she finds someone worthy of her, and nothing else. Taking a deep breath, Bea leant towards the basket again and took out some Indian incense sticks.

'They're of lavender aroma’, she said as she lit them, 'and the massage oil is also with lavender extracts’.

'Good’, Allie said dreamily, 'it smells nice, calming.’

Bea smiled down at her delicate figure, sense of protectiveness washing over her, suppressing her sexual needs. The wish to take care of the fragile blonde was so overwhelming that every other desire lost significance.

She put some oil on Allie's arms and legs, giggling together with her when her body stressed under the cool liquid. She worked on her arms first, then moved down to her long legs, making gentle circular movements from her ankles up. Bea took her time, seeing how much Allie relaxed and enjoyed it. When she reached the highest part of her thighs, Allie let out a moan that froze Bea's
movements. A minute later she continued without a word and Allie wasn't refraining from quiet moanings. When Bea's hands moved to massage her butt cheeks then her lower back, those moans became more loud and more frequent.

'Do you do that in your regular massage sessions too?' Bea rasped out.

'My regular massage sessions are nowhere this good, Bea', Allie whispered, 'and I also think I am allowed a certain freedom of expression when being taken care of by my lover.'

Bea thought about her words for a few seconds. What are they, indeed, if not lovers? She was painfully aware that they could never be girlfriends, friendship was certainly out of window, but they were so much more than fuck mates. This wasn't some root 'n' boot, they were kindred spirits, they enjoyed each other, they were lovers.

She straddled Allie's fresh looking butt cheeks and let her hands wander over to her achy shoulders.

'Then moan away, lovergirl', Bea laughed, 'It makes no difference - Franky and Bridget are in a theatre tonight'.

'Franky wouldn't mind anyway’, Allie chuckled into her fist.

'No, she wouldn't. But you would never survive the amount of her teasing. That could go on for years.'

After a long while, Allie got quiet beneath her and Bea realised she had fallen asleep. Her movements became even slower and gentler as she tried to crack into the last pain knots between Allie's shoulder blades and spine. When she couldn't feel them anymore, she got up off her, careful not to wake her and disappeared into the house to make some dinner. She had smoked oysters so she poured couple of cans into a deep plate. She washed some white grapes and took out two frozen yogurts for dessert. Allie was awake and stretching on the doona when Bea came back. The mere look at her, spread out with her frontside up, made Bea unwell.

'I'm not hungry’, Allie yawned.

Bea swallowed hard, averting her eyes.

'Well, you got to eat. You had a strong dose of medication so it's really not optional. Besides, I'm starving so I would appreciate company.’

At that, Allie pushed herself up into sitting position. Bea was kneeling beside her, placing the dishes on the doona. Allie took one of the oysters and brought it to Bea's mouth. When Bea didn't protest and ate, she was delighted to feed her another one then another one. Bea obviously agreed to play, because they kept taking turns in feeding each other, each grape berry being a rolling tease against plump lips before it found their mouth holes.

They laughed a lot at their antics, but once they moved each to own froyo, Bea found it a good opportunity to speak her mind.

'You've gotta do something about your fitness, Allie. You can't allow this to happen again.’

Allie shrugged her shoulders:

'What do you suggest?'

'Go swimming again tomorrow, and each day you can until season ends. Doesn't have to be long, a
half an hour a day would benefit you too, just keep it regular. Later you can start some aerobics, yoga, whatever appeals to you’.

'Hm’, Allie licked her teaspoon. ‘Would you come with me tomorrow?’

'If that's what it takes, then yes.’

Allie nodded.

'Come, lie down, I’ll work on your shoulders a bit more’, Bea offered.

'Okay, but I'll have to pee first.’

As Allie took off to the garage bathroom, Bea collected their dishes and brought them into the house. It was twenty to eight and Allie was so slender that her fingers didn't hurt at all so she figured she had enough time and strength for another massage round.

Having returned to the tent, she took her clogs off and stretched out, her hands above her head, as she noticed Allie approaching, carrying something in her hand.

Coming back from the bathroom, Allie was holding Bea's black dildo in one hand and couple of condoms in the other. Ignoring Bea's surprised look, she knelt in front of her, fastening the harness.

'I know you want tonight to be all about me and I appreciate it, but you have already helped me, Bea, I feel great and I would not think any less of you if you decide to do something for yourself too. I can tell you’ve been struggling the whole day long’, Allie shrugged her shoulders, 'the equipment is now here, the decision is yours.’

Bea was silent for a while then she uttered in a low voice:

'And do you want to?’

'I always want you, beautiful’, Allie smiled, 'I want you so bad that there is not a moment in my life when I would not welcome your touch.’

Bea felt a shiver running down her spine. She went to take some candles out of her basket, while Allie took a seat back on the doona. She placed the candles in the grass surrounding them and as she lit them, she turned to Allie with a shy smile: 'It’s getting dark’.

Allie whispered earnestly, 'Don’t be frightened. I will protect you from the monsters’.

Bea’s lower lip quivered at those words, she returned to Allie, turning her on her stomach, straddling her with her trembling thighs.

'You sweet girl’, she uttered into her ear, as she poured some lavender oil down her spine and her strong hands started massaging her loins.

Half an hour passed with Bea working tirelessly on her back and neck, her circular movements never changing into something more intimate, so Allie gave up hope of Bea accepting her offer, and decided to simply lie down and enjoy her touch without any expectations.

She was so relaxed under Bea's skilled touch that it took her a few moments to register when Bea's cock had entered her. She was trembling with anticipation while Bea's hands now rested around her waist. After a minute of immobility she felt Bea's right hand caressing down her spine, while her left cupped firmly her backside.
'You are so beautiful', she heard Bea mumble hoarsely, her voice so thick with desire that Allie could come just from the sound of it.

'And all yours’, she blurted out, at what Bea roared and thrusted into her.

Bea had a wish to indefinitely prolong that perfect encounter of their bodies so she took her time, moving inside Allie at excruciatingly slow speed. Her thighs were framing Allie's butt cheeks, rubbing against her smooth skin as she used her knees to push herself up and back down. She rocked gently into her, her hands relaxed down her sides so that she could move more freely. She kept a steady, slow pace for good fifteen minutes, until she heard Allie's weak voice calling out to her:

'Bea, please.’

Bea didn't change her rhythm, not for a second:

'Not yet’, she said in her usual curt manner and kept going.

Allie's face was all covered in sweat as she turned her head towards Bea, her eyes pleading:

'I'm dying here, Bea.’

Bea chuckled:

'You won't die, beautiful. It will only get better for you’, her short fingernails scratching along Allie's spine, 'you ever heard of tantric sex?’

'Aaahhh’, Allie groaned, her face falling back down in the doona, 'you've done that too?’

'No’, Bea chuckled, 'but I suddenly see the appeal.’

She removed her hand from Allie's back, keeping her arms again down her sides, wanting to stimulate Allie only with her cock and avoid exciting her further with any other touches or sensations. She wanted to build Allie's orgasm as slowly as possible and to enjoy the sight of her perfect body sweating beneath her for as long as possible.

After few more minutes Allie rolled her eyes back in her head and started letting out quiet moans. With each thrust Bea lifted her round butt cheeks up and with each pulling back they sunk into the doona. It was a beautiful game, and Bea's eyes couldn't get tired of the view. Candlelight reflected in the sweat drops on Allie's shoulders and arms and made her blond hair glow in the dark.

Bea picked up the pace only a bit, but it was enough for already overly excited Allie to shiver with her whole body.

'Bea’, she called out to her.

Her moans started to get more frequent and even though they were still low, Bea could hear the amount of pleasure they voiced.

That spurred her on, breaking her dams finally, so she leant forward, placing her elbows next to each side of Allie's neck. She slipped her underarms beneath Allie's head so that she can rest her head securely on them, preventing that her head would bang against the ground when she intensifies her thrusts. Her lips grazed blonde’s ear and both enjoyed Bea's heavy breathing into her auricle. She lifted Allie's head with her underarms, thus forcing her body to arch, with her stomach lying heavily on the ground but her backside going up in the air. Her thighs cupped that perfect backside, each thigh covering each cheek completely.
Her pelvis glued to Allie's backside, Bea started moving fast against her, stimulating her inner parts at what seemed a surreal pace. Allie started calling her name almost inaudibly, her breathing discontinuous, the sound of her voice dripping with pleasure. She repeated Bea's name like a chant as her climax was rapidly approaching, rubbing her face against Bea's forearms. Bea could feel Allie's inner walls tighten and contractions starting to take over her small body. She screamed as she orgasmed, the next second falling hard onto the ground and onto Bea's arms.

Bea didn't move off her, she continued her thrusts slowly, guiding Allie through her pleasure until she was fully spent. Then Bea pulled back out of her and lowered herself to the doona next to her trembling body.

They were lying there for a quarter of an hour, neither wanting to move.

'You okay?', Bea asked finally, brushing damped locks off Allie's face.

'Better than', Allie smiled sweetly. 'You? Got any joy out of your labour?'

'More than', Bea replied earnestly.

Allie found her phone next to the basket.

'It's quarter to nine', she sighed, 'I should get going.'

'You can take a shower in the garage before you leave, drink some tea while you dry', Bea offered.

Allie's face lit up, 'Gladly! I would hate my car seat getting all greasy and sweaty.'

Bea giggled getting up and offering Allie a hand.

'Headache gone?' she asked as blonde jumped up on her feet.

'Completely, can't thank you enough.'

Bea watched her going over to the silver birch, in front of which her dress was lying. She watched her bending over to pick up the dress and at that something in her snapped and in two long steps she was standing flush with the blonde, pressing her thin body against the birch, panting in her ear:

'I didn't have enough after all. Can we go again? Please Allie?'

Allie's heart was already pounding against her chest bone so she only managed to turn her head and nod ever so slightly.

Bea was trembling hard against her, but she still managed to compose herself enough to check upon her:

'Are you sure? I don't want to pressure you into something that you don't want.'

Allie managed to breathe out:

'Oh, Bea, I want to, I want it as much as you do.'

At that, Bea didn't need to restrain herself any longer. She slipped her hands under Allie's thighs and lifted her up. Allie hugged the tree and wound her legs around the thin bole.

'Sorry, tree', she laughed the words out, 'I guess you will get banged too.'
Bea laughed with her, as she carefully placed her black cock inside her.

'Don't apologise', she rambled, 'it's tree’s privilege to have such exquisite legs wrapped around it.'

'And you would know what tree feels?' Allie argued, as Bea made first tentative thrust.

'Mhm', Bea murmured into her ear, 'it's just told me.'

Allie laughed again, then asked mischievously:

'And you? Do you think I have nice legs?'

Bea took her time to answer, stilling her movements completely. After a short while she decided to be sincere:

'Everything about you is beautiful, Allie, inside and out.'

Allie teared up a bit on those words. She would want nothing more than to turn around and wrap herself in redhead’s embrace, but she knew she had to take only small steps each time with this troubled woman she loved so much.

'Show me’, she managed to blurt out finally, 'show me how much you like my body.'

Bea's fingers dug deeper into her thighs so Allie continued:

'What has turned you on so much today, Bea, hm?'

Bea felt her cheeks blushing profoundly.

'Yesterday’, she uttered shyly, 'your red bikini, your smile…’, her voice broke, but her pelvis unconsciously thrusted into the blonde.

'Is it so?' Allie moaned as Bea kept going in and out. 'You do good by me now and I may wear it tomorrow again.'

'You will?’ Bea grunted out, her limbs all sweaty, her hips in overdrive.

'I promise, beautiful, anything you want’, Allie meant it with all of her heart.

Bea got so excited remembering Allie's hardened nipples beneath the thin red fabric that she lifted Allie's body up, easy as if it was a feather, winding her arms around her knees, detaching her body from the tree, Allie's fingertips now barely holding onto its bark. She trusted into her with all she's got, both letting out synchronised yelps, until Allie screamed her name and collapsed into her embrace.

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A while later Bea entered the garage holding a silver platter with a teapot and two mugs, when her eyes stopped on naked Allie who was just leaving the bathroom, water dripping off her. Bea's hands started to tremble as her gaze followed one particularly brazen water drop that was shamelessly gliding down Allie's neck and over her right breast, stopping on the nipple, threatening to fall down each second.

'Fuck, fuck, fuck’, Bea uttered in frustration, trying to steady her hands enough to place the platter on
Allie smirked at her:

'Having some troubles there, Bea?'

Bea turned around to see her laughing at her state, not looking at least surprised or embarrassed:

'Ya little shit', she cursed, 'you've done it on purpose.'

'Maybe…', Allie's smile grew impossibly larger. 'What you're gunna do about it, huh?'

Bea's shaking hands started fumbling with a drawer knob, trembling so badly it took her time to open it. Taking out her only just cleaned dildo, she struggled to put a condom on it, an action which got Allie hyperventilating from laughter.

'Oh, you will pay for this', Bea threatened getting up after she fastened the harness above her jeans. She looked sinister enough, but Allie still joked around, knowing Bea would never hurt her.

'Oh yeah?', she dared her. 'Then you'll have to catch me first.'

Allie was quicker than usual, Bea thought as she chased her around the room. When she finally caught her, she pulled her towards herself, both falling into the sofa, laughing. Their laughter eventually subsided, Allie tucked blonde strands behind her ear, in order to see the other woman properly.

'I didn't do it to tease you, Bea', she whispered face to face, 'I need to feel you again, please, there's nothing waiting for me at home, all I need is here.'

Moved beyond words, Bea still knew this was the type of conversation she should avoid at all costs with Allie, so she was quick to lift herself up and move behind Allie's back.

'Lie down', she said simply, cutting short the emotional part of the conversation. Allie turned slowly on her stomach and laid her face down on one side so that she could still catch a glimpse of Bea.

Bea placed her left hand on the sofa next to Allie's hip, as if she was gunna do some pushups, and her right hand on Allie's lower back. She started riding her smooth arse in a steady pace, penetrating her deep, as each time she was going all the way to the hilt and then pulling back until it was almost out. Allie moaned out sweet nothings to her, of which Bea could understand only 'you feel so good, baby' and occasional ‘don't stop’. She felt her own wetness dripping inside her jeans, as she listened to her incoherent half-words, half-shrieks.

'I need, I need…', she heard Allie trying to form a sentence, her thoughts a mess under Bea's relentless movement.

'What do you need, sweetheart?' Bea asked softly as she slowed down her thrusting and moved her hand from Allie's waist to tuck her messed up locks behind her ear.

'In the tent…', Allie managed to choke out. 'I really liked what you did to me in the tent.'

Having understood, Bea gasped from overwhelming excitement, and leant into Allie, slipping her arms underneath her beautiful head. She lifted her upper body, exactly as she did it before outside, so that Allie could arch back into her front, and clenched her thighs around Allie's buttocks. Once in the desired position, she went at it like a rabbit, feeling half-crazy from the state this woman could bring her into. Her teeth bit into Allie's earlobe, and Allie screamed, but it was a scream of passion and not
pain. Once she started screaming Bea's name, she couldn't stop it for the world, because that was the favourite word in her dictionary. Redhead was so close to her, her arms holding her, her breasts thrusting into her back, her lips keep grazing her ear as she gibbered, 'Allie, Allie, come for me, sweety.'

Allie kept fighting her accumulated desire, struggling to stay longer close to the redhead who held her heart:

'Not yet, not yet', she panted out, 'stay with me, stay with me.'

Bea couldn't figure out why Allie was fighting against her approaching climax, seeing her beautiful features almost in pain. Whatever it was, she needed to put a stop to it, for the blonde's sake, so she freed her right hand and lifted Allie's right leg slightly off the sofa. Her left hand sneaked to play with Allie's nipple, while her right hand caressed her mound, all the while her thrusts keeping their fast rhythm. Allie's screams pitched even higher and as soon as Bea found her clit and rubbed her fingers against it, she stiffened then started to shake, as the strongest orgasm she's ever had has been ripping through her body. She let her leg fall down when Bea removed her hand and cried, her small body wrapped into Bea's embrace.

'Don't cry, Allie', Bea repeated helplessly, 'your headache will be back.'

'Don't worry, Bea, these are good tears', Allie smiled through her sobs. 'Thank you', she added in a low voice, placing a kiss into Bea's open palm. Allie scolded herself for the injudicious act, as she was momentarily punished when spooked out Bea untangled herself from her limbs and got up.

'It's getting late', Bea said in a quivering voice. She went inside and brought a robe back to Allie:

'Please make sure to wear this before you leave the bathroom, unless you want us both to call in sick tomorrow.'

Allie took the offered robe and sighed, 'If it wasn't for the client's meeting tomorrow, there would be nothing I'd rather do than to pretend sick with you and make love all day.'

'Fuck, you mean', Bea corrected her in a coarse tone.

'Fuck', Allie repeated, but that sounded ridiculous coming out of her innocent mouth.

What am I doing with her, what? Bea was asking herself in despair while Allie took another shower. Each time Allie needed her she couldn't refrain from being there for her and each time Allie was settled she felt the same fear creeping into her soul, fear of connection.

Allie didn't speak when she came out. Bea had brought the blow-dryer and brushes so she started drying Allie's hair, styling it into a fancy hairdo.

'My own personal stylist', Allie gushed out from the bathroom, as she went in to look herself in the mirror, 'I like it.'

Bea still wasn't speaking so she drank her tea silently after she came out of the bathroom, her blue eyes never leaving the brown ones, who seemed so lost in their own world.

Drinking her tea, Bea didn't even notice her gaze raking over Allie's body. When she finally realised, she felt ashamed and dropped her gaze to the floor. Robe or not, this situation clearly wasn't working for her.

Aware that Allie had caught her staring, she stood up and braved herself into facing her.
'I better go inside the house’, she sighed. ‘If you’d have to take another shower, your skin would fall off.’

Allie also stood up and Bea smiled at her apologetically:

‘You better dress in privacy. Good night, Allie.’

She turned to walk away, but Allie’s soft voice called out to her, stopping her in her tracks. She faced her blue orbs again:

‘Yes, Allie?’

‘Why don’t you let me do the same for you? No touching, no kissing, I promise. Only helping you out. Only fucking, I promise. Just to extinguish that fire that bothers you so much that you feel you can’t get enough.’

Her hand reached out, her blue eyes pleaded sincerely.

Bea shuddered, knowing that that fire was never there until she met Allie. Fucking other girls for couple of minutes was always enough to bring her relief.

And that thought scared her more than anything.

‘Please don’t touch me, Allie’, she stepped back.

‘I’ll never do anything you don’t want me to, beautiful’, Allie stepped back herself, ‘good night’.

After Bea disappeared into her house, Allie got dressed, took her phone and the horse balm Bea’d advised her to apply twice a day, and turned off the lights. She pressed the button to garage door, getting under the already closing down doors, and waiting outside until they were completely shut. She wanted to make sure Bea was safe in there. She followed the brick path lighting her way with her phone’s flashlight. It was eleven o’clock already.

Didn’t Bea say she had locked the gate, she spooked a bit, but as she stepped outside the wall, it became clear to her, as her eyes fell on a lone figure leaning against the wall.

Knowing better than to approach her in the dark, Allie unlocked her car and turned on its headlamps. Then she got out again and got nearer to the smiling redhead.

How well does she know me already, Bea thought to herself.

‘Hello again’, blue eyes smiled at her.

‘Hello’, she rasped out, ‘and goodbye until I see you tomorrow.’

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Bea was sitting in the client’s meeting, pretending to listen, but actually in her own world, letting Allie give the whole report on the street promotion they had undertaken that week. She leant back in her chair watching the blonde stand in front of a PowerPoint presentation, letting her mind go into the gutter. What she did to her last night, the curves of her body, her glistening under the candlelight… Then her voice, oh God, as she called out her name…
Allie was squirming on her feet, her eyes squinting at Bea couple of times to stop it, but Bea only continued to undress her with her brazen gaze, almost bringing Allie to the point of implosion.

'Have you lost your mind?' she hissed at Bea in a low voice, as they headed towards her car in the busy garage. 'I can't believe Mrs Rodgers didn't notice anything, we could have been so fucked.'

Bea stopped as they reached their car:

'You know what? I'm not even going to deny it.' She shrugged her shoulders: 'Be mad or not, your choice.'

***

Once in the clear, Allie wasn't mad anymore, and by the time Bea drove her out on her bike that arvo, to find a secluded beach just outside Melbourne, she couldn't even remember who Mrs Rodgers was.

They swam for an hour, no one around them but seagulls, then Bea took Allie's hand and led her out of the water.

Allie silently followed, feeling the desire already rising in her. Reaching the rocks where they'd left their stuff, she stopped, turning towards Bea, her hands going up to untie the straps on her upper piece.

'Leave the bikini on', Bea said in a raw voice.

'That much you like it?' she asked shyly.

Bea could only nod, both of their cheeks blushing.

Allie's chest was visibly heaving and sinking. It felt like the first time, regardless of their last night's antics.

Bea took her dildo out of her jacket, fastened the harness over her black wetsuit and knelt on the sand:

'Come here', she whispered, Allie lowering herself in front of her. They were behind the rock, if in a less probable case someone wanders into this God forsaken beach, but they could still see enough to enjoy the sunset.

Bea's fingers found their way into her bikini bra, as she positioned herself behind her. She usually avoided touching Allie's breasts, given the emotions those touches always threatened to evoke in her, but looking at her tiny bikini the whole afternoon, she just couldn't help herself. She kneaded them passionately, Allie muffling her moans with her fist.

Bea’s right hand soon reached for her briefs, pushing their thong-like string to the side and entering her with a loud exhalation of relief.

Her hand returned to her breast to join the other, lifting the bra up so she could have a free access. She moved her hands and hips in synchronisation, losing herself in the smell of Allie's wet hair. There was not a trace of tantric this evening, Bea was like a storm, rushing Allie's orgasm with the
urgency of an approaching hurricane.

Allie eventually fell on her hands, as Bea was riding her through her orgasm and when she collapsed into the sand, she was so grateful she still had her panties on. She needed to wash up sand anyway so they headed into the ocean one more time, swimming closely to each other, looking into each other's eyes.

Allie's hand reached for Bea's.

She guided her hand into her panties, her blue eyes sparkling in the orange sunset as she said:

'Touch me again, like yesterday.'

And again Bea couldn't say no, suppressing the thought that her antics with Allie were so often going against her strict rules.

Her fingers found Allie's clit fast, she gasped as she felt thick juices left from her orgasm.

Looking into Allie's eyes, she swam even closer to her, her lips never smiled, her fingers never stopped rubbing.

Allie let out a small, terrified shriek, as she came so quickly she didn't even realise it was happening.

The sun was setting down fast so Bea took her by her hand out of the water and drove her to her house. Allie headed towards her car, but Bea lifted her in her arms, and carried her to the tent, doona still being there, since Bea had no time that morning to bring it inside the house. She lit the candles again and stripped Allie out of her wet clothes, then went into the house, changed into dry jeans and a singlet. She came back to Allie, holding a red blanket.

'It's my favourite’, she whispered as she lay down on Allie's back and threw the blanket above them.

'Tired?' she asked, her hand removing blonde locks from Allie's forehead.

Allie shook her head and smiled, turning her head up to see Bea who was fiddling with her harness.

'Good’, the redhead whispered, and let her cock glide into the supple flesh.

It was half past two when Bea finally allowed Allie to drive home, the blonde exhausted and happy, falling asleep as soon as her head touched her pillow; Bea on the other hand lying awake in her bed until the sun came up and it was time for her to pick up Melissa and catch their flight to Newcastle.

Chapter End Notes

If among my readers are any who are also fans of Clexa, I would like to recommend this work of an extremely gifted author:
https://archiveofourown.org/works/16392794/chapters/38371109

And its continuation:
https://archiveofourown.org/works/16776880/chapters/39368713

It's an excellent read by any standards.
A Warm Autumn

Chapter Notes

Sorry all for being a day late. I just couldn't make it before.

This chapter was highly influenced by your comments and hopes from the last time so I hope that you will recognise your suggestions and let me know what you think of their realisations.

@Doxi: Sorry, honey, it's not time yet.

@new girls: Welcome aboard!

The week in which Allie and Bea held their street promotion was left to be known in Bea’s head as ‘the week I lost my mind’.

More often than not she kept seeing Allie after work: she took her to soccer games, she swam with her, jogged with her on Sundays, even joined her in her shopping spree with Regan once. However, she confined their swimming sessions to the beach in front of her home, always full of people, and kept inviting Franky and Bridget to join them.

Allie soon realised that Bea had put a ban on their sexual activities and no matter how much she teased her in the beginning, Bea didn’t cave. So Allie gave up trying and enjoyed whatever attention Bea showered her with. She wasn’t in it for sex anyway, no matter how good it felt, she just wanted Bea to be by her side.

Three weeks of April passed by really quickly. Bea had already designed sixty six rooms, each of them different, each of them finding approval in the client’s meeting.

‘You should see them, Paul’, Allie gushed one evening when Paul took her out to dinner to catch up, ‘they’re eating out her hand. I’m so proud of her’.

‘You are, aren’t you?’ Paul lifted his gaze to examine her face carefully. ‘You like her that much?’

‘I love her’, Allie said simply. ‘Wouldn’t have left you for anything less than that.’

Paul nodded.

‘Did you tell her that?’ he asked, to which Allie only shook her head.

‘Still more friends than girlfriends?’ he questioned, digging into his steak again.

Allie only sighed and turned her attention to her plate.

‘One of these days you’ll have to make it official, Allie. Otherwise you’ll stay friendzoned forever.’

‘She’s still not ready’, Allie sighed again.

‘And she never will be’, Paul managed to squeeze the words in between his chews, ‘not unless you give her a push into the right direction’.
When Allie put her fork down and sunk into her wine, Paul abandoned his steak too. Having wiped his mouth, he focused his attention solely on Allie, covering her hand with his.

‘Trust me, Allie, I’ve had my share of psychology lessons at uni, and I can tell you you can’t just sit back and let it slide. Love like you feel it right now comes perhaps once in a lifetime, you can’t just give up, you gotta fight for her.’

Allie squeezed his hand. ‘I am so sorry, Paul. Sorry I didn’t love you like that and sorry I didn’t realise it sooner. You should be hating my guts now’, she teared up, ‘yet you are here, holding my hand while I pine after another’.

‘Hey, hey, hey, no tears’, he wiped her cheekbone with his thumb. ‘I hold no grudges. We tried, we had a good run, I don’t regret any of it. We were best mates before the engagement and sure as hell nothing will change that. You will be my best mate even when our teeth start falling out because of the old age, aye, cricket, what d’ya say?’

Allie smiled to the nickname he gave her long time ago at campus, because she ‘always blabbed something, never shutting up like a bloody cricket’. He stopped calling her that after they got together so him picking up the nickname again, after two years, was a signal for her that from now on he only sees her as a friend.

‘Best mates, Dumbo’, she teased back, having had nicknames of her own.

He laughed out loud, ‘That’s an old one. Now tell me’, he asked returning to his steak, ‘what was my crazy mother up to this week?’

Allie spoke to her twice in the last few days - remembering the calls, she almost choked on her wine: ‘She got incurably ill thinking you will never get your specialty then was miraculously healed two days later after you finally decided upon pediatric surgery and enrolled in the program.’

Paul joined her laughter and they chatted the evening away, talking about everything and nothing.

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Later that evening Allie was lying alone in her king-size bed, thinking about the advice Paul gave her. She reckoned Paul was right when saying she ought to fight for Bea, but in the same time wrong about the way she should be keeping up that fight. She felt Bea’s needs and moods to her very soul and being aggressive and pushy was not what Bea needed. Bea needed patience and tenderness. She needed understanding and time. And Allie devoted herself to giving her just that. That didn’t mean Allie was settling for less - as she saw it, she was fighting for Bea by being reliable and endurant. She was trying to become a safe harbour for Bea, she wanted Bea to know she would never hurt her or let anyone else hurt her again.

It was hard though, she wasn’t gunna lie to herself. Bea was around her constantly, but has not even fleetly touched her for three weeks now. Allie gave up their friendship for a sexual relationship, hoping that would lead one day to something more, but she found herself now in having neither.

She felt that she had lost so much by losing Bea’s friendship. They were never honestly friends though, they have formed a firm bond right from the start, from that first day Allie walked in into Bea’s office and their eyes got locked forever. ‘Being friends’ was however such a convenient excuse to allow themselves to be closer than two peas in a pod. It was still vivid in Allie’s mind how Bea used to hug her all the time and kiss her cheek hello and goodbye, how she herself was free to
wrestle Bea down while running together or wrap her arms around Bea’s knees when they shared a bench. She often remembered the day Bea cut her hair and sank in her lap, letting her kiss her eyes and cheekbones. Those memories always made her feel all warm inside and she regularly asked herself whether she has made a mistake by leaving the familiar shore. But she still knew it couldn’t have lasted forever.

She repeated herself that she was a woman on a mission, a mission to help the person she loved find herself again, enjoy life again, but still it felt ridiculous sometimes. She wasn’t even allowed to hold the redhead’s hand anymore - that was just ludicrous when you considerate how many times before they walked hand in hand, how often they intertwined their fingers: over the table, under the table, any chance they got really; and now she had to wait whether Bea was gunna show as much mercy or weakness to take her by the hand. Which she didn’t do, by the way, not even once, in the last three weeks and that was driving Allie crazy. It especially bothered her seeing Bea sharing hugs and kisses all around, while she always came out empty-handed.

The other evening she snapped at Franky for no reason at all, except Franky unconsciously playing with Bea’s left hand at the poker table. The five women were sitting at Boomer’s, sipping on their beers, seemingly laughing and enjoying their evening together. Under the smiling surface, Allie was so nervous, Bea wasn’t paying much attention to her. She wasn’t jealous but she felt so deprived of Bea’s affection. She almost hated Booms for a second there when the brunette thought she saw through Bridget’s bluff and bet all in only to be left penniless and gobsmacked, which wasn’t so bad because they played for coins really, but still Bea put her arm around Boom’s broad shoulders and sweetly kissed her cheek. And then Franky had to start playing with Bea's fingers again. When Bea got up and went to the toilet, Allie shot Franky a deadly glare, hissing, ‘Do you really have to play with her fingers the whole night?!’

Franky almost choked on her beer from surprise, going in mere seconds from a tame kitten cuddled securely into Bridget's side to a full-grown puma, with her fur standing up, ready to attack.

‘Went bananas much, Blondie?!’ she hissed back. ‘For fuck's sake I haven't even realised that I was doing it. Don't tell me you're jealous! There's nothing to be jealous about, Bea is like a sister to me. You don't see Gidge getting jealous, do ya?’

'I'm not jealous’, Allie pouted. 'I know you two are like sisters.’

'Then there's no reason to rip my bloody head off, ay?!”

Bridget stroked down Franky's back, as if she wanted to groom her spiked puma hair. That seemed to have instantly calmed Franky down and she was now eyeballing the distressed Allie with a look more curious and observant than angry.

‘What you've been overlooking, darling’, Bridget spoke in a gentle voice, ‘is that our Allie here isn't allowed anymore to touch Bea, not even in the most chaste of ways...’

'Shit! Really, Al?!” Boomer interrupted, looking at her friend with disbelief.

Allie nodded her head slightly, smiling sadly.

'...so what you've been doing, innocently enough though, was to Allie like you were parading around with the one thing she can't have’, Bridget finished her thought.

Franky's face filled with compassion, ‘Sorry, mate, didn't realise. I told you you would have to put up with a lot of shit if you wanted to get involved with the ice queen over there.’
‘She will get better’, Allie said courageously.

‘She must’, Bridget teared up.

‘Aww, who needs huggies from her best Booms?’ the large brunette melted, wrapping Allie in a bone crushing embrace, at what all four women burst into laughter.

‘What did I miss?’ Bea smiled coming back into the lounge. ‘What’s so funny?’

‘Nah’, Franky said, ‘impossible to retell. It’s just one of those things where you had to be there.’

Allie threw a grateful look at Franky, her spirit lifted significantly.

The next hand Allie got really involved in the game, for the first time that evening, so she played it pretty good until the other three women folded and she found herself raising her bet at Bea. Bea followed suit and took another card from the deck. She appraised Allie's face, Allie seemed confident enough. ‘Show me your cards’, she rasped out.

Allie placed four tens on the table, flashing a victorious smile at Bea.

‘Bah!’ Bea started collecting the cards off the table. ‘I fold. You win, Goldilocks’, she grumbled.

‘Yay!’ Boomer exclaimed, hugging Allie again. ‘You kicked arse, Al!’

Three neighbours started to gather their belongings, calling it in for the night. Bridget was the designated driver, since she didn't really enjoy beer and to her it was no sacrifice to pass on it for the evening.

Allie was staying a bit to help Booms clean. Bridget pulled her into a goodbye hug and whispered into her ear, 'You know she had five jacks, right?'

Allie threw a stunned look over Bridget's shoulder at the unsuspecting redhead, waiting just outside the door on her friends. Bea caught her glance and her expression softened immediately, giving the blonde the warmest smile.

‘She cares about you’, Bridget cupped her face, 'I know it's tough, but you hang in there, okay?’

‘Okay’, Allie nodded and kissed Bridget's cheek.

She glanced over at Bea again and just like that, every trouble was worth it again, just to see redhead happy and smiling like that.

‘Who am I kidding?’ Allie mumbled in the confinement of her dark bedroom. ‘I couldn't leave her if I tried.’

She sighed, remembering how difficult it was for her back on Easter to go through three and a half days of Bea's visit to her cousin in Newcastle. They texted each other every couple of hours, yet she still missed the redhead so dearly that she couldn't imagine how it would hurt if they were to be separated permanently.

She woke up on Easter morning to a video call from the redhead. For a moment there, she didn't know where she was. It was barely seven o’clock.

‘Beeaa’, she accepted the call, falling back down into the pillows. The other woman just smiled, waiting for her to gather her thoughts. Allie rubbed her crusty eyes and tried to focus her gaze at the face on the screen.
'Happy Easter, sleepyhead’, the redhead's voice came rasping from the speaker.

'Happy Easter’, Allie yawned. 'Why are you up so early? Is that a beach behind you?’

'I thought I might have a walk while it's still peaceful’, the redhead smiled again. 'Anyhow, I just wanted to be the first to wish you a happy holiday.’

'That you certainly are’, Allie said softly, 'all other people I know are still in la-la land’.

'Sorry to have woken you’, Bea said apologetically, almost succeeding to sound sincere. She must have known at this hour she would most definitely wake the blonde.

'Make it worth it’, Allie replied, hugging her pillow and tugging it under her head.

So the early bird on the other side of the camera spent the next hour giving her the virtual tour of Newcastle shoreside, while the blonde was lying securely wrapped in her warm blanket, taking it all in like a sponge.

Easter Monday she was standing at the airport waiting on an evening flight from Newcastle to land. Melissa had Easter break until April tenth, so she was staying with her parents for another two weeks and Bea was flying back alone.

As soon as their eyes locked, Bea's lips parted into the warmest smile Allie has ever seen. She could tell just by that first look that Bea has missed her and the warmth passed onto her like an infection, spreading throughout her chest and coursing through her veins. Bea just stood in front of her ineptly, not ready to kiss or hug her, but obviously clueless what else she could do to greet her. To spare her further embarrassment, Allie took her suitcase and started dragging it towards her car. When they arrived to Bea's, Bea invited her to the lounge in her garage for a drink, but Allie asked her to give her the gate key instead, close her eyes and wait in the car. Bea complied, sitting there for good fifteen minutes, listening to the radio, until Allie finally came to invite her out. When Bea entered the gazebo in her garden, where Allie had in the meantime set up the table with dinner she brought out of the boot of her car, it was her smile again that revealed to Allie that she had hit the nail on the head with her surprise. Allie had spent the afternoon cooking and baking. It helped her to shorten the wait on the redhead, and in the same time she really felt the need to feed her with products of her own hands rather than impersonal takeout food. Out of obvious reasons, she chose meals best served cold: a zucchini lasagna casserole with farmer cheese and caramel slices for dessert. She had brought her own plates and cutlery so that everything can be perfect when Bea sees it. She had placed a vase with tulips together with several scented pillar candles on one end of the table, and their plates on the other end of the table so that they can sit together. That morning she had made a playlist on her phone, which was now placed between the candles and a slow, faint music was playing out of its speaker, as Bea stood there taking it all in. Allie could see she was overwhelmed, but in a good way. She looked like she didn’t know what to say, her cheeks matching the colour of her hair, her smile more bashful than ever before. So once again Allie made it easy for her, taking her chair out as a silent invite for her to sit. 'You don't have to say anything’, she whispered over Bea's shoulder while tucking her chair in, 'I wanted to cook for you today so just humour me’. Bea smiled at her again as Allie was taking her seat next to her, a relief washing over Allie after this going well so far. She kept the conversation light throughout dinner, talking about both of their families, doing her best not to make the atmosphere romantic, in spite of the romantic setting all around them. She was rewarded by Bea totally relaxing in her presence and asking her to stay a bit after dinner too. So far Allie has learnt that every time she would back off a little, Bea would chase after her a little, so she wasn't really surprised by Bea's proposition. She insisted that she packed the dirty dishes into her basket though, as she didn't want any frivolous work to spoil the rest of their evening. While she was bringing the basket into her car boot, Bea has brought out her red blanket out of the house. They
both sat on the padded bench in the gazebo, the blanket wrapped tightly around them. It was sixteen degrees outside and Allie felt the blanket was quite excessive, but she never said anything, as she liked the nearness of Bea under it. She tried to keep the same casual conversation afloat, but soon she noticed that Bea's eyes were getting heavy. She had been up half the night talking to Charles, both not being sure how many months would pass until they see each other again.

‘I better get going’, she said, ‘it's clearly bedtime for you’.

'Don't go’, Bea said, suddenly shifting towards her and snuggling against her shoulder, 'wake me up in an hour'.

Three weeks have passed since then and Allie could still clearly feel how strongly her heart was beating in that moment when Bea let her cheek rest against her shoulder. She didn't dare moving cause she knew too well if she tried anything, Bea would spook and the magic would be broken.

'Okay’, she whispered, inhaling the heavenly coconut smell off Bea's hair.

'Allie’, Bea spoke out to her after couple of minutes.

'Mhm’, she heard herself reply lazily.

'Would you mind singing to me?’

Allie felt suddenly becoming quite awake. 'Of course not’, she managed to choke out, her heart rate going through the roof.

Taking a minute to calm down, she started singing 'This moment' by Melissa Etheridge. She knew that was a risky move, but she couldn't sing anything else. This song was fitting so perfectly with that evening and it was all Allie could hear inside of herself. It was to her like all other music seized to exist and that song was her only choice. She sang as far as she could finish the first chorus, her voice breaking off under the weight of her emotions.

'You remember’, Bea murmured before she completely drifted off, her head heavy on Allie's shoulder.

Yes, she remembered, she remembered everything, every little detail. What amazed her though, filling her with much needed confidence, was that Bea just confessed that she remembered too, the tone of her voice underlying that that memory clearly meant something to her too.

Around half past ten Allie woke her up gently. She was careful not to touch her and to wake her only with her voice, but the poor thing still startled, causing the blanket to fall under the bench. She looked at Allie with fear that broke her heart once again for the redhead, until her gaze finally focused in the bright light of thick candles and a trace of recognition emerged in her big, dark pupils.

'Oh, it's you’, she said with relief.

'It's only me’, Allie blinked compassionately.

'You must think me an idiot’, Bea said sadly, gathering her blanket, eyes full of tears when she got up, holding the blanket in her arms like a comfort object.

'I may not know everything, but I understand you, Bea’, Allie replied honestly, taking one of the candles off the table. 'Let me walk you home.'

Hearing her gentle reply, Bea seemed to become slightly less embarrassed, and she nodded to accept
her offer. Allie pocketed her phone and car keys, then walked with the redhead up her driveway until they reached her veranda. Bea unlocked the door then turned back to look at Allie.

'Thank you for an amazing welcome home', she said warmly.

Allie only smiled, letting Bea know it was her pleasure, and turned to walk away. She knew Bea's eyes were still following her, she could feel her gaze burning her skin with its warmth.

It was a warmth that came to life in Bea that evening and seemed to follow Allie wherever she went and whatever she did throughout April. Bea's dark eyes glistened whenever they met her blue ones, and Allie could see a true joy shining through them. She never seemed to lose the newfound softness of her voice when she spoke to Allie, not even after her phone rang last Monday during their office hours and Paul's picture flashed on the screen for them both to see. She was quite uncomfortable answering that call in front of Bea, but still wouldn't think of missing it, not the first time he was reaching out in months. She moved away from Bea, but Bea could still hear her every word. As much as she tried she couldn't hide the joy in her voice of speaking with him again. He made clear from the start he was calling at business hours to make sure Bea would be present during conversation, stating that he 'doesn't want to seem to be doing anything behind Bea's back'. He invited her to dinner, strictly as friends and to catch up, and as she accepted, she noticed a flinch of Bea's shoulders, her head sinking so low she almost touched her drawing pad.

There was a long and uncomfortable silence after she hung up. Bea was still clinging to her drawing, but her fingers never moved.

'Would you look at me?' Allie uttered at last, her heart not at capacity to endure more of the reticence. 'He only wants to meet as a friend, he doesn't have a secret agenda.'

Bea lifted her head slowly, braving herself into meeting Allie's gaze. 'I'm not jealous', she spat out and added within the same breath, 'if it was up to me you two would be honeymooning on Hawaii right now'.

Allie felt a sudden anger rising in her. Not that pathetic talk again! Not after everything that happened between them and changed them both forever.

'Oh, really?!' she retorted ironically, before she could stop to weigh her words. 'I can see it too: Two of us lying on a Hawaiian beach, Paul heavily on top of me, his hands kneading my breasts, his penis deep inside of me…'

'Stop it!' Bea's voice came across sharp but more sad than angry.

'Then don't talk shit you don't mean', Allie’s gaze was still stern. 'Cause what I’ve just described was the same thing you were propositioning.'

'I only wish the best for you', Bea's voice was now dripping with sadness.

'Let me decide what's best for me', Allie said gently, crossing the room and trying to stroke Bea's hair, her first attempt at it in more than a month.

'Don't touch me’, Bea successfully escaped her caress. *You're nothing to me*, she tried to add, but those words just wouldn't leave her mouth. She tried again, she tried so hard to push something repellent through her lips, but looking at those susceptible blue eyes, she just couldn't lie to them.

'I'll stop talking shit’, she said quietly, her conformity surprising Allie.

'If you truly want what's best for me’, she spoke softly to Bea, 'you'll start seeing a therapist again
and try to make it work between us’.

Bea stood up, her eyes full of tears. She was shaking her head, as she tried to find her way to the door, before Allie see her break.

Half an hour later she was back in the office, not showing any signs of her previous distraught. She was even sweeter to Allie than before, as if she wanted to convey how sorry she was that she couldn't provide what they both needed.

And here she was, lying in her lone bed three days later, remembering and contemplating it all, trying to gather strength from the random recollections of Bea's increasing fondness, a strength to surpass this period of incredible carnal longing, a feeling of physical abandonment her lover subjected her to.

She knew this was the time when Bea was taking her ten steps back for eleven steps progress she'd previously made - Bridget warned her that will happen - and she could only hope it would pass soon. She knew Bea has lost control of her actions in the week when they held their street promotion and was now terrified to what it might lead them if she touched her again. She knew Bea needed time to recuperate after such an overwhelming experience, but a hug now and then would make the whole wait so much easier. Why couldn't she get at least that much?

She sighed, seeing her alarm clock changing digits to three a.m. Tanner called her the previous morning, requesting her presence at Rock Island on a Friday interview of candidates for two positions of professional tour guides of the resort. Since the hotel building has been recently finished and now they were working on the interior and the facade, they've been meaning anyway to head there soon enough to take pictures and videos and update their website and social networks, so Bea agreed to come with her the next Friday. She was a proud owner of a professional camera and hoped to take great photographs.

Allie knew she shouldn't have her hopes high, but she just couldn't help it. Two of them, back on their island, she dared to hope, and couldn't wait for Friday to arrive.
So here it is - the longest chapter in the book so far. Hopefully worth the wait…

I wanted not to burden you with this, but things being as they are and me obviously beginning to slip and lose control over my updates, I'm left with no other way out but to inform you I have to undergo a surgery in less than a month. It should be routine, it should be benign and it should free me of the tiny nuisance that cause me severe pains all the time and occasional bleeding like in the last few days. To calm down my vanity, I was promised it should leave only a barely visible scar on my belly. So I'm actually looking forward to it. But I need to build my immune system up and combined with the exams for my professional development I ought to take in April it probably means I will have to ease down with this story in the upcoming couple of months. Please don't be disappointed, I know the story is fiercely picking up steam and the anxiety level is high, but try to be patient if you want it to come out good. I cannot write the same quality if I'm exhausted.

Thus saying, or rather having to explain, can I please ask you not to comment on my health and exams, I don't want to talk about it - I'm just gonna do it; please comment on the contents of this chapter as I have put a lot of effort into it.

Friday six o'clock Bea was standing on the bow of the ferry, as they were leaving Melbourne behind them and heading towards another adventure on the fairylike island.

Allie was watching her from the side, admiring her long, dark red locks, that kept flying back in the breeze. She looked like she hadn't quite woken yet, sunglasses up her nose, an inertness to her demeanor so atypical for her. Her tight all-black outfit made her look even smaller and more fragile.

Allie knew what it was down to. In the last month and a half Bea was working herself to the bone: she's put such a pressure on herself to design the rooms as fast as she could. As a result, she's accomplished so far quite more than anyone was expecting or asking of her, she was far ahead of her schedule, and in the process has completely worn herself out. That needed to change, Allie had made up her mind yesterday afternoon watching the redhead barely being able to hold onto her drawing pad. Next week at the office she was gunna put her foot down and have a serious conversation with Bea. No one was pressuring her and she could even ask for an assistant if she wanted to. There was no need to run herself into the ground. Allie needed to make clear Bea has to chill out a bit and from now on work at a more relaxed pace. It was her plan to make the best use of the warm autumn weather by doing frequent street promotions throughout May and she fully intended to drag Bea with her into the fresh air and not allow her to do anything tiresome during. The girl needed to forget about work and have a little fun. Fun was something Allie was hoping they will get out of this weekend. They will have to work through Saturday though, but as compensation, they've got a day off next week, Tuesday to be precise, since Monday April 25th was Anzac Day and national holiday. So they booked their accommodation until Wednesday morning, when they will catch the 5.30 ferry and head straight to their office.

Allie had initially booked two rooms in the same hotel they were staying at the last time, but Bea
made her cancel it and rent them a flat via Airbnb. She told her she wasn't in the mood to endure Tanner's presence any more than necessary, actually that she wanted to avoid anyone's presence except hers and Maxi's. 'You should not get any romantic ideas now’, she stressed out, ‘nor sexual, for that matter. I shan't even bring my dildo. I need to recuperate. I want to keep things simple this weekend, just you and me, avoiding the fuss and ceremonies of the big hotels.’

Allie was glad that Bea seemed to have understood that she needed to gather her strength and she liked the idea of the two of them isolating themselves in a flat. Bea could’ve as easily rented a flat for herself only and leave Allie at the hotel - the fact that she didn't confirmed Allie what she already knew: that Bea has never found it strange or tiresome to be in Allie's company, she could relax in her presence as well as when she was alone, or better.

Around seven Bea’s grumpiness has left her and they shared some pastry Allie’d bought for breakfast and two cans of iced coffee. When they arrived to Little Rock, Bea was already in a good mood, and upon seeing the friendly town again, her face shone like a sun. The flat Bea booked them was in a very quiet street by the shore, four tram stops or thirty minutes walk from tourist attractions downtown. Allie kept looking at Bea’s face for impressions so she first saw the flat through her eyes. When she saw them glisten and those lips part widely, she released the breath she didn't know she was holding and started to look around herself.

The flat was even cuter than in the pictures. All rooms and furniture were miniature, except for beds and the sofa, which were all of a luxurious size. They had a bedroom each, a shared bathroom, an open-spaced lounge with kitchen and adjoining balcony overlooking the Tasman sea. Everything was clean and their wardrobes were equipped with fresh towels and bedding. It was ideal for five-day stay.

'T'm gunna love it here!' Allie exclaimed.

'Yeah, me too’, Bea rasped out, going out into the balcony and inhaling salty sea air.

Allie sighed in content seeing her happy again and suggested that Bea stayed to unpack and relax, look around the town a bit if she wanted to.

'T'm gunna change and leave soon, as Tanner and I are starting interviews at eleven, but there is no need for you to sit through them. We'll finish until three so the two of us can meet for a late lunch, aye?'

Bea agreed with relief so Allie headed to her room to change and put some makeup on.

The candidates were mostly very good. They were all BAs or MAs in Biology and with a similar profile: young people from Melbourne or Hobart who only recently graduated and were liking the prospects of moving to an exotic island for their first job. Only one candidate was from Little Rock: an experienced middle school science teacher who was willing to give up the job he loved for a better paycheck before he retires. Based on their credentials, they were all highly qualified and the trick was to choose one amongst them who would prove to have best people and narrative skills and would enjoy the job the most.

After three hours of interviews Allie and Tanner sat down alone to discuss their impressions. They narrowed it down to four candidates who will pass to second round, one of them being the old teacher. The second round was to take place tomorrow on the Rock Island - it was field work and candidates were to improvise a tour around the island for Allie, Bea, Tanner and couple of people from Little Rock Tanner hired to participate and play tourists.

After they'd informed the candidates about their decision, Allie checked her phone and was happy to
read Bea was already waiting on her at a nearby restaurant. She was hungry as hell and already craving to see the redhead.

Bea on the other hand had a lazy midday. After Allie left, she took an one-hour nap, then went to the grocery store around the corner and bought them some drinks and food to have around the house just in case they don't always feel like going out for breakfast or dinner. Then she unpacked and took a relaxing bath. Around half past one she put an emerald green dress on and applied a discreet green eyeshade and dark red lipstick. She let her long hair down, and put on green sandals and clutch bag to match her dress. She looked herself in the mirror before she left the flat - for the first time in weeks she was happy with what she saw. Just knowing that she won't be facing all the stress for the next five days was doing her good, and having Allie as a companion was truly making her happy. That girl always knew her way around Bea, she was sweet to her, she was so patient and, above all, she was a joy to have around - always cheerful, always witty.

She headed downtown on foot, wanting to see as much of the charming town as she could. She took her time, stopping by every store window that caught her eye, taking a good look at each old building with an interesting architecture. She has brought her full-frame digital camera with her and she wasn't refraining of stopping to snap a photo when she felt like it.

At quarter to three she took a seat in a restaurant in the Main Street and ordered right away. She knew Allie would be hungry by now and wouldn't want to keep her waiting on food when she arrives. She killed the little time until the blonde showed up daydreaming about her and couldn't be happier when she finally saw her approaching.

Allie's jaw dropped when she saw Bea dressed up like that. She looked like a whole other person than that tired figure she left in the flat that morning.

'Aren't you a sight for sore eyes’, she exclaimed as she was taking her seat, 'you look quite revitalised!'

'It did me good, the break from work you granted me’, Bea said gratefully. 'I took a nap and dallied around the house. I feel good as new.'

'I'm glad. And you look beautiful’, Allie blinked at her dotingl. She observed Bea's cheeks turning red instantly and it made her even more lovely. She knew she shouldn't take Bea's hand, but she really felt the need to touch her in that moment, so instead she placed her hand on the table next to Bea's so that their pinkies almost connected. Bea understood her intentions and she gasped a little. She was in awe of Allie being so considerate of her wishes and fears and, if she had any remnants of trepidation that at some point Allie was gunna force herself anew through her barriers, they left her in that moment for good. Allie understood her now and was never gunna hurt her again. She smiled another grateful smile at her wonderful companion and then they started eating.

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Maxi's baby was one adorable chubby chap. He was loud, he was demanding of attention and Bea had to tie up her hair to keep it out of his sticky hands, but the girls just loved him.

Throughout last two months since little Morgan came into the world Maxi has been sending them both photos of the baby regularly. Bea was a little surprised that Maxi was putting such an effort to stay in touch with a person she only met once, and eventually she asked her about it.
‘You have hots for her so I'm really trying to get on her good side in time - y'know, before you two hit that honeymoon, “forget about friends for a while”, phase.’

‘I don't have hots for her!’ Bea protested.

‘That's the vibe I'm picking up!’ Maxine laughed down the line so heartedly that Bea didn't dare mention Allie in their phone conversations again.

She could see it now too, that appraising look in Maxi's eyes, trying to figure out what was happening between her and Allie. Bea was doing her best to avoid Maxi’s concerned gaze.

‘Why don’t you open the gifts we brought Morgan?’ she suggested, desperately trying to avert Maxi’s attention off her business. As Maxi opened the gifts, she had to be careful not to give away that she didn't have a clue what was in it. Allie did the shopping for her too. As much as Bea loved Maxi and wanted to buy a present herself, she wouldn't, couldn't buy baby's stuff. She even asked Allie to keep the present in her house.

So when Maxi got up, wanting to gather all the wrapping paper and take it out of her lounge, Bea suddenly found herself in a horror of Maxi simply putting the infant into her arms.

‘I cannot hold him, Maxi! I know nothing about holding a baby!’ she shouted in panic.

‘You're doing alright, hon’, Maxi retorted unconcernedly and left the room.

But Allie could see through her right away, she knew Bea and she knew that look. Bea was about to go off the deep end. She swiftly stood up and took the child from her, sitting away from the shaken redhead. Little Morgan, who could sense Bea's tension, was just about to cry, but once in Allie's arms, feeling her gentle rocking and looking at her smiling face, he quickly came around. He was cooing some sounds to Allie that only made sense to him, but Allie seemed to quite enjoy them.

‘So, you were babysitting a lot in your youth, or what?’ Bea tried to start a conversation, to make the atmosphere less awkward after her freak-out.

‘No, this is actually the first time I'm holding a baby’, Allie replied, her eyes still glued to the little face.

‘Then you are a friggin’ natural’, Bea mumbled a bit sourly.

‘Now, come on’, Allie winked, 'don't be like that. I can hold ya too like this later, if y’wanna’.

Knowing that Allie was only kidding, Bea burst out laughing, and both Allie and Morgan laughed with her too. And with that, Bea's feelings of panic completely disappeared. Bea looked at the blonde with affection - she really had a gift to make everything better.

Maxi returned with a cake for her guests and Fletcher came home from work soon so they all spent another hour in a pleasant and truly friendly conversation.

Before calling it in for the evening, the four of them agreed to have dinner at ‘Fletcher's Tavern’ on Monday. Hugging her goodbye, Maxine whispered into Bea's ear, 'And Allie? You go for it!' She cupped Bea's cheek looking half-pleadingly into her eyes, and even though Bea had no intention to pursue Allie romantically, she couldn't bring herself to argue with the kindness of Maxi's heart and for a second there she felt hope for herself.

It was eight o'clock and the two women have had a long day. They decided to grab only a quick bite and head straight to their flat. It was nine when they arrived, Allie suggesting that Bea should go
shower first, given that she looked tired again.

Bea brought the change of clothes into the bathroom with her, decisive to keep boundaries between them this weekend exactly where they were so far, but when Allie got out her room naked and headed straight for the shower, Bea didn't exactly spook. It wasn't only the fact that she has seen the blonde naked quite a few times before, but it was more of Allie's attitude that kept Bea calm. Allie got out in a towel, relaxing in the lounge armchair and drinking a glass of milk while she dried. Bea could clearly see she didn't have any intentions to seduce her, she wasn't teasing, she was just feeling comfortable in Bea's presence like in a married couple so old they aren't physically fit to have sex anymore, but still are affectionate and intimate enough to be naked in front of each other. Bea had to admit, she liked Allie's frame of mind towards this matter and she accepted Allie's lack of bodily shyness as naturally as Allie was acting on it.

Besides, she loved looking at Allie's perfect form. It was like a present Allie was giving her and wasn't expecting anything in return.

'I've seen you unpacked my suitcase too’, Allie said curiously when Bea joined her in the lounge.

'I thought it would be a nice thing to do for ya’, Bea uttered confusedly, 'did I cross the line…?’

'No, no’, Allie hurried to reassure her, 'I was so happy when I opened my wardrobe and saw my clothes neatly laid out for me. I’m glad I don't have to do it myself tonight, after the day we had, so thank you.’

Bea returned her smile and approached her to take the wet towel off her head. She dabbed gently with it against Allie's forehead. 'Want me to do your hair?’

'Yes, please’, Allie said gratefully. 'But don't overdo it. You have to get a good night's rest.’

Bea nodded and went to fetch a blow dryer and a round brush.

It turned out, there weren't any night lamps by their bedsides so Allie flicked on the light in the hall between their rooms and the bathroom and Bea left her door open. Most nights she could sleep well in the darkness, but that was only when she knew she was securely locked in her house and certain that she was alone. Sharing a flat, she wasn't afraid of Allie, she was afraid for Allie, more precisely that she could harm her if she startled from her sleep and didn't recognise her right away. Bea knew it was in her nature to attack first and ask questions later so she had to leave the light on in order to be able to identify Allie fast and thus protect her from herself. Furthermore, it were the sounds made by another person in the darkness, even if as innocent as simple turning in bed or breathing during sleep, that brought back her trauma and she wanted to avoid facing her memories again.

'I'll leave my door open too’, Allie said considerately, 'so if you need anything, you can just shout out to me’.

And this was exactly why Bea was so convinced, when she booked via Airbnb, that she would be able to share accommodations with Allie and actually enjoy it. Allie seemed to know what Bea needed without having to ask and it made the redhead feel secure and unpressurised in her presence. 'Sweet Allie’, was the last thought on her mind before she succumbed to sleep.
'Okay, guys, one of you will come with us giving us a tour and the remaining three will stay here at
the meeting point’, Allie clarified after they'd left the boat which drove them all to Rock Island.

Tanner was particularly overbearing that morning, but seeing Bea smiling broadly under the bright
sun that shone upon their favourite island, Allie felt she could deal with Tanner, the hired control
group and ten dragons on the side, and still keep her spirits high. Bea had a fedora hat on to match
her tight nature explorer outfit and Allie could never avert her eyes for long.

The first tour was given by Cynthia, Allie's mild favourite after the yesterday's interviews.
Unfortunately, she proved to be a disappointment. She was very knowledgeable and seemed like a
truly nice person, but she had absolutely no talent to transfer her knowledge to others. She was only
enumerating the facts, the tone of her voice dull. Allie could imagine the youngster as a lab worker
one day, but not as a teacher, not as a tour guide. She looked at the faces of the control group,
everybody looked bored - they scribbled down their impressions on the first candidate in the survey
papers Tanner handed them earlier even before the tour reached its halftime, and Allie had no
illusions those could be favorable for Cynthia.

Bea was the only one not looking bored to death. She showed her practical side by using time to take
photographs they needed to update Rock Island website and social networks. And they were
beautiful photographs indeed.

'Sweetheart, just concentrate on nature itself’, Bea whispered to Allie when she caught her breaking
from the herd, 'look around us - it's fucking beautiful’.

Bea was right. Neither of them has previously been inside of the island and it was a whole new
world waiting for them to discover it.

The heart of the island were small forests, separated by clearings and glades. As the second
candidate, the old teacher Stan, explained to them, forests with tall, silver, straight-boled trees were
blackwood forests and those which constituted of shorter, white trees were dry eucalypt forests. He
taught them how to differ between bracken, shrubs, grasses and sedges and about various animals
and plants they've encountered.

'Oh my God, koalas!' a lady from the group exclaimed excitedly. Based on their accent, Allie
concluded that she and her husband were not Australians so it was probably the first time that they
were encountered with that species.

'I thought koalas are not found in the wild in Tasmania?’ Allie asked in wonder.

'That's the thing about this island’, the old teacher grinned, 'it's not as wild as one would think.
Geographically it is located between Victoria and Tasmania and originally it was inhabited by
species found in both states. But the island being isolated and in private ownership since before
modern laws, all dangerous animals were thoroughly exterminated centuries ago, especially snakes,
tarantulas and redback spiders. The nobles here had foresters in their service whose main duty was to
locate potential threats to the owners and their kids and kill them or burn them on spot. It was a
savage thing to do, from our perspective, but ironically enough, that's what made this island a tourist
paradise it is today. At the same time, the owners populated the island with several species they
imported from Victoria and even from Europe, just because they thought they were cute. Most of
them failed to adjust to a new climate, but some of them did so next to koalas you can encounter
European rabbit, wild duck, native brown quail, pheasant…’

'If rabbits are the biggest animals on this island, how come the island is not totally infested by them?’
one of the tourists wanted to know.
'Good question, mister', Stan smiled. 'Luckily, they are the primary food to grey goshawk and Tasmanian masked owl so they never get to bread fast enough to become a pest.'

'What are the other birds to be found here, Stan?' another lady asked.

As Stan explained all about eastern rosella, satin flycatcher, superb fairywren, scarlet and dusky robin, as well as various kinds of parrots, Allie observed in satisfaction how the tourists listened intently. Stan was her man, she was sure of it.

Exiting the final forest before the rocky side of the island, Stan halted to show them a clearing behind the last trees.

'Behold! Rose bushes!' he motioned.

Allie heard a loud gasp behind her back and she didn't even need to turn around to see it was Bea. Bea hurried to examine the roses closely, her dark eyes glistening with joy.

'Don't you have those in abundance at home?!!' Allie laughed wholeheartedly.

'Never enough’, Bea laughed back, her face shining under her brown hat. Allie shook her head in disbelief, melting on the spot.

'One of the mistresses of this island shared our Bea's passion for roses too’, Stan explained, 'in fact so much that she planted them all over the island - every woodedge you can find dozen of those bushes, in various colours too.’

As soon as Bea could part from her favourite plants, the group proceeded towards the rocks on the shore. The terrain in forests was flatland, but as further as they left the forests behind, the more climbs and steep descents they had to master.

Allie noticed how somewhat obese Stan was breathing harder and harder and by the time the group has reached the rocks on the shore, he has fallen a couple of hundred metres behind and sat down to rest. Allie stayed with him, making sure he was alright.

'My job would be to guide on this trail every day?' he asked Allie after he caught his breath. 'It seems never-ending!'

'Actually, a guide should make four tours a day’, Allie replied sympathetically. 'It's an eight-hour job, with one-hour rest between the morning tours and two-hour lunch break before the final tour for the day.’

'Then I have wasted your time, child’, Stan shook his head sadly, 'even this one tour is much more strenuous than I thought’.

'My time is all but wasted, sir’, Allie smiled warmly, 'and those guys over there already adore you. You must be a great teacher.’

Stan smiled himself, 'So I've been told. Pity it isn't paid better. I have only few more years until retirement so with this job being paid hundred grand a year I could have saved up more.’

When they joined the others on the shore, Stan pointed at giant rocks before them.

'This is from where the island got its name. The legend says those rocks are visited by supernatural creatures at night - some folks in Little Rock say they're ghosts, some say they're fairies or mermaids even. Now, as a man of science, I don't believe in that kind of superstition, but the historically
interesting fact was that all the previous owners did and it was recorded that all family members and stuff were forbidden to approach this part of the island.'

'I'd bet you a twenty there'd been at least one couple of servants who had their fun there undisturbedly’, Allie chuckled into Bea's ear.

'You've been spending way too much time with Franky’, the redhead whispered back, trying to cover her smile behind her long locks.

They came back to the meeting point using the shore cycle path. This novelty on the island surprised both Bea and Allie, but as Tanner proudly explained, one of the first things after the construction work started was to asphalt a cycle and walking trail all around the island and also through its centre in shape of a cross. All asphalted trails are well-lit all night. That way 'South Star' ensured no guest can get lost and activities were at their disposal 24/7. There will also be electric bikes and kick scooters with zero-emission available for rent so that the seniors can sightsee all parts of the island.

Stan could probably use one of those right now, Allie sighed in disappointment. How pity that his body couldn't keep up with his brain.

They made a two-hour break before the next tour. Tanner has prearranged lunch for all participants in the recently built hotel and the catering service from Little Rock showed up in time. The building was still no more than edifice with bare walls and holes for windows and doors, but Allie had to admit, even so unfinished, it looked magnificent. After Bea took enough photos of the exterior, she and Allie broke even further from the group to wander around the floors. Bea wanted to visit every room, every hall. She wanted to get the sense of space and see the view from each window and balcony.

'Come on, your designs are already as perfect as it gets, now it's time for you to eat’, Allie had to drag her down the stairs. When they reached the lobby again, Allie headed straight to the room that was planned to be a restaurant later and was now equipped with a dining table and chairs the catering company brought with them, but Bea stopped her in her tracks, by putting her hands on her shoulders and turning her towards herself.

'This is where we danced all those months ago.'

Allie looked around in astonishment, 'Could you believe it! Here?'

'On this very spot’. Bea smiled coyly, 'I think I'll redesign the pattern of the lobby floor. I'll add a big rose here under our feet to mark the moment in stone.’

Allie's face lost all colour. She turned and started to walk away.

'Wait!' Bea called out, stopping her once again. 'Did I say something wrong?'

Allie only blinked at her, her chest visibly heaving and sinking.

'Allie', Bea said pleadingly, a pain to her voice.

'You said nothing wrong, Bea’, Allie finally sighed out, 'you said something helplessly romantic, something which makes me wanna kiss you on that very spot where that rose will be.’ Bea blushed and flinched in the same time so Allie placatory continued, 'But as I'm aware that is not an option, I have no other choice but to walk away.’

Bea followed her sheepishly to the restaurant, regretting her imprudent babble.
The candidate who ought to give the fourth and last tour for the day - Emery - sat herself next to Allie at the dining table. She was noticeably pleasant and flattering to the other woman and paid no attention to her neighbour on the right. Bea firstly thought it was some lame attempt to suck up to the boss, but soon she realised Emery was actually flirting. Bea was firstly astonished, since Emery was only a child - she couldn't have been older than twenty two - but then she remembered Allie was only twenty six: a fact that seemed to have slipped her mind in the last couple of months. Well, you're only thirty four, she said to herself, it's not much of a difference between you two. It is, compared to Emery, another voice in her head answered. The main problem, a third voice interfered, is not your age, Bea, but the fact that you're suffering of an incurable trauma and are only dragging Allie down with you. Did you really say to her that you will carve your moment in stone, you selfish cow?! Release the poor girl, you fucktard! the self-loathing voice screamed at her.

Allie on the other hand was sitting as on needles. She couldn't believe Emery was so forward, and she fretted what Bea might think. She didn't want anything to spoil their getaway weekend. She reduced her answers to the young brunette to a bare minimum and prayed that Bea doesn't freak out.

The third tour passed by in a blink. Jared, the third candidate, was handsome and silver-tongued, and the women in the control group clearly found him easy on the eyes. But many times he failed to identify a plant or a bird and, in her head, Allie crossed him off her list. She was really surprised, as Jared had the best grades besides Cynthia, but clearly failed to convert theoretical into practical knowledge.

Emery turned out to be able to give Stan a run for his money. She was charming, eloquent, friendly and easygoing, and when she lectured, she gave the impression of an expert with a lot of field work behind her. Allie remembered that in her CV a lot of volunteering field work across Australia was mentioned. It was actually why Allie chose her to pass into the final round so she asked her to tell more about it. Emery then explained she spent each uni break helping save endangered species or replanting areas previously swallowed by fire. Allie must admit it was an admirable thing to do, especially being a young person, who could have spent her holidays partying away with her friends. Emery knew nothing about the history of the island, like Stan did, but it was understandable, since this was the first time she sat foot on it, and it was nothing she couldn't learn. Her approach to her tour guests was more interactive than a rather frontal tutorial Stan exhibited, and she encouraged people to discover and observe things on their own. The control group responded really well to her modus operandi and when they reached the shore by the rocks and she was finishing her presentation, they all had big smiles on their faces. Emery did not know anything about the fairies or mermaids, but she did tell them the interesting fact of dolphins preferring to visit this side of the shore.

As they walked the asphalt trail back to the hotel, Emery tried to side with Allie. After her attempts to strike a conversation with the blonde have failed, she started walking next to Bea, who was falling a bit behind the group.

Bea asked her various questions about the animals they'd seen earlier in the forest and the young woman answered them all patiently. It is funny, Bea thought, when she drags herself around in her Chuck Taylor shoes, she looks like a teen, but when she opens her mouth to speak, she suddenly transforms into Carl Linnaeus.

Taking advantage of the pause in Bea's stream of curious questions, Emery swooped in one of her own:

'So… you and the boss, are you a thing or what?'

Bea couldn't say she wasn't expecting an inquiry about Allie, but she certainly wasn't expecting that
sort of question.

'First of all, she's not technically my boss, we're equals, even though as far as you're concerned, she is in charge of the project. Secondly, no, we're not together. Why would you ask that?'

'Dunno, you two seem really close. Is she dating anyone then?'

Bea swallowed hard. The girl could be good for Allie.

'No, she's single.'

'Do you think I have a shot?'

Bea's chest was hurting as she draw in the air into her lungs.

'I don't see why not. You're smart, you're cute, witty. You're clearly an expert in your field. In fact, you know what? You kinda remind me of her.'

'Well, thank you!' the girl threw a radiating smile at her. 'Glad you're not interested though. I wouldn't stand a chance.'

Bea closed her eyes for a second, a feeling of own inadequacy overflooding her.

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After they returned the ferry to Little Rock, they paid off the tourists and informed the candidates they are going to meet them at their hotel for dinner at eight o'clock, by when the decision will be made who will get the job. The dinner and their three-day stay at the five star hotel in Little Rock were paid by 'South Star' so even the candidates who will lose, mustn't feel disappointed with their weekend, given they were paid all expenses in an exclusive holiday resort.

Allie asked Tanner and Bea for a short meeting in the hotel lounge.

'So what do you guys think?' Allie asked.

'It's your decision, Al', Tanner said flatly. 'Mr. Johnson has given you the full authority on this one.'

'I know', Allie retorted. 'I only ask for your opinion.'

'Alright then', Tanner said, 'I'd go with Stan or Emery'.

'Ditto', Bea agreed with Tanner.

'Stan folded', Allie informed them with a sigh. 'It appears he's not up to the physical challenge.'

'Pity', Tanner said, 'I like the old guy. Then it's settled on Emery, right?'

'I'm not so sure about her', Allie shook her head.

Tanner raised his eyebrows in wonder, but didn't protest, aware that Allie had the final say on this matter.

'Let's see what the surveys say', Bea grabbed the pile of papers.

They read all the surveys together, and apart from one guy who appreciated Cynthia's expertise, they
all clearly favoured Emery and Stan. Emery even more so.

'I'll think about it', Allie said as the women raised themselves to leave. 'We'll see you at eight, T.'

'What is there to think about?' Bea asked the blonde an hour and a half later, joining her on the balcony of their flat and handing her a mug of freshly made coffee.

'Thanks, Bea, I need that’, Allie said gratefully, sipping carefully from the hot mug. 'I dunno, I just don't like her.'

Bea sat down in a lounger beside Allie, 'She's pretty, energetic, she's definitely smart and, so far we can see, she seems like a decent person. It's unlike you to dismiss a person just like that.'

Allie sighed, her eyes everywhere but on Bea. 'It's… I don't want her to cause trouble, alright?’

'Trouble?' Bea raised her eyebrows.

Allie gulped, 'Y'know… between us.’

'There is no us, Allie', Bea said as gentle as she could. 'We agreed on keeping this thing going until you heal a bit and find better. You should gradually detach from me and move on, thus leaving us only friends.’

'Is this why we haven't been having any sex, Bea, huh? You're trying to “gradually detach”? Allie scoffed, a bitterness to her voice.

Bea stood up and got on her knees in front of Allie's lounger. She took Allie's head between her palms, forcing her to look her straight in the eye. It was the first time in a month that she's actually touched the blonde.

'Now listen to me’, Bea emphasized every word, ‘you could have so much more than just sex, you deserve so much more. And who knows? Maybe even with this girl. You won't know until you try. Would it be so terrible, Allie? A coffee, dinner, one simple date? No one is pressuring you for more. Just start going to dates, no obligation, one-time thing, until you click with someone. Aye?’

Allie pulled out her head out of Bea's grip. Her blue eyes were both full of storm and tears. Bea got up and leaned on the balustrade.

'The candidates who didn't make it to final round are still in Little Rock, their accommodations are paid until Monday’, Allie said after a while. 'And most of them were more than good, it was really a tough call. I will look into their CVs again, right now, and ring some of them to organise another tour tomorrow, until we find the right person.’

Bea drank up her coffee.

'We've already found the right person. That girl won fair and square, Allie, and you know it. Can you not keep the business part separated from your personal feelings towards her? You don't have to date her, but don't you harm her career just because she couldn't help but get a genuine little feeling for you.’

Allie looked straight ahead, appearing somewhat shamed, but still very stubborn.

'I'm heading off to have a shower and dress up for dinner’, Bea announced as she headed inside. 'You deliberate your decision. You're not a petty person.’
Bea was right, Allie wasn't a petty person. But sitting on that balcony, what she felt for Emery was so similar to hatred. In few hours that she knew her she has already succeeded to cause a drift between Bea and her.

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To Bea's surprise, while waiting on after-dinner cocktails to be served, the-whole-afternoon-sulking Allie announced Emery as a winner. As Allie stepped around the table to congratulate her, Emery thanked her and pulled her into a hug, ignoring her stretched out hand.

Allie seemed highly uncomfortable, and hurried over to Stan, taking him to the side. She thanked him for his wonderful performance and asked whether he would be interested in a part-time job.

'I was thinking’, Allie elaborated, 'Emery will have weekends off. Maybe you could give a tour or two on Saturday mornings, not around the whole island, but choose a trail of your liking, one that you can handle at your pace. I would want you to give Emery lessons in history of the island. You could also specialise in touring senior citizens, the whole group using e-scooters. That way you could keep your teaching job that you love so much, and earn decent money on the side. Does that combination sound appealing to you?'

'It sounds wonderful, Miss Novak’, Stan excitedly shook her hand, 'thank you for thinking of it’.

'No need to thank me, sir. Your set of skills and knowledge will be a valuable asset to our tourist offer. But, please, call me Allie.’

'Only if you call me Stan’, he smiled broadly.

'Deal… Stan’, Allie shook his hand again, then went to find Bea.

Bea was having a very enjoyable conversation with the other two youngsters: Cynthia and Jared. As suspected, they weren't feeling too bummed about not getting the job. Jared felt that he didn't really deserve it, but was grateful that he didn't really deserve it, and was grateful that he realised what skills he has been missing so that he could work on bettering himself. Cynthia came to acceptance that she wasn't cut out to work with people: she wasn't enjoying herself at all today and couldn't imagine having to do it every single day, even if her job would be on a paradise island. She planned to concentrate on scientific research from now on. They asked Bea whether she and Allie would join them in a nightclub across the street after the official part of the evening was done with. They checked out the club a bit last night and they liked it a lot, pity they couldn't have stayed for long, wanting to be fresh for today's tour. Bea agreed to go, suspecting Allie wouldn't mind either.

'I wouldn't mind what?’ Allie asked, approaching the little group with a big smile on her face.

'Going dancing with us later’, Bea rasped out, happy to see Allie wasn't sulking any longer.

'I wouldn't mind dancing with you’, Allie's eyes darkened, sizing Bea's figure up in such a way that it made the other two uncomfortable and they excused themselves to get another drink.

Allie told Bea about the offer she made to Stan.

'I'm so proud of you, Allie’, Bea gushed out, 'for figuring out that opportunity for Stan, and especially, for treating Emery fairly.’
Allie blushed a bit under the compliment. 'It took me long enough to come to my senses’, she admitted bashfully. 'Luckily I had you to keep me honest.'

'It's all good now’, Bea smiled at her so broadly that for a few minutes all the other sights and sounds around them - just faded.

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The whole bunch but Stan headed across the street into the dance club. There was quite a queue at the door and, as they were waiting in line, Emery worked her way to get to stand between Allie and Bea.

'I wanted to thank you again for the opportunity you entrusted me with’, she said to Allie, then added in a low voice that she wasn't meant for Bea to catch, but the redhead did anyway, ‘On the whole other subject, I wanted to ask you, me being in Melbourne for a whole month before I will have to move to Little Rock, would you perhaps consider going out on a dinner-date with me?’

Bea choked on her own saliva. This girl obviously knew what she wanted and wasn't shy of going after it.

Allie was totally caught off guard. 'That w-wouldn't be app-appropriate’, she stuttered eventually, 'we w-work together now’.

Bea rolled her eyes. Totally hypocritical.

'I already asked Tanner about it’, Emery was quick to answer, 'and he said “South Star Hotels” have no don't-date-a-coworker policy, as long as that relationship doesn't affect their work’.

'Alright then’, Allie turned towards Emery, a sudden firmness to her voice, 'that was a nice way for me to say that I'm not interested in you like that’.

Emery appeared stricken, but pulled herself together quickly and said, ‘You don't have to decide right away. My offer stands until you get to know me better.’

Finally passing through security, they entered the club, a slightly taken aback Emery disappearing swiftly into the crowd, chasing after the other three group members who went ahead.

As Allie wanted to follow them, she felt Bea grabbing her wrist and pulling her back.

'What are you doing?’ Bea hissed through her teeth. 'Haven't we agreed just this arvo that you would do a healthy thing and start dating again?!'

'You made that plan on your own’, Allie spit back. ‘I never agreed to that. I have my mind set on you and absolutely no interest in frolicking on the side.’

'Allie, Allie’, Bea grabbed at own hair in despair, 'I will call our whole arrangement off, I won't let you go down with me, y'hear?!'

'You hear me, Bea Smith’, Allie raised her voice enough to overcome the loudness of the music, 'you need to stop belittling yourself and stop offering me around. This is my choice to make, not yours. Why do you think everyone else is more worthy of me than you?’

She took a deep breath to calm down a bit. Staring at Bea's pained eyes, she dared cupping her both
cheeks into her palms.

'You are worthy, Bea; you are worth the trouble, you are worth the wait. You are the best person I know’, even though she couldn't quite see them in the dark club, she could feel Bea's hot tears flowing into her palms, 'I choose you. And I'll wait what it takes for you to choose me back.’

Bea was staring at her feet, her tears rolling freely down her cheeks, as Allie stroked her hair for comfort.

'Bea… you are precious’, she let down a kiss onto her forehead, causing Bea to finally look up. Allie wasn't sure how it happened, it was all so quick, but in one moment Bea was staring into her blue eyes and in another she was holding her so tightly in her embrace like she wanted to suck her inside herself. Before she closed her eyes, Allie vaguely noticed a watch on the wrist of a guy who danced very close by, flashing its fluorescent hands in front of her face. The hands of the clock were showing ten fifty five, as perfectly aligned as they always were during so many significant moments with Bea. You are my destiny, Allie thought, while returning the hug as wholeheartedly as it gets.

They stood like that for minutes, Bea still shaking in her arms. It was like no one and nothing existed except the two of them. Allie didn't hear the music, didn't mind the crowd. The only sound that mattered was that quiet sobbing into her ear.

Eventually, Bea rasped out into her ear, 'I need to clear my head, I need to go’. Before Allie could react, Bea kissed her temple and fought her way through the crowd and into the street.

Allie hurried after her, but by the time she managed to exit, Bea was nowhere to be seen. Allie's gaze searched in all directions, but in vain. She spent another hour walking the nearby streets in search of the redhead. At midnight, overstrung and exhausted, she took a taxi home, hoping that by now Bea might have returned into the flat.

Their place was cold and dark. Allie flicked on all the lights and searched all the rooms, but no sign of Bea. She went to the bathroom to freshen up and remove her makeup. Then she helplessly dragged herself into the lounge. She set on the sofa, determined to wait up. Even though she was confident that Bea could take care of herself, she couldn't help but worry. She knew Bea had made a little progress that evening and now was the time for her to freak out. When she comes to her senses and returns home, Allie wanted to make sure she will be right there and welcoming, so that Bea knows Allie understands and doesn't hold it against her.

Yes, she wanted to be there for Bea, but alas in no more than half an hour the excitement of the day caught up with her and - she fell asleep.

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Allie stirred from what it appeared to be a nightmare. For a moment there her startled eyes wandered around, not recognising the lounge. Then she realised she was lying in her rental bed, the small room quite illuminated by the light coming from the hall.

Bea! she felt the panic rise inside and as she wanted to jump out of her bed, her eyes caught the sight of the source of her worries, sitting on the floor in the middle of the room.

‘You’re back’, Allie croaked out.
'Sorry if I gave you the fright', Bea said sheepishly, 'I just… I…'

'Hush', Allie said, getting out of the bed to squat beside the other woman, 'I get it. It's alright.'

'I didn't want to wake you', Bea kept apologising.

'You didn't. I had a nightmare.' Allie suddenly realised her pants and silk top are gone and she was sitting there wearing nothing but undies and a t-shirt. 'Did you change my clothes?'

'I carried you to bed', Bea shrugged her shoulders. 'I couldn't let you sleep in your evening clothes so I found the fresh undergarments in your wardrobe. I reckoned you wouldn't mind. It's nothing I haven't seen already.'

'I don't mind', Allie said warmly, 'I was just wondering. What time is it anyway? What are you doing still up?'

'Dunno. Couldn't sleep.'

She was holding onto something in her lap. Coming even nearer, Allie took it from her, gasping when she saw a sketchbook with an unfinished drawing of her sleeping self.

'It's beautiful, Bea', she gushed out, wanting to kiss her cheek but not daring, out of fear it might cause Bea to run into the streets again.

'Go lie down, let me finish it', Bea urged.

'You'll finish it other time. You need to rest now’, Allie said worriedly. 'This weekend was about you recuperating, remember?'

***

Allie opened her eyes to what it seemed to be a bright midday light bathing the room through her window. She checked her phone - it was ten o'clock. Bea must be up, was the first thing on her mind, because she realised the light in the hall was turned off. She needed to make sure she didn't wander off again so in split seconds she jumped out of bed and checked room by room. Her panic subsided when she found Bea in the kitchen, apparently making scrambled eggs and bacon. She watched her from behind, looking so sexy even in the terry cloth bathrobe she was wearing. In fact, Allie thought, she never looked hotter than this morning. Maybe it was because she seemed so domesticated, like a fulfilment of Allie's deepest desires for the two of them. And when she turned around to wish her good morning, Allie's heart just stopped. The ringlets of her dark red hair were so unruly, obviously having not met a brush yet that morning, her brown eyes were still sleepy, giving her features a hint of vulnerability and gentleness that made them even more beautiful than usual.

'What do you wanna do today?’ Allie asked after she'd finished breakfast and reached for her coffee.

'Rock Island… the whole day’, Bea managed while gobbling the last pieces of her bacon.

Allie smiled, 'It's doable. I saw a portable mini-fridge in the kitchen, we can stuff it downtown and then stay there swimming until sunset'.

'We can go swimming only if you agree to wear the wetsuit that I bought you.'
‘You bought me a wetsuit?’ Allie was surprised. ‘That to keep me chaste?’

‘To keep you warm’, Bea rolled her eyes. ‘The last week we went swimming the water temperature has dropped down quite a notch. Face it, we’re approaching the mid autumn.’

‘They said on the news next week the sunset’s gunna occur at half past five’, Allie mumbled grumpily, her lips on the mug. ‘There goes our swimming after work. This is our last chance.’

‘I know some great swimming pools if you’re that keen on swimming. But you might want to switch to yoga or aerobics for a while, the main thing you stay active to strengthen your back and stomach muscles.’

‘Only if you come with me’, Allie winked. ‘I’m definitely too lazy to keep it up myself.’

Allie showered second, going out of bathroom and straight into Bea’s room. ‘So what did you buy me?’ she asked even before she barged in and saw Bea standing in front of a mirror in a thick fullsuit, braiding her hair into a single Dutch braid. Her suit was the nuance of her hair and it accentuated every muscle of her sculpted body, making Allie tingle in all the right places and forgetting why she even came in there.

Bea was finishing her braid, watching Allie’s reflection in the mirror, the blonde leaning on her door frame. It was just like Allie, she pondered, to barge in naked, not stopping for a second to deliberate the effect she might have on the other woman. Bea couldn’t decide whether Allie was a tease or just highly practical, not seeing a point in changing her clothes twice. Whatever the reason, Bea was infatuated with the way the blonde’s clothing was buttoned-up in public, her bodily movements so decent in front of everyone else but so free of restraints when being left alone with her. It was like Allie could be her natural self when she was with her and Bea loved that the blonde made no attempt to suppress the feeling of intimacy awoken in her since their first time together.

She gestured to five fullsuits laid out on her bed. ‘The white and the brown one are meant to be mine, and navy, sky blue and taffy yours, but you can really take whichever you prefer.’

‘You chose the colours well, I’m not swapping. Bring me the taffy one, to wear it today’, Allie demanded, still leant on the door frame.

Seeing she showed no intention to move from the spot, Bea hesitantly picked up the suit and brought it over. Instead of taking it, Allie made a motion of wanting to step in it, thus forcing Bea to bend and put it on her. After she pulled the pants up both of Allie’s legs, Bea straightened up to stand flush with the young woman. She was acutely aware that Allie was still naked from her waist up - she dared to look between their bodies, loving how Allie wasn’t shying away from her. In this moment she heavily regretted not bringing her dildo; she wanted to run her hands all over her smooth skin until her fingers find a way inside of her, but her fear was still stronger than her desire. She put Allie’s arms through the long sleeves and zipped her up front. She felt so impotent.

***

It was an exciting start of the day for Allie, as Bea taught her how to drive a motorboat.

‘I want you to learn to be independent here’, Bea told her, ‘what if you have to come back here on your own sometime?’
Allie was appreciative of the way Bea always wanted to keep her safe and empower her, and she had to admit, being in charge of the mighty engine, was a total thrill.

Bea wanted to spend the day at the rocky side of the island so Allie parked their boot there.

'You didn't!' Bea squealed after they'd unpacked on the beach near the rocks and Allie pulled a large inflatable ball out of her bag and started blowing it up.

'You bet I did!' Allie exclaimed popping in the valve and throwing the ball at Bea. After the ball hit Bea on the head, she ran for her life into the water, Bea hot on her heels, carrying the ball as she chased after her.

They never had so much laugh with each other as in that two hours of throwing the ball around, sinking each other in the water and splashing all around. It was probably the unique occurrence in their lives - having a beach, no, a whole island to their sole disposal. No workers were ever there on weekends and they both acted quite juvenile, having no fear of being caught out.

Was it their ball or their loudness that attracted him, Allie didn't know, but she almost fell over from shock when a dolphin emerged between them. Oh my God, Emery wasn't kidding when she said they swim this close to the shore, she thought, watching in amazement how the sea creature bobbed their ball, letting out all kinds of whistling and clicking sounds.

Eventually their playful mate got tired and left, and they headed to their towels to dry a bit before lunch. It was two o'clock already.

During lunch Allie was unusually quiet, her eyes pensive and faraway.

Bea didn't even have to ask why. When she returned the leftovers in the fridge, she pulled out two bottles of water and sat down on Allie's towel. She brushed her wet strands off her sad face and ran her fingers down her cheek. 'I'm sorry it had to be exactly this weekend', she spoke softly.

Allie sighed, 'I'm being childish, that's all'.

'Want me to rent a chopper? If we pack quickly, we could be in Melbourne in an hour. You can still make it.'

Allie turned her head to meet her eyes. 'You'd do that for me?'

Bea stood up, 'Let's go'.

'No, no', Allie shook her head. 'Sit back down. I'm bummed I can't do both, but if I have to choose, I'd rather stay three more days in this paradise with you. Besides, it will give aunt Liz the opportunity to catch up with mum in private'.

They spent the next two hours alternating between short naps and pillow talk, then Allie pulled out her phone to ring her aunt Liz and check how the monthly visit went and how her mum was doing. Wanting to give her some privacy, Bea announced she was going to go explore the rocks.

'Don't fall in love with a supernatural creature there’, Allie shouted out jokingly behind her back while dialing her aunt.

She was pleased to hear her mum was doing just splendidly and sent her love. During the conversation she heard a short beep, indicating she got a text message but she didn't check it out until she hung up.
The text was from Franky.

'Hi there, Blondie. We're just checking on ya two. How ya guys doing there?'

Allie lay down on her stomach and typed out, 'So far pretty great, Franks. Thanks so much, but no need to worry.'

The reply came through quickly:

'Alright then! Hey, don't do anything I wouldn't do ;) '

'Well, that wouldn't leave me with much options now, wouldn't it? Y'know, after your big talk how you're like a sister to Bea, I sure hope your list of things that you would do to Bea begins and ends with a hug and kiss on a cheek!!!'

'Oh my God, monster's on the loose again! Just promise me you won't eat Maxi's baby if he accidentally grabs on Bea's boobs :D'

'Very funny... Let me find my emoji for stuck-out tongue...'

'That's my favourite (wink, wink)'

'Oh, gross, Franky!'

'Ya only say gross because you haven't tried it yet, ya poor puppy. '

'Cannot argue with that,' Allie chuckled, putting her phone down and getting up to search for Bea.

She found her between two highest rocks, settled down comfortably in a niche covered in a thick layer of dry moss.

'Kaz is well, I hope?' was the first thing Bea asked.

'Yeah, doing just fine without me', Allie tried to joke, but there was a certain amount of resentment to her voice.

'Don't be like this, the woman loves ya', Bea argued.

'It's awful when your mother always puts your needs last', Allie continued as bitterly.

'No, she doesn't. And you're an adult, for Pete's sake’, Bea lost her nerve a little. 'At least she's still alive.'

And instantly, they both regretted what they'd said.

'Oh my God, Bea, I was so inconsiderate with my whining.'

'No, I was the one out of line’, they both apologised, talking over each other.

'Let's just drop it', Allie urged, 'the important thing is she's fine and that's it'.

Bea smiled placably and tapped the ground beside her.

Allie lowered herself next to her, taking in the view. As far as the eye could reach, there was nothing to be seen but rocks on their sides, sea water below them and clear sky above their heads.
It was peaceful, it was beautiful.

It was perfect.

The only thing which was missing was the feeling of their bodies being as close as their souls, but Allie knew she couldn't just reach out without warning and permission.

'So, those rules of conduct of yours...', she blurted out finally, causing Bea's eyes to shoot up straight to hers. 'Does it mean, I never get to be driven around on your motorcycle again?'

'Nonsense', Bea rejoindered, 'of course I will take you for rides'.

'But how do you mean to do it', Allie continued carefully, 'if I'm not allowed to hold onto you? I'll fall'.

'It's not the same', Bea replied, too dense to catch up with Allie's true intentions, 'it's not intimate, you'd be just holding around my waist in order not to fall off the bike'.

'So, when we get back in Melbourne, you'll take me out on your bike? You haven't in a month.'

'Sure', Bea promised, still failing to see through her words.

'Where will you take me then?'

'Maybe along that stretch between Lorne and Apollo Bay?' Bea bit the bait. 'We've never been there together'.

'I think I never drove there myself', Allie confessed, making Bea's eyes pop up in wonder. 'What?! I'm a workaholic too. Never found the time. How is it, describe it to me.'

It didn't seem to be in Bea's habit to deny Allie any pleas, especially not when she asked for it in such a sweet voice, so she closed her eyes in order to concentrate better on the image in her mind and started depicting Apollo Bay where massive sandstone ridges plunge down into the sea. She told her how Bass Strait is almost unnaturally blue and little white caps dance on the water far below.

Allie closed her eyes too. 'Drive further', she said when Bea paused.

'If we drive further west, towards Cape Otway, the landscape will begin to change', Bea continued. ‘Dense eucalyptus forests will give way to gentle sloping hills, green meadows and farmland. It is less wild, but equally beautiful’, she whispered.

‘Are you driving slowly, so that I can take it all in?’ Allie asked dreamily and Bea shared her illusion by confirming she is.

‘Can I lean my cheek on your shoulder?’ she asked, both of their eyes still firmly closed. ‘My neck's killing me; it's a long drive.’

'Sure', Bea replied hoarsely, and did not twitch when Allie indeed leaned in from behind and put her chin over her shoulder.

'I need to hold onto your waist so that I don’t fall off’, she whispered into her ear. When she felt Bea slowly nodding, she opened her eyes and moved behind her, parting own arms and legs so that she can engulf Bea into her long limbs. She snaked her arms around Bea's waist and let her chin down on her shoulder again.

'We're both safe this way, aren't we?’ she whispered, making Bea open her eyes and shudder. She
could see how she draw in the air deeply into her lungs, she could feel her heart beating loudly, but she didn't pull out of her embrace. Instead, in couple of minutes she seemed to have calmed down, throwing her head back to rest on Allie's shoulder and relaxing her tense body in blonde's arms.

'This seems surreal’, she uttered after an hour of total tranquility, her eyes fixed on the blueness of the water kissing as equally blue sky in the horizon. She wanted so badly to wrap her arms around Allie's, but she feared the other woman might misunderstand her and think she is ready for more than she really is.

'You're only holding on so you don't fall off?’ she asked in a feeble voice. 'You're not doing anything else?’

'I promise that's all I'll be doing’, Allie reassured her gently, making Bea let out the breath she didn't know she was holding.

Bea trusted Allie, she knew blonde would never coerce her consciously into something she wasn't prepared for. Now that she made her realise she wasn't ready for more today, she wasn't fearing anymore of Allie misunderstanding her intentions. She slid her hands up the silky material of Allie's long sleeves until she held onto her arms as strongly as Allie did onto hers.

***

It was quarter past five when sunset started to threat. Allie didn't want to leave the warmth of Bea's embrace, especially because she couldn't predict when will it happen again - if it was to reoccur at all, that is - but she knew she couldn't allow for Bea to get caught out in the darkness and freak.

They picked up their stuff from the beach, Bea insisting that Allie drives again.

That night Bea slept like a baby, for good ten hours, not turning once in her bed.

Monday they spent wandering around the streets of Little Rock, eating heaps of ice in cones and participating in Anzac Day parade. They went home only late in the afternoon, when it was high time to dress up for their dinner-date with the Fletchers.

They both put on light dresses, Bea oozing an surprising amount of femininity, and when after dinner Maxine and Matthew got up to dance to the lovely voice of the lead singer of “The Rockets” and Bea agreed to Allie taking her to the dance floor too, Allie could feel through the thin fabric how every fibre in her body shivered in her embrace. With the corner of her eye she could catch a glimpse of Maxi’s smirk, as she watched them over her husband's shoulder, but as long as Bea surrendered to the gentle sway of their movements, every other thought but her could wait.

Woken to realisation this would be their last day in dreamland, Bea asked Allie if she minded spending their Tuesday at Rock Island again. She wanted to bathe on the rocky side again, fully inclined to avoid the workers on the construction site. She had enough pictures for their website, but she still took her camera with her, taking artistic shots of Allie every chance that she got.

Allie tried to lure Bea into the niche in the rocks, but Bea was too afraid to repeat the experience. She wasn't opposing of sitting close on the shore though, a picture of beauty in her white wetsuit. Allie pondered how Bea was wearing white every time she felt especially well and silently congratulated herself that she managed to put Bea in such a good mood over the course of their prolonged weekend.
She noticed how Bea's look was glued on her toes, which she was dipping in and out of sand. Bea stretched out her hand towards them but flinched back before she could reach them, once again needing reassurance from Allie.

'I get to touch you, but you don't touch me, remember?' she asked Allie pleadingly and when Allie agreed to her rule once again, she reached further, intertwining her fingers with Allie's cute little toes.

Allie watched her pulling on her pinky with a childish joy, then slowly changing her expression from naive to lustful. She ran her hands up her smooth pant legs, along her hips and ribs until she reached her shoulders and pushed her down in the sand. She unzipped her wetsuit, undressing her to her waist then laid her down again, admiring her beauty.

'Please don't reciprocate', she begged, the look of the brown eyes so pleading and insecure it broke Allie's heart again. Her throat was too sore to answer, but she buried her hands deep into the sand to signal Bea the lack of her sexual intentions. That made Bea smile with affection and she ran her hands freely along the voluptuous curves of Allie's upper body until they both trembled so fiercely they had to run into the chilly afternoon water to cool the temptation off.

They spent half the night lying in their boot in the middle of the sea, between two islands. Bea was surprisingly brave, considering they had no light left after their phones ran out of battery, but the night was bright and she wasn't sleepy, knowing it was only her and Allie and no one could sneak upon them from the darkness.

She gazed at the stars for long, quiet hours, then turned to the other woman, whispering:

'It's funny, how I don't seem to need any other company but yours.'

'It's the spell I put on you talking', Allie beamed, but Bea didn't return her smile. Instead, she just kept gazing into her eyes.

***

Wednesday six o'clock, as their ferry started speeding towards the shores of Melbourne, Bea was already the picture of her usual hardened, composed self. But as she was leaning on the railing on the bow, Allie could see her self-restraint hasn't reached her eyes yet. Her look was still dreamy and to Allie's astonishment, it hit her that the white dress Bea was wearing that morning was the same one she wore when they first met for breakfast in their diner. That can't be a coincidence, Allie thought to herself. Feeling a little bravery, she stepped closer to the lone figure in white and spoke under her breath:

'Current daylight length won't allow it for you to drive me to Apollo Bay. What if tonight you took me for a city ride instead?'

'That would be nice too', Bea's response was merely a hoarse whisper. This time she knew where Allie was heading, and she trembled with anticipation. Allie could see the nerves radiating off her.

She took a step to stand behind her, putting her hands on the railing on each side of her.

'It's still a dangerous ride', she breathed into her ear. 'I'd have to hold on tightly.'

She could see Bea swallow. 'You do that', she said, her breath visibly hitching.
That was all the consent Allie needed. She scooped her small frame into her long arms, and as she
did so, she could see Bea close her eyes and hear the little whimper that came out of her throat.

She knew this was progression and she knew what was to follow once in Melbourne. But she had
the patience to endure it all and in that moment, feeling the warmth and trust exuding from Bea's
relaxed body, she felt she'd have a power to divide seas if that was what it would take to help heal
Bea.
The Tiger Who Changed Its Stripes but Not Its Disposition

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The best Bea could describe the moment when they entered their office on that Wednesday morning was comparing it to a blow to her chest. Seeing their two tables, their chairs, computers that's when it really hit her - their weekend was over. She seemed to have forgotten that: after all, it was only a getaway, and this was reality. She approached her desk and sat down to power up her computer. She stared at the screen dumbfoundedly. She let herself believe, back there on the islands, that she was getting better, that her hardened demeanor was softening. For a few days there she could remember the carefree girl she used to be until nine years ago, she felt a glimpse of hope. But now, the wall clock indicated nine a.m. as she glared at it, and she was reminded that hour after dull hour will pass until it strikes five and she has to drag herself to her empty home. She was always self-sufficient inside the walls of her beautifully decorated house, but thinking of coming back to it tonight, her place stroke her as lonesome and sterile. They were over, the days when she had a perfect companion in each and every moment, when they were inseparable and nothing seemed to can threaten them - neither past nor future - and she realised, when she walks out of this office today, she'll have to part from Allie and leave alone. She was the same fuck-up she was six days ago and she was a fool to let delusions flourish.

A silhouette crept in front of her glazed stare. Allie, in her ocean blue suit, opening the window. Then she opened the other one. 'That's better', she said in a brisk, vivacious tone, 'let's let the old air out and let a fresh one in!'

Bea felt a bit better just hearing her resonant voice and sensing her familiar energy filling the space around her. But the hit to her chest - she could still feel it, so she kept her eyes down on her monitor and started loading her email inbox.

To her surprise, the blonde carried over her chair to put it next to hers, then she sat. Bea didn't dare turning her head to look, as that simple friendly gesture of Allie’s has just brought tears to her eyes. Why couldn't they've just stayed back there on the island, where life was so simple, so uncomplicated, almost void of bad memories?

'Hey, puppy', Allie said gently as she lifted her chin with her finger, forcing her watery eyes to look at her. 'What's with the melancholy? I know Melbourne is not as exotic as a remote paradise island, but it's a great city and it's ours to enjoy it. Together.'

A single tear left Bea's eyes and slid down her cheek. Allie nuzzled her face up against Bea's cheek, catching her tear with her protruding lower lip then tracing her lip up the wet trail until it reached her eyes. She kissed away the tears from one watery eye, then the other one, and to her astonishment - Bea let her. She was so supple, so trusting in her arms that Allie rightly guessed she could even get away with a kiss. But that would be taking advantage. Bea was in a really bad place now, too numb to show resistance. She needed support and consolation, not some arsehole who would just use her moment of weakness. Allie wanted their kiss, when it comes to it, to happen out of Bea's free will, out of desire and affection, not as a result of trickery or coercion.

'You don't understand', Bea started to sob, 'in the last three days I thought I was getting better, but now I…'

Her voice broke off, her shoulders were shaking. Allie has never seen her like that. She tried to embrace her, but the arms of their chairs were getting in the way so she grabbed her under her
armpits and pulled her out of her chair onto her own body. Bea nested into her and cried into her neck. Allie was holding her tightly, praying that no one barges in. People rarely came to their office unannounced, and when they did, those were mostly either those HR guys or editors from Tina's magazine wanting Bea's help on a page layout. Luckily, today was not one of those days, and they were sharing the armchair undisturbedly, Allie stroking Bea's back and hair.

'Will you really come on a ride with me tonight, as you promised before?', Bea asked in a weak voice, after her sobbing had toned down.

'How 'bout tomorrow?' Allie offered. 'You slept for only four hours, you need to rest first.'

'You promised', Bea repeated like a disappointed child.

Allie could only guess where this clingy, needy, broken side of Bea has been hiding all the time and why it showed up exactly when it did. She couldn't deny her, seeing how unwell she was, the same way Bea couldn't cast Allie away when she clung to her a month and a half ago in her garden, begging her not to go to Tina.

'We can go tonight', she said after a brief thinking, 'but only if you agree to get couple of hours of sleep first'.

'Okay', Bea murmured into her chest.

Allie took a pack of kleenex out of Bea's desk drawer and wiped Bea's face.

'We may have left the island', she whispered against the red ringlets, 'but I promise you, in the days to come, I will show you the island has never left us.' She unbuttoned two buttons on her starched office shirt and guided Bea's hand into her cleavage. 'It's right there', she added when Bea's hand halted over her beating heart.

Bea's dumbed down expression seemed to give way to a more sober one. Encouraged by the way Bea's hand was trying to work its way into her bra, Allie undid more of her buttons, enabling Bea to roam freely.

Bea liked the warmth of Allie, the tenderness of her flesh. She found comfort in her proximity and that treacherous feeling of hope started creeping back in. She looked at the swell of Allie's white breasts and she could imagine them smiling at her. She started smiling back at them, the movements of her fingers getting more purposeful and more passionate. She could feel Allie's nipple harden under her fingertips and when she twisted it gently, Allie let out a moan that made Bea startle and fall off her lap.

'What are we doing?' she squealed, coming to her senses. She kneeled in front of the chair, buttoning up Allie as fast as she could. 'Oh, my God, someone could have walked in, and the windows are open!'

'I have relied on divine protection', Allie smiled, smoothing Bea's locks and helping her into own chair.

She stared into Bea's eyes, the adorable green nuance clearly visible in the bright morning sun. 'You see? Nothing has changed. You have made a progress. And the trust that we've built between us, these past few days on the island but also in all the time before that, wherever we go - we're taking it with us.'

'Why are you so good to me?' Bea murmured, not able to avert her eyes from the clear blue pools, feeling the little hope that had crept inside of her now spreading through her chest, enveloping her
Bea had managed to completely pull herself together before they had to leave for their weekly Wednesday meeting with their client. This gathering was going to be a little more exciting than usual, as not only Mrs Rodgers and Tess were going to be there, but also Ms Hagurson, Mr Johnson and all the senior managers from Allie's home office. When they walked in together, they exuded the impression of a power couple and by the looks of them, one couldn't have guessed that they ever had any trouble, let alone that very morning. Bea noticed straight away that Richard wasn't in the meeting, even though he was supposed to attend; soon enough Tess excused his absence with explanation that he got sick and needed to go home. Good, he learnt his lesson to stay away from Allie, Bea thought. They talked about the outcome of the tour guide job audition and Allie's plans for engaging Emery and Stan into her campaign of attracting future visitors by them organising excursions to Rock Island for tourists who take vacation in Little Rock. Mr Johnson agreed, stressing out that Allie will be their direct supervisor until the Grand opening. Then they talked budget for the next month and Allie's plans for May to be a street promotion month. Allie's bosses watched in satisfaction how Mr Johnson seemed to put more trust and jurisdiction into Allie's hands with each passing month.

After lunch, Allie sat down with Bea again, announcing she was going to spend the afternoon helping Bea to sort through the pictures she'd taken on Rock Island.

'Don't you have more pressing things to do?' Bea quirked her eyebrow.

'They can wait’, Allie said firmly. 'But before we start, I wanted to talk to you about something.’

Allie got her point across of Bea being too overstrung and tired and needing to take it easy from now on. She did the math: Bea did half the work in four months time and she had six and a half months until she had to leave for Rock Island to supervise furnishing and decorating the hotel and do the landscaping. She could afford to slow down, if not for her health then in order that the quality of her work does not drop down.

'Call it worry out of affection or call it a blackmail, I don't care’, Allie assured her, 'I can't order you to ease off, but I can require an assistant for you if you don't’. 

Bea blinked at her in disbelief, speechless. In May she'll work on their website and help with street promotions, she won't pick up any serious work on room designs until the end of the month, she won't take work home any longer, she won't work through another lunch, Allie listed a demand after demand. Bea couldn't decide whether she should explode in anger or laugh off her preposterous requests, but she ended up doing neither and agreeing to everything. She who just last weekend lectured Allie on separating business and personal matters, couldn't escape her judgement being clouded by the sweetness and genuine worry in the words of gentle persuasion Allie poured down on her. There was never such a business conversation before: with hands in one's hair, with whispers, with blonde head leant against the headrest of her own chair. How could she say no? Especially, how could she today? Today when she was so needy of her, when she dreaded even parting from her for the upcoming short night, let alone risk a discord or estrangement.

For her complaisance she was rewarded with three hours of harmonious joint work - Allie, her mind having been put at rest, beaming light all around them.
Bea's phone went off just before she was about to take Allie out on her bike that evening. It was Kim, sending a message, asking to meet with her. 'I got caught up at work', she lied texting back, then threw her phone on the sofa and left her garage.

And there it was: that feeling of safety, of belonging, when she felt Allie's arms wrapping themselves around her. It wasn't Allie who held onto her, it was her who clung to her arms like they were throwing a lifeline.

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People started sneaking up upon them, coming between them, disturbing their plans. First it was Fridget, organising a gathering on Thursday in their house - they even invited Regan, whom they didn't know before, just to have Boomer and Allie feel the evening was complete. To that thoughtfulness Bea couldn't say no, and Allie, not having a fit of clinginess like the redhead, seemed keen to go. Not long after Bea hung up on the call from Bridget, Emery came to the office, having freshly signed her contract and having a scheduled meeting with Allie to receive initial instructions. Allie returned from the meeting room in an hour, Emery's persistent flirting almost giving her a headache. Her phone rang couple of times, Bea listened to tiresome conversations, feeling the stress building up again and the hopeful, clingy Bea giving way to her usual closed-off self. On top of that Paul called to check up on Allie and Bea could clearly feel her blood starting to boil. Then the unimaginable thing happened and suddenly Kim was standing in their office.

Kim felt something was off with Bea and came to make sure she was alright. Bea turned down her offer for that arvo, excusing herself on account of having dinner with friends. Allie sat there numbingly, pretending not to listen, repeating in her head how unimportant that relationship was, how this changed nothing.

But during that visit Bea seemed to have switched back to her badass mode. The whole day long Allie was watching her growing harder and harder again, cutting her off from touching her, gradually shutting down, and during Kim's visit she completed the transformation. She agreed to meet with the brunette tomorrow, Friday at seven.

'But you said you were gunna take me to a pool tomorrow’, Allie protested after Kim had gone.

'We can work from eight to four’, Bea tried to compromise, ‘then we can swim for an hour and have dinner together afterwards, just as we have planned.’

Allie mumbled something incoherent under her breath.

'I have a responsibility towards them too’, Bea argued, 'and I haven't seen them in more than a week.’

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Not a fan of physical activities before she met Bea, Allie has never been in Harold Holt Swim Centre. They swam in an epic fifty-metre outdoor pool, which was so well heated that Allie was hot in the wetsuit Bea gave her. Splashing water on her any chance she got, Allie reminded Bea of their
antics in island bay, showing her nothing has substantially changed as long as they were together. Bea showed her around, pointing out an indoor gym where in other occasions, when they would have more time at their disposal, Bea could work out while Allie takes a spa treatment after their swimming session. The idea cheered Allie up. It didn't matter, she said to herself, that Kim gets to spend an evening with Bea, for it's not Kim whom Bea plans all these wonderful dates with, it was her.

Bea was quiet during dinner. They lightened up her gazebo with candles left from their last dinner there and after they ate, when they turned on the lights in the gazebo and blew out the candles, Bea felt ridiculous. She saw Allie out, hating the fact that they had to cut their evening short for her to have a meet she wasn't feeling up for that night.

Bea stood there, one hand on her garden gate, watching Allie ramble. Her eyes focused on Allie's lips. They've got dry and a bit chapped from the chlorine in the pool, and therefore so incredibly red. It was that ripe, saturated nuance of deep ruby that is seen usually on Lapin cherries. Her white teeth flashed between those lips and the rosy tip of her tongue moved tirelessly up and down as she kept talking.

Bea bit her lip.

Allie's whole face was lit up. She was so joyous, so carefree, so sweet. She was like a light shining upon the boring familiarity of Bea's surroundings and Bea hated the thought of her leaving and taking that light with her.

Allie talked not only with her mouth, but used her hands in abundance to gesticulate her feelings. Bea took in how long her arms are, how slender. All of Allie's limbs were amazingly long, almost overgrown, and Bea has already learnt to love them just the way they were. It used to surprise her at the very beginning, causing new wave of wonder every time she saw Allie, but she quickly accustomed to Allie's figure, and the attraction rose in her - an attraction so big she couldn't imagine being drawn to any other shape again. Oh, she loved the shape of Allie. Last Sunday, when Allie held her in her embrace between the rocks on Rock Island, she was settled so comfortably between Allie's long legs and arms that it seemed to her she was being hugged by a giant, warm octopus. She smiled remembering the feeling of being safe and cherished. She longed to feel it again, but, in the routine of everyday life in Melbourne she's fallen into since yesterday, she didn't dare asking Allie to repeat a phantasy like that. At least, not unless they were driving out on her bike.

Bea's beady eyes kept wondering from the naked skin of Allie's long legs over the fabric of her athletic dress up to her fitted bust disemboguing into a soft, pale neckline. Allie's words seemed to be fading out, as Bea was falling into bewilderment with the colour of Allie's skin, the movement of Allie's hands and lips.

It took her a moment to realise that Allie's hand was waving in front of her eyes.

'Bea', she finally heard Allie calling, 'where did you go?'

Bea licked her lips, her eyes still glued to tiny movements of Allie's throat as she asked her that question. After struggling to lift her gaze up, she met slightly confused blue eyes and failed to answer.

'Righto, I'd better get going', Allie took a step towards the gate, 'I've tired you enough with my babble'.

Seeing her trying to leave, Bea broke out of her stupor. Her hand grabbed the gate tighter, thus hindering Allie to walk through it. Then she took a step towards the blonde and once again locked
eyes with hers.

'I don't want Kim tonight', she blurted out, her heart beating in panic.

Allie quirked her eyebrow, not quite sure where Bea was going with it.

Bea took a deep breath, 'I want you'.

Those words were so heavy with meaning but kept floating between the two of them like a feather, as they both appraised their insinuations and prospectives they suddenly opened.

'Kim will be here any minute', Allie replied finally, a hesitation to her voice.

'She'll reckon no one's home and leave', Bea sighed, a bit of a guilt creeping into her features, but not enough to disturb her general expression of lustfulness. 'I'll call her later and think of some excuse.'

Allie's sense of justice was alarming her that it would be unfair to the other woman to come to an arranged meeting and run into closed door. But in the same time she couldn't pass on an offer like that, especially not after a month of abstinence followed by the tantalising petting of her breasts. Being intimate with Bea again was the first thing she thought about in the morning and the only thing she was fantasising about before drifting off to sleep. She couldn't, she wouldn't think of how she ought to be fair to a woman she barely knew, particularly not when in her mind that woman had no business in continuing to fuck her girlfriend.

At last Allie nodded into Bea's keen, almost hungry, expression.

Bea turned around, relieved, and locked the gate.

She looked into the blue pools again and took her right hand, intertwining their fingers.

Allie inhaled sharply. How she longed for their hands to meet like that again. She squeezed Bea's palm with hers and smiled down to her.

Bea felt the earth spinning around her from their innocent touch. She kept her eyes locked with Allie's, to calm herself down and not to spook.

They're blue, they're blue eyes, like an ocean, they are not black eyes, they're blue, that's Allie, she repeated over and over again in her head, until she felt her panic subside.

Then she smiled herself and dragged Allie up her driveway into her garage. She left the garage door wide open, in order not to panic in a closed space, and went to fetch her dildo.

They were staring at each other, neither making the first move.

'May I put it on on you?' Allie asked at last, taking a step closer towards the trembling redhead.

'I like it when you put it on me', Bea replied, licking her lips. 'It turns me on so much.'

Allie smiled wickedly and attached the harness in a jiffy.

'And I'd say you've got so incredibly handy with that', Bea laughed at the swiftness with which Allie fastened her equipment.

'Oh, my real aim there is to break other girls' record', Allie joked and winked.
'Actually’, Bea took a step closer, placing her hands on the young woman's waist, 'it's no competition.’

Allie's breath hitched in her throat.

Bea's hands kept wandering around Allie's waist, smoothing the fine, thin, microfiber fabric.

The gate bell rang.

They looked at each other.

'Any regrets?’ Allie whispered.

Bea shook her head, as the gate bell rang for the second time.

'It's not too late to change your mind.’

'I told you: I don't want anyone but you tonight. If this is what you want…?’

'Most definitely’, Allie lowered her gaze to Bea's lips.

Bea gripped her waist tighter. 'Good’, she rasped out.

They stood there for another couple of minutes, just gazing into each other's eyes, co-conspirators, as the ring on the gate and the ring of Bea's mobile kept alternating. Silence finally befalling them, Bea turned off her phone and led Allie towards the sofa.

She stood very closely to Allie, their breaths mingling, her fingertips running up Allie's thighs.

'I get to touch you’, she warned Allie, emphasising the pronouns as a plea not to reciprocate her caresses.

'I know’, Allie exhaled Bea's breath she'd previously captured, for that was how near the redhead got. Her tone was full of compassion and understanding and Bea stopped to fret…

Her hands kept exploring under Allie's skirt until they settled on her underwear.

'Sorry’, Bea murmured.

'What for?’ Allie smiled in confusion.

'For this’, Bea said as she ripped through her panties, throwing them aside.

'Don't be, it's hot’, Allie moaned after Bea squeezed her bare buttocks.

Bea turned her around, bending her over the armchair of the sofa.

She lay heavily on Allie's back. She stroked the locks off Allie's face.

'Am I too hefty on you, can you breathe properly?’ she asked with concern.

Allie chuckled and shook her head.

Bea smiled down on her, relaxing her head on Allie's, sticking her nose behind Allie's ear. Her hands dropped to Allie's thighs again, lifting her short skirt up and running up the smooth skin.

'Allie’, she let out an utter of pure lust into Allie's pinna. Allie felt goosebumps rising on her skin and
Bea felt them too…

'You really like saying my name, don't you', she teased, wiggling a bit beneath Bea's body, making the redhead want to press into her more.

'Mhm', the redhead breathed out, 'Allie'.

'Every time when you're inside of me', Allie confessed, 'your name is all I can think about'.

'You perfect girl', Bea said tenderly, her left arm snaking below Allie's collarbones, to hold her more securely, as her right hand parted her legs.

She shuddered as she entered Allie for the first time in ages. She couldn't proceed right away, her heart beating so hard that Allie could feel it against her spine. She let her right hand wander down Allie's naked side, the act turning her on more and more, almost to the point of combustion.

Bea thrusted slowly couple of times into Allie, then to Allie's surprise, she stopped, pulling her even closer with her left arm and brushing the locks off her eyes again.

When she spoke, Bea's voice came out sore and defensive.

'Do I go deeper than Paul, Allie?' her question couldn't surprise Allie more. 'I lied when I said I wasn't jealous of him.'

'Body and soul deeper', Allie found it easy to confess the obvious truth.

'It's just', Bea's voice now sounded so insecure, 'I've never before been with a woman who's been with a man. I hate that I get to be compared'.

'Actually', Allie smirked, 'it's not a competition'.

'Throw it back at me', Bea laughed. She bit Allie's ear, 'But if it was a competition, would I win?'

'Every time', Allie moaned out, feeling Bea's hips pushing into her.

'So you've never been this wet for him?' Bea fished for information, oozing with jealousy now that Paul was back in Allie's life. She needed to know.

'Just once', Allie wouldn't lie, 'but only because I was thinking of you'.

Bea sighed into her ear.

'Put it out of your mind please', Allie demanded in a serious tone. 'You're the only one who feels right, the only one who has ever satisfied me, the only one who I want.'

Bea let out a breath she didn't know she was holding and relaxed on top of Allie. 'Let's forget about all of them', she whispered as her hand started caressing Allie's thigh again. 'Look where I am, you're absolutely thrilling, and I'm wasting time talking nonsense.'

'There's no rush', Allie replied gently, hating it when Bea was beating herself down. 'I'm not going anywhere. I'm yours to take.'

'You're mine tonight', Bea's nails dug into Allie's skin.

'Only yours.'
Bea embraced Allie even closer with her left arm, her hips starting to rock against Allie's again.

Bea was a true artist when it came to sex. She could feel every little tremble and itch in a woman's body and respond to her needs prior than the woman even realised that they avoked in her. Her bodily fitness raised her stamina to the level of a machine - she would never get tired and, before she would get off, she always made sure the woman beneath her was completely satisfied.

With Allie she felt she could go even further, even higher. She felt she was sinking deep then felt she was flying. She paired her moans with Allie’s, as Allie matched the movements of her hips with hers. She felt the hotness of Allie's breath on her left arm and she herself breathed out hot air into Allie's ear. She could feel Allie's juices dripping onto her skin through her ripped jeans and it turned her on even more. She was pushing and pulling faster than ever in her life, making Allie's eyes roll back in her head. She closed her eyes herself, calling Allie's name just to hear her respond with hers. Allie was a sweaty mess in her arms, but she wouldn't release her, she wanted to give her even more of a pleasure.

And here it was, that scream, that final shake before Allie's body went limp in her arms. She lay there like a lifeless doll in her embrace, her features so pretty and perfectly still that if it wasn't for the feel of her pounding heart against Bea's arm, Bea would think she was a doll indeed.

She carefully pulled out her cock then snuggled to Allie's back again. They stayed like that for fifteen minutes, until they regained their breaths and their heartbeats stabilised.

Bea noticed that Allie's thin dress was completely soaked with sweat now so she got off her and scooped her into her arms to move her to sit on the sofa. Allie opened her eyes only lazily and smiled at her. The dress was still bunched around her waist and Bea knelt in front of her to lift her arms up and pull the dress over her head.

'I'll bring you dry clothes, okay?' she smiled at Allie's spent figure, still so supple in her hands she could mold it like plasticine.

She removed her sweaty sports bra and took a paper tissue out of coffee table to absorb the drops between Allie's breasts.

That action seemed to have sobered up Allie. She watched Bea thoughtfully attending to her needs. All this woman did in the last months was taking care of her, she realised. She made sure she worked out, ate, didn't catch cold. She protected her from Richard and everyone who would only look at her wrongly. She supported her at work, making their bosses know Allie enjoyed her full trust when all they wanted to do was to doubt her. She massaged her, styled her hair, accompanied her whenever she was in need of a companion. And she gave her the best orgasms, never getting anything in return.

'Don't allow it again’, Allie croaked out, completely overwhelmed by the touch of Bea's hand gently tapping between her breasts and her memories that came rushing back.

‘What?’ Bea lifted her head curiously to meet her glazed eyes.

‘For a month to pass before we're this close again’, Allie replied, her bright eyes fixed on the dark ones.

Bea felt her hand stiffening on Allie's chest.

‘How 'bout a minute?’ she didn't avert her eyes, even though she felt her cheeks turning crimson red.

Allie gasped, taking her by her elbows to pull her up on the sofa.
'Let's make it comfier for you this time', Bea said lying down on her back and pulling Allie on top of herself, both of their fronts up. Her left arm wound itself below Allie's breasts and her right inserted her black toy. Allie's long legs stretched along hers, almost clasping them.

'Little white octopus', Bea murmured into her ear, as her right hand stroked down her belly.

'I beg your pardon', Allie laughed, but she quickly saw what Bea was getting at. It made her warm inside, hearing Bea cooing like that.

Bea moved to caress the inner side of her thighs, Allie relaxed and moaned sweetly.

'You mind if I go slowly this time?' Bea asked tentatively.

Allie herself wasn't sure she would be able to endure another round as passionate and physically exhausting as the last one so she replied she would prefer it at a more relaxed pace this time. Man, I really have to work out more, she thought to herself, if I mean to keep up with this woman - was she ever to ask me to return the favour, I'd collapse of extortion before I managed to satisfy her.

Bea thrusted into her in a steady rhythm, lifting both of their pelvises off the sofa then letting them sink again. Allie couldn't but be in awe of how she didn't seem to tire. She was unhurriedly building a small but very pleasurable orgasm in Allie and after she eventually came, she was surprised to feel Bea's hand gliding towards her completely relaxed clit, dousing it with Allie's own juices she picked down low. Before Allie knew what was happening, both Bea's hand and hips went into frenzy. It came so quickly, so powerfully - her first double orgasm. She rolled off Bea, her eyes wide in astonishment, her body trembling fiercely.

'And you had to ask whether you could measure up to Paul?' she asked hoarsely. 'How could I ever react to anyone else like this? The chemistry between us is off all charts.'

Bea felt proud of herself and reassured of her self-doubts, but this ego-boost made her even hornier. She raised herself into sitting position then turned on her knees, grabbing Allie around her waist and pulling her into herself. When she got Allie crouching on all four, she took her doggy style, the position allowing her to go deeper than the previous three times. Allie screamed her name in reward, building up more of the redhead's confidence with each tone she let out of her throat. It was a different kind of confidence than the high that she got when winning races and fucking other girls. This was something true, something lasting, it healed her inside. She knew Allie truly cared about her and that her excitement was real. Allie's enjoyment went deeper than the skin level and it ricocheted back into Bea, piercing through her hardened exterior. When Allie came and collapsed on her stomach, she felt her heart could implode with pride of herself and tenderness for the young woman. She disappeared into her house, Allie too spent to even lift her head let alone protest.

Of course, I should have known, Allie reckoned couple of minutes later, as Bea came back holding her red blanket. She always makes sure I don't catch a cold, this wonderful, caring woman.

Bea tucked her in and went to close the garage door. She returned to sit at Allie's feet, taking them into her lap. In mere seconds Allie drifted off completely so Bea turned on the TV on silent and watched a soccer game as Allie slept. It was half past eight.

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In the meantime, in the other side of the town, Kim was pacing through Tina's lounge.
'I'm telling you she stood me up deliberately. I could sense she was there.'

'Rubbish', Tina dismissed her with the wave of her hand. 'That’s not Bea. Something must have happened. I hope she's alright.'

'She's alright doing God knows whom in there, while she left me standing out on the street.'

'Why would you think that?!

Kim sat down, running her hands nervously through her thick, black hair.

'For starters, her gate was locked. Bea's gate is never locked! Her phone powered off after I called her the first time. There was a light in her garden. And if she was alone, what was that car doing parked in front of her home?'

That last sentence seemed to have finally raised some flags with Tina.

'What type of car it was, did you register?'

'Sure', Kim replied. 'A red Mini Countryman.'

'That blonde bimbo!' Tina shouted out in anger. 'She told me she only had sex with Bea once!'

'Who?' Kim asked to be sure but deep down she sensed who it was.

'Allie', Tina hissed slowly through her teeth. She will make sure the lying cunt gets what she deserves. Kim was ten thousand times better than her and no one stands up her love for a blonde weakling like that, not even Bea Smith. She rubbed Kim's knee, 'She'll get what's coming to her, don't worry, and if Bea gets hurt in the process, let it be a lesson for her for humiliating my girl.'

My girl, Tina's words echoed through her head so loudly that she forgot all about Bea and the way she stood her up. The red-haired freak could go get stuffed now that Tina called her hers.

But she couldn't appear weak in front of Tina if she wanted to keep her respect and her affection, she knew that well. So she went along with the retaliation talk.

'Should I call Mel over?' she asked.

'No', Tina retorted, 'she'll never agree to our plan. We'll keep it between us.'

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Unsuspecting of the dark could that was coming over their heads, the other couple was relaxing on the garage sofa. As soon as Allie opened her eyes she whined 'Feed me' and Bea almost choked on her laughter. While she prepared them an after-dinner snack, Allie took a shower and dressed herself warmly. It was a great feeling, being wrapped up in Bea's clothes, wearing her undergarments. Bea brought them milk and cold turkey sandwiches and Allie knew she’s started to buy milk only because it was Allie's favourite. She never asked Bea for it, but Bea noticed on her own during their brekkies and even drank it with her, although she always opted for orange juice when she was alone. Bridget was right, Allie smirked downing the milk, Bea cared about her and it was the little things such as this that showed Allie how much. They made themselves comfortable watching a movie of Allie's choice and nibbling on their sandwiches.
All right, ladies, some pretty big things are happening inside of Bea. She had a couple of meltdowns this chapter and the last one, she didn't refrain to show Allie her tears, but then she keeps struggling to maintain her badass mask - where do you think she will go next? What do you imagine for the next few chapters? If you have some ideas for the scenes to come, please describe them to me, I'm curious to know about your imagination, and don't worry, the storyline cannot be influenced as it was set in stone a long time ago, it will just be a little game that we could play today in our comments.
Meeting Burnt Angels

Saturday morning caught a long, narrow and sleepy street on the outskirts of old downtown Melbourne unprepared for what it promised to be a bright, sunny day, ideal for outdoor activities. Traffic was, as usual, a constant flow of transit cars coming from the urban centre and disappearing towards the suburbs, but accustomed to its constant buzz, the residents of the old houses there just ignored it and hibernated in their warm beds. It was nine a.m. and not a soul was to be seen walking down the footpath.

That wasn't a promising outlook for Tina Mercado's plans. She was already sitting in an ambush for an hour, her green Yamaha bike parked fifty metres from across Allie's home. Way back when, before she met Bea and Kim and joined “The Burnt Angels”, she used to date a chick from HR. The blonde drongo never changed her password so Tina got a habit of logging into her company account over the years, every now and then erasing couple of days off her list of used vacation days. So yesterday evening she logged into HR account again and easily pulled out Allie's home address. She has decided to wait out another half an hour and if Allie doesn't show up she will move to plan B and ring her doorbell. But she knew her story would be less plausible for Allie that way and less likely to succeed. She was already pondering whether she should call the whole thing off for today and postpone it to the next weekend, sticking to plan A until the opportunity presents itself one Saturday or the next, when one of five doors on Allie's house opened and the familiar blonde figure stepped out of it, a supermarket trolley in one hand. Tina waited until she got a good head start then roared her engine and followed the blonde from the distance until she saw her entering the supermarket around the street corner.

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After having slept the best eight hours’ sleep there is, Allie woke up around eight to sunrays overflooding her bedroom. Even though this was the only day in the week she knew she wouldn't meet with Bea, she welcomed the morning with a big smile and plans of her own.

She knew Bridget was the doctor on duty today at the psychiatric hospital she worked for, so Franky was hanging out the whole day long at Boomer's. She aimed to join them later in the day, but first she wanted to prepare herself a strong breakfast and do some chores around the house.

After breakfast and a coffee, she decided to dress herself and go for food shopping. She wanted to clean the household afterwards so she dressed only sloppily, slipping into plain blue jeans and putting on a navy blue flannel shirt on her bare back. She tied the ends of her shirt around her waist, she put her hair in a ponytail and headed out, dragging a trolley bag behind her.

It seemed to her the sun has never shone brighter upon her peaceful neighbourhood, the birds have never chirped jollier. She inhaled deeply, a smile forming on her mouth. She wanted to sing at the top of her lungs, and when once again alone in her house later, she fully intended to.

She could still feel it, the presence of the silicone object in her vagina. When she left Bea last night, she took that feeling with her, and it was still all too intense, so vivid inside of her, like Bea didn't let go of her at all. She could still feel her: her left arm pressing under her collarbones, her right gliding all over her skin. She felt hot breaths rolling down her neck and eager pushes against her buttocks. Her opening was still prickling, causing her little shudders as she walked between the food aisles, trying hard for other people not to notice. They probably think I'm cold, or a junkie, Allie smiled, her thoughts returning to Bea. What a force she was. And how gentle in the same time. Allie felt so
lucky that she got a taste of what it would be like to be the object of Bea's uninhibited affection. It was like last night she got a fix of her favourite drug and all she could think about now was how badly she craved another one.

Nearing the checkout, she bolted from her happy thoughts at the loud conversation between one of the employees and another voice, which sounded familiar.

'Tina!' she exclaimed in surprise when she had to walk around them in order to get to the cashier. Allie saw the pretty brunette enwrapped in what it seemed to be a quite successful flirting attempt, before she saw Allie and instantly forgot about her almost-conquest. The young employee huffed and left after seeing Tina taking Allie into a warm hug and forgetting all about her.

'Sorry I cramped your style', Allie batted her lashes.

'Nah, it's alright', Tina swatted her shoulder playfully, 'y'know I wasn't going anywhere with it. So how come I ran into you here? You live here in the hood?'

'Yeah, just around the corner’, Allie replied cheerfully, while placing her food on the conveyor belt. ‘So we're actually neighbours?'

'No, I'm renting a place in Clayton. I've had an early interview with a coach who lives in this block, it's for my Monday article. He wanted to do it before his team's morning practice, I really had no say in that. I had to skip breakfast so I'm starving now. Came here to buy me some snack to bite on’, she gestured to the wrapped up sandwich and a red bull can lying on the belt, 'before I head off to meet my gang. I'm late as it is already.'

‘That’s right’, Allie said pleasantly, as she really didn't mind, at least not today, 'you gals have your rally on Saturday’.

'It's not exactly a rally’, Tina explained after they paid and came out of the supermarket, 'it's more of a friendly gathering of people sharing the same love for bikes, with couple of races in between. It's always a good laugh, you should come once and see. Hey,’ she suddenly exclaimed, reaching her bike and tapping on its passenger seat, 'why don't you come along with me today? I'd like to show you the venue. Or do you have other engagements today?’

'I have no particular plans today, other than casual hanging out with my friends, but...' Allie hesitated. Bea never specifically told her the racing circuit is off limits, but she also never invited her there, and Allie suspected Bea wanted to keep her out of that part of her life. 'I wouldn't feel comfortable, really’, she said at last into Tina's awaiting face, 'Bea never asked me to come with so she might not want me there’.

'Nonsense’, Tina dismissed her words with an impatient wave, 'she probably only thought you wouldn't be interested in that. Why wouldn't she won't you there? She likes you, we all do’.

Allie thought about her words. Bea did seem to want to include Allie in everything she did in the last month and a half, and it was true that Allie never expressed aloud a wish to come to one of the crew meets so Bea couldn't guess she wanted to. If she comes with Tina now and even if it turns out at the end of the day that Bea prefers to keep the blonde separated from her gang life, Allie was confident Bea still wasn't gunna be mad at her or similar. Not after last night. Not after the island.

Tina nudged her shoulder, 'Come on, make up your mind. First race is over by now, now there will be an hour recess before the best ten drivers have a big clash in the second race. Everyone else will be cheering from the bleachers: Mel, Kim, Nash, Doreen. Hell, she'll probably bring little Joshy too.'
Allie smiled a bit, imagining the scene on the venue. She yearned to go, to witness the event for once and to see Bea a day earlier than expected, but still couldn't make up her mind. It would be more appropriate if Bea invited her.

'I'll call Bea to ask', she pulled her phone out.

'She won't hear it. Our stuff is always in a locker room in the prep house while we're at the race’, Tina said unconcernedly, before taking the first bite of her sandwich. 'Why don't I wait up for you here and you go leave that trolley at your place? I'll eat my sandwich until you come back and we can make it in time for the second race. You'll get to see Bea at her best.’

Allie couldn't resist anymore. The mere picture of Bea, straddling her bike in her leather-like pants, racing others on a hot circuit, was making her heart pump fast. She really wanted to see her like that and this was perhaps the unique opportunity.

'Alright then’, she agreed, failing to notice a glimpse of malicious joy making appearance then quickly withdrawing from Tina's face, 'I'll be back in five minutes then we can go’.

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Allie was so relieved when they finally arrived. It turned out a bike ride was no fun when you spend the whole drive trying to keep a respectful distance but in the same time not fall off the bike.

She jumped off the bike and looked around eagerly. It was an apparently abandoned practice circuit in the middle of nowhere. Other than circuit and aluminum bleachers installed on one side of it, there was nothing as far as eye could see but their prep house, hundred metres away and surrounded by a yellow grass field.

Mel and Kim were waiting on them. After she kissed them both, Tina motioned to Allie, 'Look who's here, guys - the girl who broke our rollercoaster!' she laughed. Then she turned to confused Allie, 'Al, they will take you to the bleachers to watch the second race together. I gotta go, the race is about to begin.’

'Wow, so you are among the ten best drivers?' Allie gasped.

'Yeah, I failed to mention I'm a badass too', Tina winked, putting on her helmet. The unsuspecting Allie watched her drive off towards the track with a smile on her face.

'My, my, infamous Allie’, Mel joked, 'the girl who spoiled the game for all of us'.

'How do you mean?' Allie asked warily.

'Mel's only messing with ya’, Kim linked their arms to take Allie to the bleachers. 'Bea isn't herself lately so we joke between us three that the sex with you broke her mechanism.’

Allie took offence, like every time Bea's girls were referring to her as a machine. 'Her mechanism is working just fine, thank you!'

'Well, we wouldn't know, how could we?’ Mel scoffed behind their backs. 'And if you know that, then you're the only one whom she's been having sex with in the last two months!'

Allie stopped in her tracks, watching Mel in shock.
Kim understood she needed to do something to calm down the situation, otherwise Tina's plan could founder. Mel wasn't aware of the plan and didn't know Allie was coming so she now acted on an impulse, out of sheer spite for a woman who was taking Bea away from them.

Kim stepped in between them, patting both of their shoulders, ‘Oi, oi, we're here to support our girls, not bicker at each other. Come on, before we miss the race.’

They stepped up on the bleachers, Kim heading to their usual spot next to Doreen and Nash, in the highest row. Nash shook Allie's stretched out hand rather tepidly, Allie saw how he wasn't the least pleased to see her again, and he looked at Kim like if he wanted to ask 'what the fuck'. But that was nothing compared to Doreen's reaction: when Allie tried to kiss her cheek, she stepped back, her expression pure dismay.

'What are you doing here, Allie?' Doreen asked sharply.

In that moment it became clear to Allie that she had made a mistake in coming.

'Tina gave me a ride', Allie uttered, 'she invited me to see the race’.

'Nm', Doreen raised her eyebrows in wonder and took her seat again. Allie sat herself down next to her; as unpleasant as she was today, she would feel even more uncomfortable next to Mel. What the hell did Mel mean with what she said earlier? Did Allie understand it right?

'You didn't bring little Josh this time?' Allie tried to smooth the things with Doreen.

'Why for fuck's sake would I bring my son here?' Doreen snarled at her. ‘It’s no place for a child. Look around, half of these people are high.’

Allie took her advice and scanned the crowd around them. There were about twenty five people sitting on the bleachers, all dressed in the same black leather outfit, with patched inscription 'Burnt Angels' on the back of their jackets. Some of them seemed normal, but some of them were clearly under influence. But they all had one thing in common: they looked tough and uncompromising. Allie noticed glares thrown her way and knives sticking out of several boots and a sudden shudder overtook her body. If this is what Tina calls a friendly gathering, she seriously needs to reconsider her way of looking at the world.

The ten racers were lining up at the start line and Allie forgot about her anxiety, her eyes instantly managing to find Bea, even if they all were dressed alike and her hair couldn't be seen under her closed helmet. But Allie knew without a doubt which one was her. Tina was also easily recognisable by her green bike. Bea's eyes were concentrated on the start line, ready to go off as soon as the whistle blows, even though a sturdy built woman on her right obviously tried to provoke her, throwing something her way every now and then.

'Who's that woman picking on Bea?' she asked Doreen.

'That's Juice’, Doreen squeezed through her teeth, obviously not interested in chit-chatting with Allie, 'she'll give Bea a run for her money’.

Allie remembered that was the name of the woman who tried to topple Bea off her bike and fear crept into her veins. At that moment the whistle signaled the beginning of the race and the bikes went off in a pile of dust.

They were supposed to drive twenty four laps, judging by the easel sign at the start slash finish line, which the woman who blew the whistle flipped to twenty three when the first rider completed the first lap. The speed was rapidly increasing, and Allie's breath was hitching in her throat. Her gaze
was fixed on Bea, her eyes full of terror. After a few laps a guy lost control of his bike, fell off, and his bike headed towards the outer curb. He stood up after the others drove by him, luckily he wasn't badly hurt. He hopped off the track, his helmet under arm, cursing loudly. At that point, Allie only wanted the race to end as soon as possible, with Bea coming out of it unharmed.

Bea had other plans though. She seemed very comfortable down there, fearlessly tilting her bike when on curves to make a turn sharper. She developed a maximum speed, overtaking the leading position from Juice after only a few laps. Tina was thick behind her, blocking her from one side, while Juice was attacking from the other. The others were already falling a lap behind the three of them. Two laps remaining to go, and Juice leaned her bike towards Bea's, trying to clasp her between her bike and Tina's. Bea drove closer and closer to Tina's side, seemingly trying to avoid Juice, thus luring Juice to chase after her. Tina wasn't so daft as Juice not to read Bea's intention, but being in the inner circle there was nothing she could really do to escape it. When Juice got close enough, Bea shortly pressed on her break, to fall slightly behind them, leaving Juice to run straight into Tina. Tina had to break hard to avoid collision with Juice, while Juice drove straight off the tarmac and across the grass into the inner circle, which automatically disqualified her from the race. Bea has in the meantime swerved towards the outer circle, leaving them both behind and racing towards the finish line. She was driving alone in the last lap, cruising by the gang members who were falling at least two laps behind. Tina managed to start her engine and accelerate just in time to escape them catching up with her, so she came in second, Bea by then long time won and drove straight to the parking lot behind the prep house to leave her bike there.

Allie watched her coming back all the way from the prep house, her eyes glued to her lone figure, ignoring mocking looks Doreen sent her way. Juice was slowly driving towards the parking lot and when her road crossed with Bea's, she stopped her engine in front of Bea. Allie stood up, blood draining from her face. She was about to run to Bea's help, when she saw Juice stretching out her hand and congratulating Bea. Then they continued going each their way and Allie sat down again in relief.

As Bea approached, Mel and Kim plummeted down the bleachers and threw themselves around her neck. Congratulating Bea on her wins was the unique opportunity when Bea allowed them even the simplest of hugs. Tina got off her bike and joined the little group too. When Bea broke out of group hug, she took off her helmet, revealing a bright smile she wore underneath it, and shook out her long locks in the wind. She was so beautiful Allie's eyes stung, but, most importantly, she came back from the race unscratched. Allie let out a sigh of relief.

As everyone from the bleachers came down to congratulate her, including Doreen and Nash, Allie followed sheepishly behind the lot. After she'd seen the type of people who dwelled around here, Bea's closest mates seemingly the only normal or completely sober human beings among them, Allie started to fear Bea would get mad at her for coming.

Bea was returning high fives and happily brooked pattings on her shoulder, until the mass dispersed a bit and her smiling eyes locked with Allie's, who stood quietly behind. Bea's face slackened in an instant. For a few seconds she just stared at Allie, her face taking on a blank expression. When she finally blinked, recovering from her surprise, her eyes darted at Allie not with anger, as Allie expected, but with a fleeting glimpse of fear.

Bea fought her way through the dissipating crowd to get to Allie.

Allie shifted from foot to foot. 'Congratulations on the win, Bea’, she finally broke the awkward silence. ‘It was a clever thing you did back there.’

Bea ignored her congrats and asked in a low, trembling voice that only Allie could perceive, 'How in
'I ran into Tina this morning and she talked me into tagging along with her. I wanted to check with you first, but she said you won't hear the call anyway', Allie shrugged her shoulders and whispered pleadingly, 'Please don't be mad at me'.

'I'm not mad', Bea lifted her eyes at her at last, 'but we need to go. This instant. Grab your helmet, we're leaving'.

'I don't have a helmet', Allie murmured, knowing Bea will be upset about her negligence.

'You gotta be fuckin' kidding me!' Bea exploded. 'Tina, you drove Allie here without a fucking helmet?!' she yelled across the clearing that separated them from the group.

'I drove carefully’, Tina retorted with a sly smile. 'You see any bumps on her precious head?’

'That's it, Allie and I are leaving’, Bea shot her a deadly glare. 'Allie, wait by my bike, I'll just grab my phone and wallet and a spare helmet from the locker room, okay?’

Tina saw she suddenly had a very small window of opportunity left for her plan to come to fruition. She followed Bea and Allie to the prep house and tried to argue while walking next to redhead, 'Don't be like that, Bea, you always stay for lunch and drinks’.

'I'm not in the mood anymore’, Bea snapped back.

'I'm sorry I forgot about the helmet, but I really drove carefully. I just ran into Allie this morning, she didn't have any grand plans for today so I thought it would be cool if she would hang around with us, get to know the rest of the girls better.'

She looked at Bea pleadingly, which seemed to have calmed down Bea a bit, but she still wouldn't change her mind and stay, 'You know outsiders are not allowed here, what were you thinking?’ the redhead murmured, shaking her head, however the tone of her voice was softer now.

Bea went inside, motioning Allie to the parking lot behind the house.

Tina sighed, 'Sorry how it turned out, Al, I just wanted us to have a bit fun, but Bea can be so pig-headed sometimes. Come on, I'll show you to her bike.’

They got in the parking lot, which was good sixty metres behind the house. Tina led Allie through rows of parked motorcycles until she stopped in front of what Allie recognised as Bea's black Night Rod.

'So, see you at the office, Al’, she squeezed Allie's arm and left, leaving Allie to wonder why wouldn't she wait out with her, but then she figured she didn't want to encounter with Bea's rage again.

She ran her fingers down the familiar black saddle, caressing it the way she would caress Bea. That was Bea's baby and only half an hour ago, back on that terrifying circuit, it came through for Bea, it kept her safe.

In the same time, Tina approached a group of women, who seemed to have been amusing themselves by telling dirty jokes in front of the prep house. 'Juice, quick’, she called out, 'someone's stealing your bike!’

Fat as she was, Juice still ran like a wind, her 'boys' hot on her heels along with all the other gang
members who were loafing about the yard, until she saw some blonde skank straddling her bike, her hands on the throttle, apparently ready to take off.

'Oh no, you won't, you little thief! Get off my bike!' she yelled and pulled shocked Allie down by her collar.

She swayed her from left to right, dragging her arse across the dirty tarmac.

Allie couldn't grasp what was suddenly happening to her, how could her world turn around so quickly - one minute she was joking about on Bea's bike, the next she was choking on her own collar, powerless in the merciless hands that held her.

She tried to free herself, tried to explain, but she could only hear herself choking on her swigs of voraciously inhaled air. When she thought she was on the verge of passing out, she saw, detached as if she has left her body and kept watching herself from the side, Juice lifting her up by her throat until her toes were barely touching the ground. She eased her grip just enough for Allie to breathe in and stay awake and the shakes she gave her brought Allie back into her own body, into the present.

She recognised her captor as Juice and vaguely remembered the story Tina told her once about Juice having bought exactly the same bike as Bea's out of envy. The way Juice was acting now, she realised she must have been sitting on her bike. But how could have Tina made such a mistake?

'I thought it was Bea's bike’, she managed to choke out.

'Bullshit!' Juice yelled into her face. 'Everyone knows where I park. And what difference does it make whose bike you were gunna steal?? You think I'd let you steal Bea's bike?!!'

If she could bend, Allie thought she would vomit from tiny spits flying out of Juice’s mouth and landing on her face.

'I wasn't stealing anything, I was just sitting on it’, she tried to reason with the reddened face so unpleasantly close to hers.

'What the fuck do you have to go about getting on people's bikes and who the fuck are you anyway? How did you come into our territory?'

Allie could see other thirty gang members gathering around them and in the circle she searched for Bea's face, but failed to find it. But she saw Tina and Kim, standing next to Doreen and Nash, and she felt relief, like everything's gunna be cleared now. 'I was waiting for Bea by what I thought it was her bike. Tina, tell her.'

Lucy turned her head quickly into Tina's direction, asking with her eyes whether this was true.

Allie was shocked to see Tina pressing her lips tightly together and shaking her head slowly as if to indicate to Juice she had no idea what Allie was talking about. She locked her eyes with Allie's giving her a look so hardened, so malicious, so different from all the amiable smiles she showered her with in the past few months, that Allie understood that was all pretend, and this was the truth, this bitterness in Tina's eyes, this set-up.

Juice shook her again, stopping once more her air supply.

The ground around them, the crowd, was going up and down in front of Allie's eyes, but she managed to detect a small movement in the back of the mass of bodies. A tiny figure was fighting her way through the mob. When she came close, Allie could distinct it was Mel.
What the hell are you doing, Juice?’ Mel spat in distress. ‘That's Allie Novak, Bea's friend. You mess with her, you'll have a problem with Bea. Now put her down.’

Allie looked at her with grateful eyes, expecting this misunderstanding to be over now. But Juice held her still, even though she eased her grip on her throat to let her breathe in again.

‘She's no friend of Bea’s’, Doreen scoffed with contempt, ‘that's just some dumb bitch stanning Bea around. Bea has no heart to get rid of her, the bitch is making her weak’.

‘Bea would sell her own mother to lay with this one’, Kim twisted her mouth in repugnance.

‘You wanted to know the reason Bea has changed so much lately, how did you call it last Saturday, “became pathetic”, if I remember correctly’, Nash came closer to Juice, ‘well, now you're looking at it. This slut is turning our Bea against us’.

He gave a slap on the back of Allie’s head and went back to stand next to his wife. Allie couldn't believe this same man brought her flowers on her birthday, she couldn't in fact believe all three of them were her guests that evening, perfectly blending into the friendly gathering. Now they were her enemies, spitting lies, spurring her captor on. She saw Lucy's eyes returning to her face, their look more dangerous than before. She understood threats are about to transform into beating, but the thing that really frightened her was why Bea wasn't there already. Did Tina send someone after her? Did they hurt her?

‘If you're Bea's stan’, Juice hissed slowly through her teeth, ‘you might have not wanted to steal my bike after all. You just wanted to mess up something, enough for me to break my neck next time I ride it, huh?!’

She huffed into Allie's face, angry enough to have a stroke. Allie tried to speak up for herself, but Juice's fingers were clasping tighter around her chords. She tried to wiggle out, but one of Juice's ‘boys’ hit her from the side. She could see hate in all eyes around her, in all but one pair. Mel coming into her view, she could see only worry and disbelief this was happening.

Mel tried to reason with Juice one more time, but seeing it was in vain, she decided to run back to the prep house and search for Bea. She might have not liked Allie and wanted Bea to side with them and forget about the blonde, but Allie didn't, in fact, do anything wrong and she was too devoted and loyal to Bea to participate in a thing that would hurt Bea. Cause she saw it back there on the bleachers, the way Bea worried about Allie, the way she cared about her.

While Mel was running away, Juice focused her attention back on Allie. ‘Hold her, boys’, she commanded to two women standing in the near proximity so each grabbed Allie under an armpit, lifting her up in the air. ‘I'll search her for tools. She must have some wrench or sheers on her. Kosta, you go check on my bike. See if the bitch has already managed to cut through wires or something.’

Allie saw a brunette in an olive vest, angels and flames tattoos down her arms, nodding to the command. While she checked the bike, Allie suffered the disgusting feel of Lucy's hands traveling up and down her limbs. ‘All fine here’, she finally heard Kosta shouting back at Juice.

‘Nothing here too, she's clean’, Juice grunted, but instead of releasing Allie, she put her right hand on her throat again. Allie could see the pupils of her round, piggy eyes dilating and her breath shortening. Juice motioned to her ‘boys’ to step back so that Allie could be solely in her power again.

‘I can see the hold you have over Bea’, she grinned as her left hand pressed on Allie's breast, then trailed it down her body until it grabbed between her legs. Allie’s stomach turned, she wished for her breakfast to make an reappearance all over Lucy's smug, disgusting face.
Bea has just come out of the loo and unlocked her locker. She put her phone and wallet into the inner pocket of her jacket and grabbed a helmet for Allie. She was turning the key in the lock again when it struck her: the prep house was unusually quiet. When she got into the loo, it was full of people, but when she turned around now, no one could be seen. A chill went down her spine. Only one thought consumed her being: she needed to find Allie fast.

Heading out of the house, she bumped into a breathless Mel, who explained in short sentences how Allie mixed up Juice's bike for hers and how now Juice has her pinned down.

Before Mel could finish, Bea started running towards the parking lot, Mel following her tracks as fast as she could.

Bea scolded herself for risking going to the toilet. It was only several minutes, but apparently in this milieu it was enough to get Allie into trouble. She could see from afar Juice's hand clasping around Allie's throat and her legs fluttering above the ground in an unsuccessful struggle to free herself.

Bea's heart dropped. She felt like her whole world is being taken away from her. She ran even faster, squeezing the strength she didn't know she possessed out of her limbs, until she hit the mob. Even though they were her mates and started instantly getting out her way, she rather knocked her way through their bodies instead of waiting for a free passage.

She was just that mad.

And when she came up front and saw the way Lucy's paw was groping between Allie's legs, she got even madder. She gnashed her teeth and clenched her fist, in order to compose herself enough to rather speak than to attack first. She knew it was only Juice's usual way with newcomers and she would step down if Bea tells her to.

'She's with me, Juice', she stated in a powerful, raised voice. 'Now let her go.'

'No, no, no' Lucy shook her head, 'it is my right. She messed with my bike.'

'She didn't do anything to it, Juice. So why don't you quit while you're ahead, huh?'

Lucy's turned her attention back to Allie, squeezing her throat with more of the sadistic pleasure.

'How 'bout you apologise.'

'Sorry, Juice. I didn't know it was your bike’, Allie made a peace offering, relieved to see Bea was there and unharmed.

'No, no, no. Not like that. You see, I'm in the need of an orgasm. Fifteen minutes in the prep house with me and you can show me that you mean it.'

With that, Bea lost it. She dropped the helmet she carried and launched herself at Juice, clenching her neck with her right arm. Juice cried out in pain and released Allie, who started coughing once her throat was free. Juice tried to shake Bea off, but Bea only tightened her grip and with her left hand she punched her hard in the ribs a couple of times.

'How 'bout you and me, Juice, what do you say? Fifteen minutes in the prep house, alone, this time I just might put you in the wheelchair permanently.'

Allie saw the look of fear in Lucy's round, piggy eyes.

'You apologise to Allie, right now. You say “Sorry, Allie, for attacking you, sorry for disrespecting
'She's just a cunt, Bea, not worth your sweat', Lucy grunted, trying to shake Bea off, to bite her in the arm.

Bea punched Juice in the ribs again and in that moment one of the Lucy's 'boys', a large blonde woman about thirty years old, found her courage to throw herself at Bea.

'Behind you!' Allie shouted with fear. Bea dropped Juice to the ground, turned around like a cat, and connected her fist with the fat blonde's face. With another punch she knocked her out, and turned her attention to kneeling Juice. The other members of the gang watched silently as Bea grabbed Lucy's ear and twisted it. They didn't want to interfere in a personal fight between their two mates, especially not these two who were their unofficial leaders, even though it didn't sit well with them that Bea was aligning with an outsider. Bea dragged Juice by the ear to Allie and said with the sound of a real threat in her voice:

'I suggest you apologise to Allie while you can still walk."

'I'm sorry, Allie', Lucy spat hatefully.

Bea twisted her ear again.

'For attacking you, for disrespecting you!' Juice yelled in pain and by that Bea dropped her and reached her hand out to Allie.

'Let's go', she said, picking up the helmet.

Allie took her hand and followed her, still scared to look at Lucy as she passed her by.

'And don't you touch her again', Bea hissed into Juice’s face.

Lucy Gambaro was shaking off the dirt from her pants, and her blonde 'boy' got up as well.

Waiting until Bea was in the safe distance, she yelled behind her back:

'It must be love!'  

And they both laughed.

Bea ignored them and continued towards her bike, not letting go of Allie's hand.

'You've gone soft, Bea!' she heard Doreen shout and turned back to face her.

'What did ya say?' she asked slowly.

'She said you've gone soft, Bea', Nash stepped up for his wife. 'We've all been seeing it for a while now, and now we understand why.'

'All that pillow talking with your little Polish princess gone to your head, huh, Bea?!' Juice spitted out. 'Punching your own for an outsider cunt', she added with venom.

'Yeah, Bea', Tina threw in, 'you can't be in the gang and not stick up for your own'.

Bea paused to eye Tina. She saw her taking Allie to the parking lot. Tina knows which parking space belongs to whom, if Allie doesn't. Bea gave a snort of disgust, everything suddenly becoming clear to her.
'You brought her here on purpose, you jealous bitch. Under false pretenses, you wanted her to get hurt.'

Tina bit back, 'Maybe, maybe not. Maybe she should know better than to jump behind every stranger who offers her a ride to the middle of nowhere.'

Allie saw Bea's fist clench, she was taking a step forward to approach Tina. So she placed herself in front of Bea, fearing that they all might attack her at once and remembering the knives some of them were packing.

'She's not worth it, Bea. Let it go.'

Bea spat towards Tina, and sat on her bike, handing Allie over the spare helmet and unhooking her own off the throttle.

'What's it gonna be, Bea?' Mel asked nervously. 'Is it us or her?' She felt her little heart dropping at the thought of losing Bea. After all, her infatuation with Bea was the only reason she got mixed up with this lot in the first place.

'Yes, Bea', Kim added, 'because you can't be a rider and vanilla in the same time.'

At that, Bea lifted her visor up and looked at them all with disgust.

'You know what? I think I'm done here. For good.'

'No Bea!' Mel and Kim cried out simultaneously, while Tina only stood there in disbelief.

Bea Smith walking away from her people, for the sake of this pathetic, weak outsider.

But Bea didn't care.

'Hold on, Allie', she whispered and got the engine roaring.

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Allie couldn't believe what just happened. She still felt the remnants of fear, and also guilt started creeping up to her for causing Bea to lose the thing she loved so dearly. In the same time the buzz got into her head, her blood was pumping with adrenaline, as she held onto Bea's waist and thought about what lengths she just went in order to protect her.

Bea pulled on the side of the road after fifteen minutes of riding, and took off her helmet, so Allie got up from the bike and took off her helmet too.

'Are you alright?' Bea asked, placing her hand on Allie's throat, as to examine whether she's been seriously hurt.

'I think I'll probably have a few bruises to powder up but otherwise I'm fine. You?' she roamed her eyes concernedly over Bea's face.

'My fist hurts a little, but it's nothing.'

Allie took Bea's hand and looked at her bruised knuckles. To Bea's surprise, she lifted her hand to her lips and kissed her bruises. Bea shivered, 'Don't, Allie.'
'I won't, I won't, I know', Allie said gently but still held Bea's hand against her heart.

'I'm sorry you had to leave the gang because of me. It's all my fault, I shouldn't have come.'

'You couldn't have known, Allie. I get it, you trusted Tina, she is so nice when we're at work. But she played you all the way.'

'I feel like an idiot,' Allie lowered her head.

Bea raised her chin and looked her in the eye.

'Don't. It's not your fault. You thought you were coming to a normal gathering, no way you could have predicted this. Tina set you up for a beating, simple as that.'

'Because I “broke their rollercoaster”?' Allie blinked in confusion. 'I thought that they were only messing with me.'

'Their what?!' Bea shouted out in disbelief.

‘That’s what they call their time with ya - riding a rollercoaster’, Allie admitted against her will, knowing in advance the realisation would hurt Bea. She felt a need to comfort her, Bea looking stricken on spot, 'I know it's been a long time being involved with them, but it's not worth your sorrow. Not when they never perceived you fully as a person.'

Bea's eyes stared pensively into the distance. 'Maybe I never allowed them to see me as a person', she said at last.

'So have you really?' Allie needed to know.

'What?'

'Cut the girls off. Stopped intercourses with them since you got on with me.'

'I guess so, now that you say it', Bea said hesitantly, another shock evident on her face. ‘I didn't really notice or realise it until now. I certainly didn't plan on it. In fact, I brought my strap-on in my jacket this morning but after the first race, when Mel grabbed me by the hand to go celebrate, I couldn't. I just didn't feel in the mood for it.'

Allie's heart soared at the confession of Bea's unplanned, yet instinctive fidelity, and she placed her hand on Bea's cheek.

'Don't, Allie’, Bea said dismissively so Allie withdrew her hand quickly in order not to agitate Bea.

'Thank you', she said.

'What for?' Bea raised her eyebrows.

'For protecting me. For risking being beaten because of me.'

'Oh Allie, I couldn't just leave you with that hyena, couldn't I?'

Bea smiled and Allie felt her heart melting into those chocolate eyes. She really wanted to kiss Bea, but she knew better by now.

'Sorry again for getting you kicked out of the gang.'
'No worries. I was meaning to lose them anyway. Since Juice and her boys joined in, it wasn't as much of a group of anarchists anymore. It felt lately more like a group of criminals. I could swear some of them even started using drugs, but I can't be sure: I'm not really familiar with symptoms of a drug addiction and, I mean, where would they get it? But something is definitely happening with the lot, so two weeks ago I decided to leave them, but kept postponing it, because I didn't know how to break the news to my girls and Nash and Doreen. As it turned out, the whole bunch wasn't worth my time', Bea said bitterly. 'Anyhow', she changed the subject, 'this dump across the road is the only settlement before we reach Melbourne and this diner is your only chance at lunch in the next two hours. What do you say, you want to grab a burger?'

'Sure', Allie replied, 'but I'm confused. Tina drove me there in half an hour.'

'This God forsaken detour is much longer. I took it to make sure they don't catch up with us. I think they don't have interest in pursuing us, but I wanted to be careful just in case. This road is practically abandoned after this point, no asphalt, you can't see a car for hours so I think it will not occur to them that I'd use it. We certainly never used it together. It's rocky, and a long drive, kind of risky for the tires.'

'Let me buy you lunch then', Allie chirped out. Thanks to the rocky road, she gets to spend couple of more hours with Bea.

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After they had eaten their burgers and had drunk their orange juices, they took off again, leaving the trail of dust behind them.

Her hands wrapped around Bea's waist, Allie held on tight to one of the happiest moments in her life. How Bea drove that race today, how she protected her, how she joked with her during lunch, threw her head back and laughed… Above all, how she confessed to not sleeping with others after that first time with her. Allie was pressing her face against Bea's jacket, inhaling the smell of dust that caught up in it. Mixed with Bea's natural odor, it was an incredible turn on and Allie felt throbbing between her legs.

Bea pulled her bike and turned her head to Allie.

'What do you think you're doing?'

'What?'

'You're touching me, Allie, stop it.'

Allie looked confused for a second, until she realised that her hand had dropped low to Bea's groin.

'Shit, I didn't realise. Sorry, I'll behave. Drive on.'

Bea sighed impatiently and roared the engine again.

Quarter an hour later Allie couldn't take it any longer. Ever since Bea’d shown her where her hand was, she kept imagining sexual scenarios, involving her and Bea on this bike. The rocky road didn't help either, Allie almost sure she came a bit in her pants. Oh fuck, she thought, I'll risk it, even if she abandoned me here on the side of the road and I'd have to walk to Melbourne. She lowered her hand again and caressed Bea's core with her fingertips. She felt the older woman twitch and it spurred her on. She pressed deeper.
With that, Bea stopped her bike abruptly and jumped off it, shouting at Allie, 'Do you want us to fall off the bike? What's wrong with you?'

'Sorry, I can't help it. You're incredibly hot.'

'Can't you control yourself a bit, aye? You're not even a lesbian, for God's sake!'

Allie shrugged her shoulders.

'I don't know what I am, Bea. But I know you spoiled me for all others, men and women alike. I don't want anybody else, just you. And I want you all the time, I can't fight it.'

Bea inhaled deeply. Now I've really fucked it up, Allie thought, looking at the redhead’s stiffened face.

Without a word Bea returned to the bike and started driving. After couple of minutes, Allie was surprised to see they were turning ninety degrees right. Bea drove hundred meters through a stubble field until she entered tall bushes and stopped the engine. She took her helmet off and fastened it on the side. She stood up on the footrests and turned carefully to face Allie, then sat down again.

'Alright, bring it on', she said to Allie's confused face.

Allie looked in panic at all the sharp thorns surrounding them.

'Scared, aren't ya? Was it more amusing to tease me? Well I don't intend to have sex in the middle of the fuckin’ road, Allie. We'll just have to do it on the bike.'

Allie was still looking at her surroundings with fear of falling into it.

Bea laughed at her perplexed expression: 'I knew ya didn't have it in ya. Just wanted to show ya I can be a fuckin’ tease too, ya know.'

With that she started to raise herself to turn to throttles again and drive them away, but her little prank has just turned Allie on massively so she grabbed Bea's arms and said: 'Wait. I want to.' She carefully took off her helmet and dropped her sneakers into the bush next to the rear wheel. Then she reached for the inner pocket in Bea's jacket until she managed to get Bea's strap-on with dildo out of it and placed it into Bea's hand.

'It would be a shame that you brought it all the way for nothing', she winked at still disbelieving Bea.

Allie carefully removed her pants, scared that she will fall into bushes, then she tugged them behind Bea's back.

'Let's make it comfortable for you then', she smiled at Bea while fastening the pant legs to handlebars.

'Who's scared now?' she stood up and took Bea by the chin to close her shocked gob.

Bea's look dropped to Allie's lower stomach, so close to her mouth in that position, so she shook her hair and placed her hands on Allie's hips. She pulled Allie's panties down by their strings and inhaled the scent of Allie's mound.

'Sit', she said laconically and when Allie did, she removed Allie's underwear very carefully, from one leg, then the other. That act gave her a better view of Allie's mound then ever before and only with a great strength she refrained of devouring her with her mouth.
She then stood up to fasten her strap-on and once she finished putting a condom on it, Allie passionately grabbed her by the hips and took her dildo into her mouth. She sucked a bit on it, then stood up and placed her hands on Bea's shoulders to hold herself while turning her back towards Bea.

Bea herself has got massively turned on by now and when Allie bent down holding herself up by her palms on the passenger seat, she leant in and placed the silicone cock very hastily into her vagina. She's just started to push, when she heard Allie panicking: 'Sorry, I can't, I can't, I'll fall.' Their feet were sharing the footrests and even though Bea was extremely glad in that moment that she customized her bike with extended length footboards instead of mini daggers she initially wanted to build in, Allie had to actually stand on her tiptoes to fit in, Bea's hands on her waist being the only thing keeping her from falling into ambiss.

Bea grabbed Allie's front quickly and pulled her back up, into the safety of her embrace.

'Sorry, my hands are not strong enough to hold myself like that and my head got a little dizzy. Let's sit down, try another position.'

They got back down, Allie trying to bend forward so that Bea could enter her but the passenger seat was higher than the driver's so they struggled to get it in until Bea gave up and said: 'Sorry Allie, it's just not possible under this angle.'

'Maybe if I come closer', Allie tried to sit into Bea's lap in the driver's seat but only ended up pushing Bea up the fuel tank until she felt completely cornered and groaned out in frustration: 'Oh just turn around already!'

Allie froze.

Decisive not to blow her chance, she came quickly to her senses and carefully turned around until she was standing over Bea. Bea leaned her back fully on the fuel tank, her head on speedometer, padded with Allie's jeans. She let her legs fall along bike sides, then Allie dropped slowly into her lap, putting her upper thighs over Bea's. Their eyes locked.

'I like it like this. Now put it in', she lifted her hips a bit, creating more room for Bea's hand to insert her cock.

Bea's eyes went wide as Allie relaxed back down into her lap and she started moving her hips up, impatient like a child with a Christmas gift.

'Wait', Allie whispered and started to unbutton her shirt. Her full breasts fell out into Bea's face and she gripped both handles of the bike to gain more stability and bring herself even closer to Bea.

Allie's breasts were now touching Bea's face, Bea staying perfectly still under them, stunned frozen with was happening. They smelled like flowers, Bea thought.

Seeing how paralysed Bea was by her inhibitions, Allie started moving on her own, started riding Bea's cock on her own. First she moved slowly then picked up the pace, her breasts tapping into Bea's frozen face. She never took her gaze off Bea's expression, who stared mesmerised into her tits. She could see her pupils fully dilated, her open mouth, her hair scattered all across the tank. Bea was biting her lip bloody and watching it, Allie felt her climax building up fast. When Bea gasped and dug her nails into Allie's back, Allie came all over Bea's groins.

She shook with pleasure couple of minutes in the aftermath, with still immovable Bea inside of her. She sighed happily and pulled the stunned redhead up into such a tight embrace that her head was
pressed against Allie's chest. Panicking, Bea started to pull away, but Allie was stubbornly not letting go. In that silent wrestle, during which Allie expected them to fall into thorns any second now, Allie's tits kept slapping Bea across her face, rubbing against her cheeks, shutting her eyes or falling on her mouth. Allie felt Bea giving up protest so she loosened her grip and held Bea gently in her arms. She caressed her locks, scared that by the beating of her heart Bea could guess how much she cared.

Couple of minutes later Allie almost fell off the bike as Bea's teeth on her nipple startled her. She couldn't believe what was happening. She was afraid to move, to breathe, thinking that Bea might come to her senses and pull back. She's been suppressing her moans successfully, that is until Bea opened her mouth fully and took her left breast in it. At that point she let out a long, excruciating moan and her breasts shuddered into Bea's face. Bea lifted her look to Allie's shut eyelids, taking in how cramped her features were from the amount of arousal she was experiencing. She smiled up to her face and soon felt something terribly strong running through her veins. Consumed with passion, she leaned her upper body towards the rear side of the bike, not letting go of Allie for a second. Her face still pressed into Allie’s chest, she placed Allie’s back onto the passenger seat and lifted Allie's legs higher up her thighs.

Bea raised her upper body by her elbows on the rear fender and paused for a moment, taking in the sight of Allie, laid down underneath her. She was so beautiful, watching her with that dreamy look, her blue eyes glistening in the afternoon sun, her full lips parted, her nose covered with fine sheen of sweat after the last orgasm.

Bea's look then fell to her breasts again and she felt driven completely mad by their brassy turbulence. She howled like a wolf, not having time to wonder where that came from, before she launched herself at those tits, kissing them like a maniac, sucking them into her mouth. Allie started moaning and writhing underneath her and soon begging for Bea to take her.

At those words, Bea took pity to the young woman below her, got herself up with her palms on the fender and started thrusting fast into her. She could hear a sound like she was splashing into a puddle, for that is how wet Allie was. She placed her hands on Allie's breasts and squeezed them passionately, as she pushed in and out of her.

Allie didn't last long after that and her whole body went limp, arms and legs hanging loosely on the sides of the bike.

Bea laid down her head on Allie's chest and could hear how her beating heart matched the wild rhythm of her own.

Allie lost consciousness for a minute there, unaware where she was, until she awoke to the feeling of Bea's lips caressing her nipples. Bea's tongue started to gently lick the sweat off her skin and Allie felt her heart would beat out of her chest with happiness.

Bea was insatiable. She kissed Allie's breasts quenchlessly, she couldn't get enough. She stroked the right one with her hand, while putting the left one into her mouth. She unclasped her harness and threw the dildo into the bushes. To the sudden sound Allie opened her eyes again and turned her head towards the sound. As she turned her shocked face back to Bea's, Bea said simply: 'I'm sick of it.'

With those words, she leant into Allie's chest and started sucking on the skin under them. Her right hand went up and down Allie's mound, stroking it to awoke the tremble in it.

Allie's body, Allie's mind was on fire. Her lover was finally touching her the way that she always wanted her to, and when Bea's fingers entered her, she squealed out of joy.
'Beaaa!' she shouted. Bea licked her, with her whole tongue, up between her breasts and increased the pace.

Soon she had Allie screaming her name over and over again until she stiffened up and fell down hard, Bea having to hold her not to fall off the bike.

She cried, her whole body shaking in pleasure. Bea looked at her questioningly.

'Don't worry', Allie managed to choke out. 'Those are happy tears.'

'Ya doofus', Bea said gently.

'So I've been told before', Allie smiled through tears.

'You know, you seem to be handling the first orgasm well but those afterwards seem to dumb you down a bit. Maybe in the future I will stick to giving you just one at a time.'

'Don't you dare', Allie growled and that put Bea into a fit of laughter. She sat up still laughing and pulled Allie by the ends of her open shirt towards herself, placing her back against the steering frame.

Allie looked at Bea's smiling lips, so close to her own, and after everything new that happened with them that day, she dared her luck to try to kiss Bea again. Bea stopped her lips with her finger and said firmly: 'The rules haven't changed. I don't get to be kissed, I don't get to be touched.' She looked Allie straight in the eye: 'Do we understand each other?'

'Deal', Allie accepted, thinking that for the first time she has a real hope that things will turn to normal one day. Two minutes ago Bea implied for the first time that she expects future sexual encounters between them and that was a sign for Allie to hold on, under any circumstances, until Bea isn't scared of intimacy anymore.

She snuggled into Bea's neck, while Bea's hand was playing with her blonde locks.

'Now we will stay here until you are confident that you regained your strength. We don't want you falling off the bike, don't we?'

Allie only sighed back in happiness and snuggled her face even closer in. Things have already changed a bit, she thought in delight.

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As Bea parked in front of Allie's house, it was already six o'clock in the evening.

'How come you live in a chateau?' an amused Bea asked.

'I inherited it from my father. When my great grandfather came from Poland, he built this huge house with so many rooms, so that his four sons could remain living with them after they marry. Which was accostumary in Poland, back in those days. Unfortunately, three sons died in WWII, they had all decided to go back to Poland and fight against the Germans and only my grandfather came back alive, holding his wife by the hand and his newborn son - my father - in his arms. My grandma was also Polish, they met on the front in Europe and she followed grandfather across the globe. Unfortunately, my father was the only child they had, and I don't have any siblings either, so during
my childhood the house was creepily empty and depressing.'

'Did you try to sell it, get yourself something cosier?'

'No way! My dziadkowie would get up from their graves and kick my sorry ass to hell.'

Bea smiled: 'You speak Polish?'

'Sadly no. Grandma spoke it to me when I was little but she died when I was nine so I only remember few words. I rent most of the house though. I first rented only a basement, but after I gathered enough money by renting the basement, I invested into remodeling the house into five completely separate accommodations, with five separate entrances. Now the half of the basement is mine, and the other half is a joint storage area.'

'Wow, I'm impressed, Allie. You're a real entrepreneur.'

'EASY enough when you have the means. Come in, I'll show you around. For myself I kept the part of the house we actually used when I was a child', Allie took Bea's hand, pulling her towards the door.

Intrigued Bea followed her inside. Once in the living room, she looked around. The furniture was modern and cozy but the fireplace and windows looked old and romantic.

'What can I get you to drink?'

'Oh just water please.'

Bea was still admiring the windows when Allie came back.

'Venetian glass', she said handing Bea a glass of water.

As Bea drank, her eyes fell on framed pictures on the piano, showing a little blond girl with either her grandparents or her equally blonde father.

'Oh my God, is that you? You we're so darn cute!'

'Do you mean to say that I'm not cute anymore?' Allie pouted.

'You just want to fool me into saying how beautiful you are grown up.'

Allie laughed aloud:

'Come sit, let me show you some real funny childhood albums, full of embarrassing pictures.'

Bea was finishing her drink as Allie fumbled inside some drawers. She was sizing her half bent body up and down, listening to her sexy voice telling some funny story, and all of a sudden she felt heat rising up her body. She approached Allie from the back, placing her hand on her backside.

'How 'bout you show me those albums some other time?' she said as her hand kept wandering. She could feel Allie's body stiffen from surprise, and she turned around towards Bea slowly, eyes full of desire.

She had to bite her lip to refrain from kissing Bea so Bea took a few steps back and said in a low, husky voice:

'Why don't you undress for me?'
Allie shuddered.

She unbuttoned her shirt first and threw it on the floor. Then she kicked off her shoes and socks and started working on her zipper. Her hands were trembling badly by now so Bea approached her and pulled down the zipper herself. Then she stepped back again, leaning on the back of the sofa so that she can enjoy the show from the distance.

Naked Allie hesitated until Bea husked: 'Come here.'

Allie got nearer, Bea pointing with her chin towards the white, comfy sofa. Allie nodded and bent over the armrest, waiting for Bea to enter her.

'Oh, I don't think so,' Bea whispered, then sat down on the sofa herself, pulling her legs up, leaning her back into the other armrest, her gaze fixed on Allie.

Wondering if she understood it right, Allie warily approached and climbed into Bea's lap, straddling her and holding onto her shoulders.

Chuckling, Bea leaned even deeper into the armrest, so that Allie's breasts fell right into her face.

'Now, that's what I've been thinking about,' Bea murmured lustfully, as her right hand went straight up Allie's core and her lips attached themselves to her nipple.
Hello, my patient friends!

Hereby I present you one of the capital chapters. It's obscenely long: it took me five full days to write it and six hours today to proofread it. So I hope, whenever you're done with it, even if you have to break the reading into couple of days, that you'll leave me a comment of what you think of it. You know how I'm spoiled by your comments ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The next morning Bea awoke shortly after six. She got more than decent nine hours' sleep and she felt like a brand new person. Her thoughts went first to her gang. While she would miss their Saturday races, the adrenaline and driving around in a pack, she felt strangely deliberated. Ever since she's met Allie she's started losing taste for the raw, the wild, the annihilating. All the rush she now needed from a bike ride was the rush she got when Allie wound her arms around her waist and they slowly cruised the city. Maybe her crew was right - she's gone soft on Allie, but she actually liked this new version of herself. It reminded her of how she used to be - before. Bea was disappointed to discover there was such an ugly side to her relationship with her girls and companionship with Nash and Doreen, but it didn't hurt her. If anything, their yesterday's malice freed her from the burden of guilt she'd been feeling ever since she had definitely decided to leave the crew two weeks ago. She would never forget how Mel tried to save Allie - but then she wasn't really surprised as Mel was always better than the lot, herself included. She will remain in Mel’s debt and one day, soon enough, she will find her and thank her. But she didn't have any wish to contact her in the immediate future, she was way too happy with her newfound sense of freedom and wanted to detach from her ex-crew completely.

It didn't take her long before her thoughts wandered off to their favourite subject - Allie. She went over their yesterday's adventures, one by one, in order of how they happened. She was sure she'd never forget the awful moment she saw Allie struggling to free herself from Juice's grip. If she had had any doubt that Allie's well-being and safety has become her priority in life, it would have been dispersed after the way her body reacted to the sight of her gentle lover being shaken like a rag in the merciless hands of a bully. In those few seconds before she started running to her rescue, she experienced a wide range of emotions and chemical reactions: from fear that caused her eyesight to mist and world around her to turn to darkness for a second to her heart pounding so loudly she could hear waves of rushing blood coming over her head to rage that shook her body and prompted her to act upon it. Once Juice dropped Allie and Allie took her hand for Bea to lead her out of that wretched place, Bea almost broke down with relief. She couldn't believe they actually pulled it off and she got her Allie back into safety. She wouldn't know what she would have done if she arrived after Juice managed to inflict serious harm to Allie. As ridiculous as it sounded compared to the brightness of the morning sunrays that were lightening her room and the general feeling of lazy lulliness into the good life of upper middle class, Bea remembered the wrath that overtook her and was sure she would have ended up a murderer of Lucy Gambaro and locked away in a prison cell for the rest of her life.

But then she wouldn't see her Allie anymore… Bea smiled an insecure, fearful smile. Maybe that's why she took her into her embrace afterwards, because she caught a glimpse of how it would be like
if Allie was taken away from her. Maybe that's why she held onto her so tightly later on her bike, caressed her, ran her fingers through her hair. The thorns of the bush they were hiding in were all around them and the prospect of Allie falling into those thorns if she didn't cradle her protectively prolonged the anxiety that took over her back on the parking lot and made her overcome her fear of closeness, for fear of losing Allie was stronger than her usual phobia.

Bea felt herself blushing profoundly as images of what came after followed one another. She could see it all again vividly: Allie straddling her lap, opening her shirt, the sight of her full breasts so close to her face. Her blood was pumping as strongly as yesterday when it all happened, and she parted her lips as if she wanted to take that delicious nipple into her mouth again.

She couldn't believe she actually took Allie's breasts into her mouth. She couldn't believe she embraced her, let her be on top. And above all, it seemed surreal how her hand found her way into Allie without any fear or hesitation. The most amazing thing was, now that she rewinded the scenes in her head, that she didn't panic, she didn't feel any regret, she actually felt proud of herself. She realised the braveness she exhibited yesterday and her breath got caught in her throat from excitement. She was so glad it was Sunday and she was to meet Allie in about two hours. She felt so high on confidence after her yesterday's accomplishments, she couldn't wait to do it all over again: the meet, the bike ride, the sex, the talk. She was so intrigued by Allie's house, her past, her ancestors. She couldn't wait to walk in there again and explore everything, ask anything.

Bea jumped from her bed with a feeling that everything will be good in the end, must come out good. She took in the sight of the beach and ocean in the horizon, abundantly bathed in the sunshine that was promised in the weather forecast for this first of May.

In the shower, she leant on the wall with her outstretched left arm and let her right fall freely. She imagined Allie resting her back on the wall in front of her and her free right hand roaming over her smooth skin. She wanted so badly to touch her the next hour couldn't pass soon enough. Her right hand longed for the warmth she felt when she was buried deep between Allie's thighs. It was a feeling as if she discovered a secluded cave, a treasure. Yesterday her fingers soaked in tepid waters of that cave and now they ached because they couldn't dive into them right away. Bea sighed out loud, opening the cold water tap and cooling her hot head under the stream. She was impatient to explore the tight walls of that cave again and minutes couldn't fly fast enough.

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Mere minutes after she'd finished breakfast, Allie was surprised to hear her door bell ring. She was in the hallway anyway, putting her running shoes on, so she opened the door quickly, curious who it might be. Whoever it was, she only hoped they wouldn't keep her up for long, for it was high time that she heads to the park and meets Bea.

She gasped when she saw Bea herself standing at her doorstep.

'Thought I gave you a bike ride to the park, now that I know where you live’, the redhead explained clumsily, her cheeks going colour of her hair. Her right arm was hidden behind her back, but she stretched it out soon enough to hand over a colourful bunch of roses. Allie brought them to her nostrils, surprised she could actually sense their fragrance. She was so accustomed to odourless hybrids from flower shops she forgot how real roses smell. Then she understood and a feeling of guilt and sadness temporarily overwhelmed her.

'You cut the roses from your garden’, she stated in shock.
I have so many I won't even notice’, Bea dismissed her as if it was nothing, but Allie didn't fall for her act. She knew it hurt Bea to cut down even the already withered ones. Instinctively, she reached with her hand to strike down on Bea's curls for solace, but before she actually touched her, she remembered she shouldn't and withdrew her hand. To her amazement Bea reacted with pulling her into a hug. She was just tall enough to nuzzle her face into the crook of Allie's neck and Allie couldn't help but think she fitted in there perfectly. Then she didn't refrain from reaching out again and actually caressing the red curls. It seemed to her she could sense Bea's lips broadening into a smile against her neck and when they finally parted, she indeed saw that smile still lingering on Bea's face. She could see Bea was happy that morning and that was all her heart needed to soar.

Even though Bea continued to wear that same enchanting smile the whole morning long and didn't seem to regret any of her actions yesterday, Allie still couldn't quite throw off the feeling of guilt for causing her to lose her biker gang. She knew Bea needed races, needed adrenaline rush to shake off her demons and once in a while forget about her problems. So when she saw an ad on the noticeboard at the end of their jogging trail advertising Saturday morning running races in groups, she took Bea's phone and insisted on memorising the contact number of the event organiser. Bea went along, even if she rolled her eyes, seeing it made Allie feel better about what happened yesterday.

'Shall we go in and eat something?’ Allie motioned towards their usual tavern.

'How 'bout we went straight to your place and ordered in some pizza instead?’ Bea asked boldly, her eyes glistening with promises and possibilities. She has barely held her composure during their jogging session and all she wanted now as a reward for behaving so well was to be alone with Allie, as soon as possible.

'Bea Smith opting for junk food, what would that be?’ Allie mocked her, but her smile soon froze as Bea stepped closer and put her hands on her waist. Her brown eyes were sparkling with green flares in the morning sun, and she beamed with confidence and sex appeal. Allie only nodded, almost unnoticeably, but it caused Bea to smile even brighter.

During their ride back, Allie held onto Bea's waist firmly with her left hand, but with her right she dared drawing patterns across Bea's belly and Bea didn't seem to mind. In fact, she could hear her humming a tune in a mic inside her helmet. When she recognised the tune, she joined her singing it aloud and could hear Bea giggle. It was a glorious day, the sun was bright, not a cloud in the sky, it wasn't cold, it wasn't too hot, and it was perfect, because under that wide blue cover there was nothing that stood in the way of the feeling of happiness they shared.

They both took a shower at the same time, Allie in her en suite, and Bea in the main bathroom upstairs. When Allie got out, she found Bea already comfortably seated in her lounge.

'You look nice in my clothes’, she smiled down on her, before she joined her on the sofa. Bea wore her white cotton shirt and blue jeans and looked like a poster girl for the great outdoors.

Allie sat down so closely their thighs were touching. A comfortable silence fell upon them. Allie snuck her hand into Bea's, encouraged by the way Bea was welcoming every initiative she took on this blessed day. And now, again, she didn't push her away. Instead, she squeezed her hand and smiled shyly.

As eager as she was the whole morning, Bea suddenly felt like she didn't know what to do. Her hands were clammy and her heart was beating way to loud. It was different with the two of them this time, good different, but she was still nervous as hell. But she wasn't afraid, she was still boosting with confidence. After her success in overwhelming her fears yesterday, on this very spot, she had every faith in herself and the woman sitting next to her. She played with Allie's fingers while they
silently stole glances. At last she pulled her feet up on the sofa and Allie followed her example.

They sat like that, facing each other, staring into each other's eyes, for minutes and minutes, until Bea extended her hand and cupped Allie's cheek. Allie leant her head into that hand and placed a kiss into her open palm. Bea brushed her thumb over Allie's cheekbones, then held her hand on her neck, as to steady them both. She inhaled deeply couple of times, then smiled again into the bluest of eyes. Their eyes still locked, her fingers worked tirelessly to unbutton and remove Allie's jeans, then moved to lift her red sweater and bra.

'God!' she said in disbelief something can be so pretty, as Allie's naked skin shone brightly in front of her. Every time she got to see her like this, Allie seemed more and more beautiful and Bea found it hard to believe her good fortune. She hugged around her naked body, pulling her closer to herself and assuming the same position as yesterday against the armrest of the sofa. When Allie was quick to understand and straddled her lap, Bea smiled a grateful smile and rasped out, 'Thank you'. She felt so privileged, so blessed, to have this wonderful being surrendering to her over and over again, as every time it seemed more of a miracle it could happen once, let alone repeat itself.

She stroked tenderly down Allie's neck and shoulders. She was in a hurry to get to Allie this morning, but now that they were actually together, she took her time, for it seemed to her they had all the time in the world. It wasn't past midday yet so, in a way, she was right to feel so.

She loved running her fingers through Allie's tresses and she let her do the same with her curls. No matter what Allie did, all was fine for Bea, as long as she looked at her with those innocent blue eyes and they reflected back her own feeling of belonging to each other. Allie didn't do much anyway, afraid one wrong move could spoil it all for them. When Bea started pulling her closer and closer, her lips trailing hungrily below Allie's collarbones, Allie sat more upright, hugging around Bea's neck and letting her arms fall down Bea's back.

Bea was sweet-torturing her even more than yesterday, her lips and tongue dancing around her nipples for one excruciating eternity. Bea's hands drew tender patterns on Allie's bare back; now and then she bit ever so slightly into her shoulder and upper arm.

They were both so relaxed in each other's embrace, they didn't notice their foreplay was way past SLA, and was quickly upgrading to the next level. Both completely unaware where they were headed, Bea kept kissing on Allie's breasts like it was her last, while Allie didn't even register she has started to grind against Bea's jeans. The movements of her hips pushed Bea deeper down into the sofa, she was now almost lying under the blonde, not caring where she was, for she was still too busy chasing after her swinging bosoms. However, soon she started feeling the pressure of Allie's rhythmic movements against her core, and she couldn't lie - it felt good, it got her wound up. She felt herself slipping even further into the sofa cushions, she pressed her lips against Allie's shoulder, letting go and relaxing completely. She would have been completely immovable if it weren't for her hands that kept wandering across Allie's back, grabbing on her arse and pulling her closer each time Allie's vigorous motions caused her body to drift a bit away from Bea's. Allie's flowing blonde hair was constantly in motion too, so it kept poking into Bea's eyes until Bea closed them firmly.

Bea didn't know where she went, she was lost to sensations that felt surreally good, she checked her usual, strict self out and let herself enjoy the moment. Her whole body shook with small waves of pleasure and her fingers dug deep into the supple flesh of her lover's back. It felt so familiar, like coming home. She stopped thinking…

When she opened her eyes again, she was staring at the poplar tree, pressing against their window on the first floor of their small apartment. Its branches were tossed against the glass over and over again in the raging storm and wind outside, but she felt so safe in her lover's embrace. She could see the
city was bathed in rain, the elements fought a heavy battle against each other, but all she cared about
was the gentle battle of their overly excited hearts. She could sense her climax building, like so many
times in the past, and the tapping of the thick black curls against her bare bosom excited her even
more, leading her inevitably towards the edge. She dug deeper into her lover’s back, and as she felt
herself ready to come, she lifted her head to make contact with those mesmerising eyes. Black as the
darkest night, as they looked deep into her soul, instead of climaxing, Bea startled and screamed,
tossing a shocked Allie on the floor.

‘No, Helen!’ she heard Bea shouting in anger, ‘I said never again!’

She looked like she was sleepwalking with a nightmare, and Allie was quick on her feet to try to
calm her down. When she tried to strike her hair to relax her, Bea pushed her away, yelling to get
off. She was still lost in her own head, not registering anything around her, but kept yelling
nonetheless so that Allie started fearing if her tenants heard anything, they might call the police. She
quickly ran into the kitchen. Coming back with a half-full glass of water, she threw the water into
Bea’s face.

That seemed to sober Bea up: she went silent and still, then slowly opened her eyes. First thing she
registered was the absence of the sound of pounding rain and how the tree branches weren’t grating
against the window glass anymore. She was looking around as if to establish where she was and
when she finally did, she quickly understood what must have happened. Allie noticed her eyes filling
with different kind of fear, the one she identified as trepidation where Allie was. Once Bea's eyes
located the object of her anxiety, they filled with relief, but it was short-lived, as guilt crept right into
them.

'I'm sorry, I'm sorry’, she uttered, looking ashamed, then jumped out of bed and headed for the front
doors.

'Don't run on me again’, Allie's voice was trembling.

The redhead paused in the open doorway.

'I didn't mean to run’, she said in a broken tone of voice, 'I'll be right outside. I just need air and some
alone time’.

Allie watched the door shutting behind her, then sank into the armchair, covering her face with her
hands.

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An hour later Bea still hasn’t come in. From time to time Allie could hear her walking up and down
her veranda then sighing and sitting down again. When the sounds of her movements lost on
nervousness, Allie dared to slowly exit her house. She found Bea on the lounger next to front door
and tentatively squatted down in front of her. Bea lifted her eyes to meet hers and Allie could see
them starting to fill with tears. She slipped her both hands into Bea’s and intertwined their fingers.

'I fucked the day up’, Bea stated as the first drop tore away from her watery eyes and glided down
her cheek.

'So what if you did? Tomorrow's another day’, Allie caressed her palms with her thumbs.

Bea smiled a little: there was no judgement in Allie’s voice, no frustration, no resentment. 'I guess we
could try again tomorrow. I freaked out today, but I did so well yesterday’, she tried to rectify herself.
'Yes, you did’, Allie brought their intertwined hands to her lips to place a kiss on Bea's knuckles, 'but there's no pressure. You don't need to do anything you're not comfortable with, not tomorrow, not ever, okay?’

Bea seemed touched by her words and tears started to spill again. There was just something about Allie granting her an absolute freedom of choice in this matter that got deep to her.

'Sweet girl’, she whispered, before she got on her feet, pulling Allie up with her, so that she can take her into her embrace.

'Changing the subject’, Allie started few minutes later, ‘I called pizza delivery and their runner should be here any minute. Wanna watch a movie while we eat?’

She felt Bea smile into her neck, 'Only if it's a comedy’.

Allie smiled too, 'Deal’.

***

It was good twenty minutes after the end credits have rolled and Bea and Allie were still sitting in the same comfortable position, empty plates and glasses in front of them. Bea was lying down with her head against the armrest while Allie sat on the other end with Bea's feet in her lap. Finally the blonde got up to bring the dirty dishes into the kitchen and open the windows in the lounge to let the fresh air in. It was three in the afternoon and the weather was getting chilly so when she returned to the sofa, she lay down next to Bea and threw a blanket over them.

Bea was unusually quiet and tame, and was still looking quite ashamed of the episode she had earlier. Their faces were almost touching and it caused Allie to scratch her nose now and then, each time evoking a little smile in Bea. Allie tucked a stray curl behind Bea's ear.

‘Who's Helen?’ she breathed out almost inaudibly into Bea's open mouth. She watched Bea's expression slacken again, as she knew it would, but she needed to ask.

‘So that happened too?’ Bea stated in a beaten-down voice. ‘She's…’ She took in Allie's expecting and cramped features and found a strength to give her the answer she needed, 'She's someone who hurt me’.

Allie dug her both sets of fingers into the hair behind Bea's ears, bringing her head so close to her own that their foreheads touched. 'Wanna talk about it?’ she exhaled painfully.

Bea took her time to answer, 'Cannot yet. But one day, when I'm ready, I'll tell you everything’.

Allie nodded against her, their noses rubbing together.

Bea laid her head on Allie's shoulder, her hand finding its way under Allie's sweater and gently caressing her belly. 'This will sound hypocritical now’, she started warily few minutes later, 'but I wanted to talk with you about something this arvo. Naturally, once I was done rocking your world today’, she threw in a joke on her account, a sarcasm evident in her voice.

‘Naturally’, Allie accepted her joke, then asked in a curious voice, 'What did you wanna talk about?’

Bea turned to lie on her belly, locking her eyes with Allie's, 'Your childhood. I wanna know everything’.
Allie went completely silent. She wasn't expecting that.

'With the exception of my mother, I don't think I have ever told anyone everything’, she stated pensively. 'Not that I have something to hide, but it's a really long story. A kind that will kill off the rest of our day. You sure you wanna do this?'

Bea cupped her cheek. 'Please', she said most seriously.

Allie sighed then got up. She opened a glass door on a closed bookcase, pulled out several photo albums and placed them on the coffee table. She disappeared into the kitchen, only to return with two beers. Bea sat up and, as they drank in silence, Allie leant her back into Bea's front, while Bea resumed with comforting strokes down Allie's belly.

After they put their empty bottles down, Allie placed the albums on Bea's lap and snuggled to her side. She opened the first one. It was an album of her between age of six to nine, taken mostly around this house, often posing with her grandparents or her dad. Then she showed another one to Bea, this album featuring her primary school photos, as well as photos from various kids’ birthday parties. She was mostly pictured with three same kids throughout years, and Bea wanted to know who they were.

'This is Logan’, Allie pointed to one of two carrot-haired boys, ‘we were in the same class and his father was my father's best friend so we naturally spent a lot of time together, and this is his younger brother Jordan’.

'Was this your best friend?’ Bea tapped on the picture of a dark blonde girl, hugging around Allie's neck. Allie nodded, 'Yeah. That's Natasha. We were inseparable from the first to seventh grade. Her parents were mechanical engineers immigrated from Russia’.

'I'd like to see some pictures of your mother, Allie’, Bea asked, causing Allie to smile and grab another album more vivaciously.

'Course! Look, that's the first picture of us together. Aunt Liz took it. I was almost fourteen at the time.’

Bea took in a picture of a smiling Allie - the first picture from her childhood where she was actually smiling broadly, without holding back - and a picture of a pale, blonde woman, with crystal clear blue eyes and a look of kindness in her expression despite her naturally strict facial features. She was enwrapping Allie in a protective hug, and one could really see Kaz loved the young girl like her own. It was a delight to watch Allie beaming with joy as she went through happy memories of her secondary school and uni, showing younger versions of Boomer, Regan, Sophie, Artie and Paul, as well as numerous pictures of Kaz and herself, but that wasn't what Bea asked. After a better part of an hour, where Bea sucked in every word Allie told her about her teenage and university years, she used a break in her story to carefully cut in.

'I actually wanted to see pictures of your birth mum, Allie. You never talk about her.’

For a second there Allie looked dumbstruck, as if the thought about speaking of her birth mother never crossed her mind.

'It's not that I don't think about her - I do - it's just not in my habit to speak about her because father never allowed it, which is ironic, really, because one could see she was his only thought, all these years. He certainly never thought of me that much. I don't know. Kaz speaks about her a lot; she says she won't let me forget her, but how can I forget when I don't really remember her, I was fifteen months old when she died and her parents died even before I was born so there was no one except
gma to tell me how she really was. Kaz tracked two of her school friends down so she told me everything she found out of them, but it's not much. Or it's not enough anyway. I'm rambling’, she broke off, her eyes trailing off into the distance.

Bea wound her arm around Allie's shoulder, 'Why don't you start from the beginning?’

'Alright', Allie let out a sigh, 'I guess you really weren't joking when you said you wanted to know everything’.

She grabbed her baby album and opened it. On the first page there was a picture of a beautiful woman holding a few days old baby Allie, pride and happiness radiating off her face. Bea melted at the sight of Allie's cute chubby face and the way her mother was looking at her - she doubted it earlier, but she could see now, Allie was a wanted baby, a loved baby. The more she studied her mother's face, the more familiar she looked. Thanks to her sketching talent Bea was in habit of memorising people's faces, but now she couldn't figure out of whom Allie's mother reminded her. She wasn't as tall as her daughter and looked overall very fragile, her thick mane of naturally blonde hair appeared to lie too heavy on her bony shoulders. She looked softer than Allie too: Bea could certainly never imagine her in a role of a business shark Allie daily assumed. She oozed warmth and sensitivity, mostly due to her buttery blonde hair colour with splashes of honey-yellow, doe-like green eyes and delicate features, but Bea had a feeling something was missing from her face, makeup maybe? She tried to picture Allie's mum with an updo and heavy makeup and then it was when it hit her.

'Your mum looks like Elinor West!' she shouted out with relief, but her expression soon slackened when Allie opened another album, full of pictures of her mother on the stage, often followed on piano by Allie's dad. 'Shit! Your mum was Elinor West. No wonder you sing like an angel.'

'Please', Allie waved her hand dismissively, 'I don't have a tenth of her singing voice. Maybe if I did, I wouldn't have been such a disappointment to my dad’.

'Rubbish', Bea replied sharply, 'you couldn't have been a disappointment to any parent'.

'All he cared about was his music’, Allie retorted bitterly.

Bea didn't know what to say. She wasn't much of a fan of the opera, but whole Australia knew the tragic story of Elinor West, a young prima donna who died of cancer at the peak of her career. With her ladylike attitude and a voice so strong it could move mountains, she quickly became a national favourite, her performances being replayed on television even today. Hell, even Bea had a CD of her most popular arias at home.

She closed all the albums and put them back on the coffee table. Then she scooped Allie into her arms and threw the blanket around them again. 'Talk to me please’, she whispered into Allie's hair, 'talk for real’.

She saw Allie relaxing back into her and closing her eyes.

'They were both already very popular when they first met’, Allie started, ‘they were performing together in a humanitarian concert for orphaned children, and that fateful meet sadly resulted in their own child ending up orphaned. My father was fifteen years older, charming, a famous pianist Robert Novak. He was pretty arrogant though, a sworn bachelor, and to me it remains a mystery both what she saw in him and how he went from a stag to a man who was practically begging to lay down his freedom.’

'It's love’, Bea said pensively, 'there's no logical explanation when it comes to it’.
I would know, Allie thought to herself and smiled a little, then continued, ‘They married when mother was twenty five and officially they were living in this house, but according to my grandmother they were on tours all the time. They were practically inseparable for five years, devoted to each other and to their music, until mum wished for a child. Dad had never wanted a child - to him taking care of a child seemed like a waste of time he could better be spending practicing Chopin's preludes - but he wanted to make mum happy so he wasn't opposing the idea. Things got heated between them when mum was two months pregnant and the routine ultrasound showed a healthy baby sitting next to ovarian cancer. It was in early stages and doctors recommended a total hysterectomy to nip the cancer in its bud. Dad jumped at the chance for her to heal completely, but mum wouldn't hear of it. No matter how much dad pleaded, she just wouldn't abort me.’

Allie could feel Bea's arms tying around her so tightly that she had to wiggle out a bit to save her shoulders from being squashed.

‘Right after she gave birth to me, surgeons removed her uterus and ovaries, but by then the cancer had already spread to her lymph nodes. She fought really hard to stay alive, she did numerous chemo rounds and radiation therapy, but the cancer kept spreading until she gave in.’

Allie reached for her baby album again, turning page after page for Bea. 'See, until I was one year old she still looked good, she was holding up, but here are some pictures public eye will never see.’

Bea teared up at pictures of a bald-headed and even skinnier Elinor, a shadow of her former self, yet tirelessly trying to keep up with a restless one-year-old.

‘Your mother loved you, Allie’, she said softly. ‘She didn't leave you willingly.’

‘I know’, Allie sighed, ‘I wish I had at least one memory of her. I have a full drawer of DVDs of the opera singer, but not one image in my head of her being my mum’. She wiped out a tear from her cheek then continued, ‘For a long time I lived with a guilt of her trading up her life for mine, but my mum Kaz eventually talked me out of it. She taught me how to filter out all the things I wasn't responsible for and to hold onto the knowledge that she loved me so much she did everything possible to give me my best shot’.

Allie could sense Bea's arms tying around her again, she was trembling so badly Allie asked her whether they should leave the rest of the story for another time. Bea got up to use the bathroom and close all the windows and as she returned to sit next to Allie, she simply asked her to continue.

‘I asked dad once whether he hated me’, she sighed, ‘for he was constantly ignoring me. That was the only time he took me into his lap and told me that he loved me. “I just find it hard to look at you, Allie”, he said to me, “you remind me so much of your mother”. I couldn't quite wrap my head around that one, because I was a spitting image of him and, as you can see, never had any physical resemblance to my mother, but I guessed my very existence was a constant reminder that I was here and she was not. He was always on tours, trying to escape reality, losing himself in his music and amongst his fans. The only time he took a real interest in me was when I was five and started to learn piano. He quit tours for a while and made sure all his afternoons were free so he could give me lessons after school. We had fun together and I was a quick learner, but when I was about eight, he had to face the fact I was never to grow into a piano virtuoso or a great singer like my mother. I had talent, but I simply didn't have what it takes to be a true musical genius. It's not that I didn't practice hard nor that my technique was bad, but I have never played as passionately as I was doing math problems, for example. Math wasn't his thing, neither was history or geography, nor common human things that interested me, so we drifted apart once again. He resumed his tours, securing me one of his students to give me piano lessons three times a week. I wasn't feeling alone though, at least not yet. My whole childhood was coloured with the beautiful relationship I had with my paternal
grandparents. They fed me, they clothed me, they led me to school and accompanied me to birthday parties, they spoke about my mother when dad was not around and kept her memory alive. At home we spoke Polish, and I never knew any Polish families but us, so it was like a secret language I was in possession with and could brag about in front of Natasha and the boys. They both died when I was nine - grandad in January and gma in October - and suddenly I was left alone in this vast house with an estranged father. I suppose he did his best: he quit his touring altogether and limited himself to only giving performances in Melbourne. He picked me up after school and was never a minute late, he hired a full-time cook who transformed to nanny whenever he was at work. The cook taught me a great deal how to manage around the kitchen, but she never particularly warmed up to me - she had children of her own to worry about. I often asked her to bring them along so that we could play together, but she never did, stating she was a firm believer of not mixing business with pleasure. Father never had the patience to take me to any after-school activities so I had no choice but to wander around this house and try to figure out different ways to amuse myself in my solitude. He rarely spoke to me when we were alone, he usually sat here by the window at the piano, mum's picture in front of him, while he tirelessly practiced. I could sit and listen to him, I could do my homework, read something or play quietly - whatever I did, I was invisible to him, and quite lonely.

She felt Bea's fingers running through her hair - a solace that came sixteen years too late, but nevertheless felt good.

'He grew depressed over the next two years. Sometimes he would go days without speaking to anyone. If he only was selfish enough to resume his tours and find a proper nanny to look after me, but to his own demise he tried so hard to be a father he promised his wife he would be and he wasn't cut for', Allie stood up to take a piece of paper out of their family Bible and brought it back to Bea. 'Please read it', she whispered.

Bea took the envelope out of her trembling hands and pulled out a letter. It was addressed to Allie. She read:

'I'm sorry for not being a better father to you, Allie. You are a good kid and your mother's death was not your fault. She wanted to have you so badly and in the little time she got to spend with you she was the happiest woman. After she died, I tried to be a father you deserved, but I was so lost without Elinor. It's turning for the worse for me as years pass by, and I can't hold on any longer without her. So soon I will be joining her. I hope she forgives me and that one day you will forgive me too. I'm leaving you with a great family, something that I could never provide for you myself. I wish for you to grow up into a good and happy person. Love, Dad.'

'He committed suicide shortly after my twelfth birthday', Allie explained dryly, putting the letter back in the Bible and returning it to the shelf. When she returned to sit next to Bea, she spoke matter-of-factly, her face lithified and emotionless. 'He had it all planned in advance: he sent me on a weekend school trip, wrote this letter and left it in my room. He committed suicide in a hotel suite so that I have a clean home to come back to and not have police seal this place. Previously, he wrote his last will and testament. He named Logan's and Jordan's parents my legal guardians. In return for taking care of me, father divided his life savings into three parts: a million for each child. He chose Logan's and Jordan's dad to be the executor of his will too. Two days after the funeral I went to live with their family. They took me in really warmly at first, I had my own room and the boys were as friendly to me as ever. I went to the same private school as the two of them and the only thing that was missing was that Natasha went to a different secondary now and my substitute parents didn't show much interest in driving me across town to visit her. However, after three or four months, things started to change around the house. The father of the house started coming home late, sometimes staying out the whole night. From our beds we could often hear their muffled quarrels, we
didn't know what it was all about, but suddenly everyone was nervous. One day police came to our
door and placed the dad under arrest. Y'know, my father thought he had everything figured out. He
thought his best friend had a perfect family, he thought they could provide me with a normal home
and a healthy lifestyle. What he didn't know was that his best friend was a recovering gambler, he
had his addiction under control for the previous fifteen years, but when my father's suicide made him
a manager of three million dollars plus the rest of my inheritance, the temptation was too strong. He
started gambling again until he squandered the best part of it: first he embezzled Logan's and Jordan's
two-million inheritance, then my million; then, in exchange for only hundred thousand dollars he lost
on roulette the same evening, he signed off the author rights to my parents' works to their record
label so now I have no entitlement to profits when they publish CDs or DVDs of my parents’ public
performances. The only thing he didn't manage to sell was this house, and that is only because it was
rented out to a tenant with a six-year binding contract. He did put my house under mortgage though
and all the income from the rent went to paying off that mortgage. Anyhow, he was sentenced to
seven years in jail for embezzlement, and my domestic life turned to living hell. Logan and Jordan
blamed me for their father's misfortune and started being really mean to me, it got worse when we
couldn't afford to stay in the private school any longer and had to transfer to public school - they
accused me of having lost all their friends because of me. Their mother couldn't stand the sight of me
anymore: she didn't refrain of telling me it was my father's weakness that brought misery upon her
family, our money was to blame for spoiling her husband. She was left with three kids to support on
one salary, through no fault of her own, and didn't know how to make ends meet. She cut off our
allowances, which was understandable under the circumstances, but then she started saving money
by snipping off my essentials: while she still fed her own kids three times a day, I was fed only
dinner so I was spending most of my days hungry. If they were in need of a new pair of pants or
shoes, she would pick up extra shifts to provide it for them, but she stopped buying clothes for me
altogether, even though I was the fastest growing one. I soon became a laughing stock in our new
school: my t-shirts were too tight for my new size, my leg cuffs reached only till the middle of my
calves, my stomach was growling in the classes. The worst for me were evenings though: the three
of them were usually sitting in front of TV after dinner, I had to sit separately in a chair; they were
cuddled up to each other and chatting, but if I tried to cut into the conversation, they would snarl at
me or throw me hateful remarks. The mum would usually send me to my room and over the course
of the next few months, I became like a prisoner to that room: I was either in school or reading in bed
in solitary confinement. Things worsened when she started going to regular visits to prison: more
than ever, she blamed me and my father for everything that happened and started slapping me around
any chance she got. I started pondering on going to Child Services, but I feared foster homes and
was hoping they would come around. After all, they knew me all my life long and up to this point
were always great to me. Also, I couldn't shake off the feeling of guilt because it was, in fact, my
father's suicide that set the unfortunate events into motion, and, in a way, I thought I deserved the
beating, the cursing and the deprivation of food. The only good thing going for me was that I
renewed contact with Natasha thanks to free use of internet in our school's library. In the past year I
have missed her so much that I started idolising our friendship. Her emails were the highlights of my
day and she was the only person I still trusted and could confide in. Her parents were always
occupied with work, but when she saw how miserable my new life was, she kept insisting that they
find the time at least once a week and drive her off to visit me. My guardian didn't mind the visits, as
long as her stays were confined to my room and she didn't “steal any of her food”. It was strange
seeing Natasha after all those months, and that's why even more exciting. With every weekly visit,
our relationship deepened, and the emails we wrote to each other daily became sort of a short love
letters. I really think she was my first love. I hit puberty, but I didn't pick up much interest in boys, all
I could think about was her.’

Suddenly becoming aware what she was talking about, Allie paused her story and threw an insecure
glance towards Bea. But Bea drew Allie closer into her front and placed her chin on her shoulder.
'T'm glad you had someone to love you in those dire times. I can't believe your foster mum treated
‘We were merely kids’, Allie continued, her eyes lost in her past, ‘but I do believe Natasha did love me. She wrote me the most beautiful words, she listened to me, she hugged me, and one day she kissed me. It was unexpected, it was unheard of, it was too wet, but after she went home that kiss was all I could think about. I spent the next week in a state of fever and it didn't stop until I kissed her again. In the next few weeks kissing was our favourite pastime. Passing by my door one day, my foster mum heard us giggling and smooching. She opened the door and caught us. I'll never forget the shocked look on her face: she called us abominations, she said we disgusted her. “Under my roof!” she kept yelling, “Like you haven’t done enough already! You want to finish us off!” She called Natasha's parents right away, and when her father came to pick her up, instead of calming the situation, he sided with my guardian and acted like I spoiled his daughter, like it was the end of the world. As soon as he left with his daughter, my foster mum gave me such a beating I had to stay home sick for a week. Natasha's family was very pious and her parents started blaming our country for high tolerance on sinful behaviour. In less than a month they quit their jobs and moved back to Russia. I never heard from Natasha again. The last thing she wrote me was how disappointed her parents were with her and how guilty they made her feel and that she hoped that moving to their homeland would smoothen the things between them. When I sent my reply, my email came back to me as sent to a non-existent address and that was the fate of my next tries. When the summer school break came, I thought I was living in hell. The boys were sent off to the outback to spend the vacation with their grandparents, and I was left alone with the woman who hated me more with each passing day. She had now insulted me on regular basis, she kicked me, she slapped me around. I've had enough of it so I tried going into Child Services, but she caught me before I could enter the building. She dragged me home and beat me with her belt. She said I owed her more money than I could earn in a lifetime and the hell if she allows me to steal the daily bread from her children's mouths. She meant, of course, losing the carer allowance if I left, which was like a second income for her family. After that day, she started disconnecting the phone and locking me inside the house when she went to work. Two weeks were left until the return of the boys and starting school again, and I didn't know how I would manage to get through them. The day she came back after visiting her husband in prison was the day she hit the desperation point, she drank herself to oblivion and passed out in the lounge room. I woke up in the middle of the night, with her kneeling on top of me. She held a knife to my throat. She was still very much drunk and she slurred into my face how much she hated me, how much she wished they never even met my family, how much she wanted me dead. I was paralysed with fear, but when she finally got off me and passed out on my bed, I instantly jumped to dress myself. I ran out of that house, I ran, I ran and never looked back.

It was two weeks before my thirteenth birthday when I ended up living in the streets. I found other kids to hang around with, and supported myself by begging for money and petty shoplifting. Streets were a dangerous place, but most of the other homeless people left the kids alone. We had one alley we called home, I snatched somebody's wallet in the City Loop ride and bought me blankets and clean cardboard boxes to sleep on. Things were tolerable for three or four months, that is until the winter kicked in. Even though I found me a wool hat and gloves, I started getting frostbites on my fingers and cheeks overnight. I couldn't imagine how I would survive when the temperatures drop below zero, but I didn't know where else could I go or what else could I do, so I stayed there.’

Allie twitched when she felt tears rolling down her neck. She turned her surprised self to Bea, who's been quietly sobbing behind her back for a while now. Bea knew Allie's childhood must have been difficult in a way, having lost her parents early, but she never could have imagined the horrors she was just hearing of: the loneliness of her parental home, the suicide of her father, the beatings, the starvation that followed, her life in the streets. It was like each word stabbed right through Bea's heart - it was too late for her to do anything about it and even though Allie was alive and well in front of her, she couldn't control the anguish and worry she felt for the abandoned teenage girl Allie once
was.

'I should stop’, she heard Allie saying.

'No, please’, she retorted, opening her swollen eyelids, 'more than ever, I need to hear the whole story now’.

She pulled Allie to lie down with her and hugged her like it was her last. She wrapped the blanket around them so tightly, as if that blanket could chase away the chill Allie felt in the streets thirteen years ago. Her head pressed on Bea's chest, Allie eventually continued.

'It was the beginning of June and it was already so cold that I was afraid of falling asleep one night and never waking up again. I spent my whole days in the shopping moles with other kids, where it was secure and warm, and we started sleeping pressed closely together at night, all of our blankets covering our joint bodies. One day, a lady came, sharing hot soup and warm hoodies and gloves. She cupped my chin to raise my head and look me in the face. When I lifted my eyes to hers, I could swear I saw an angel. Her skin was as pale as Snow White's and her hair was platinum like in elves. Her eyes were almost the same colour as mine and when she smiled at me, her eyes smiled with her lips. She came with more food the next day, and then the next day, and always lingered while I ate and tried to animate me. Subsequently, I started opening up to her. One day she asked me whether I would like to come and live with her.'

'So this is how you met Kaz?’ Bea asked, a sense of relief washing over her.

'That wasn't Kaz’, Allie replied less enthusiastically, 'the lady's name was Marie. Marie Winter’.

She breathed in like she needed to gather her strength to be able to continue. Bea could feel her body shuddering on top of her and sudden fear she still haven't heard the worst of Allie's fate overtook her.

'No matter the trust she inspired, I still was having second thoughts about going into a stranger's home. But what choice did I have other than to risk freezing to death in these streets? So I took a leap of faith and followed her to her house. She wasn't living alone in that huge house, there were eight other teenagers there too, about sixteen years old - seven girls and only one boy, but he was more beautiful than any of the girls. They were living there for couple of years already, they told me Marie rescued them off the streets, just like she rescued me. They had nothing but best to say about Marie so I relaxed and started thinking she was indeed an angel God sent my way. Marie had a four-year old son, Danny, and she let me help her with him and play with him all day. I gained a feeling of how it would be like to have a baby brother; I quickly attached to him and, through him, to his mother too. I could roam freely through her spacious home - that is, until six o'clock in the evening. After that, I was to remain in my room or Marie's private quarters, and to babysit Danny. She wouldn't come around until after midnight, and none of the other kids too. I could often hear strange voices, adult voices, and sounds of music and clinking glasses, like they were having a party. When I asked Marie about it, she retorted it was business parties and not to worry about it. Two months after she took me in, she asked me whether I was happy at her place and I responded sincerely that I was. She told me she didn't know how much longer she could keep me though, the costs were going through the roof and she didn't have much of an income. I felt my heart breaking at those words: I got so accustomed to her home and her strange family of misfits and I didn't want to go out in the streets again. “Why can you afford all those other kids but not me?” I asked her sadly, and she explained the other kids were old enough to support themselves and contribute to the household. “I can work too! I can mown lawns, deliver newspaper, give math and piano lessons”, I exclaimed naively. I begged her not to send me away and she asked me whether I loved her. I nodded emphatically so she promised me she would figure out what I could do to earn money for the family.

After that evening, she stopped going to work in the afternoon and stayed home with me and Danny
instead. She showered me with attention: she started taking me to malls and buying me nice clothes, especially dresses, she taught me how to apply makeup and bought me makeup of my own. She wanted me to dress up for dinner and put my makeup on and when I did, she called me her princess. Each night after she’d put Danny to bed, she would run me a bubble bath and while I was in there she would sit on the edge of my tub and talk to me and make me laugh. She could make me laugh like no other person I ever knew. Then she would prepare me a cup of hot cocoa and tuck me into bed. Soon enough, she asked me whether it was okay for her to sleep with me, because she apparently had nightmares and was afraid to sleep alone. I would have been happy to repay her for her kindness with whatever she wanted so I never thought twice about doing her that little favour. She always slept holding me close to her body and one night I felt her hands roaming up and down my thighs. She appeared to be tightly sleeping, but I was highly uncomfortable and started to panic, so I woke her up. She excused herself saying God knows what she must have been dreaming and I accepted her apology. Another month later she told me she found a part-time evening job I could contribute with and I was to start in a couple of weeks. I was happy to hear that and wasn't much worried when I asked and she failed to explain what it was. I only thought I wasn't to lose the roof over my head anymore. Her choice of movies we watched together switched from PG to love stories and one evening there was a full-blown, extended love-making scene. I respectfully averted my eyes, but she turned my head towards the screen again, saying that was all natural and it was time for me to learn about those things, for I was entering my adulthood. I didn't feel anywhere near the point where I would be entering my adulthood, but I didn't want to seem completely ignorant. So when she played “Lolita” the next evening, I didn't protest, even though I was revolted by it. She went out with Danny the next evening and sent one of the older girls to her quarters to keep me company. The girl wanted to switch to adult channels, which for some reason weren't blocked on Marie's cable. So I watched my first porn with that girl. Instead of being turned on or intrigued by it, like the girl told me I'd be, I found it all disgusting. She insisted we watched some more and when I told her it was repulsive and refused to watch, she snapped at me that it wasn't, that if I called the deed repulsive, then I was calling her repulsive because that was her daily job. I was shocked to hear that and asked whether Marie was aware of her misconduct. She laughed so hard I thought her jaw would fall off and told me she was whoring for Marie. When I didn't believe her, she said with contempt and impatience towards me, “What do you think this house is? It's a brothel, you little sucker!” In that moment Marie came back and caught that last sentence. She shooed the girl away to her room, and I heard her cursing her in the hallway for breaking the truth too soon to me. When Marie came back, I asked her whether that was the job she secured for me. “We all pull our weight around here, Allie, and so will you”, was all that she replied. I told her I'd rather be back on the streets. She called me ungrateful little bitch and told me she had invested too much time and money in me to just let me walk away.

I spent the next few days locked in my room, with barely any food occasionally brought to me. I realised exactly where I was and who I was dealing with. Marie Winter may have seemed like an angel when I first met her, but she was just another who tried to break me, starve me and use me. I needed to escape her, but that was not possible while I was being kept locked in this small room. Also, I fell ill, I had a sort of fever and wasn't in control of my actions. I wasn't sure whether it was from hunger or thirst or did I catch some virus, but I knew this was the sickest I felt my whole life through. One moment I was pacing around the room, the next I was lying helplessly on the bed, each of my muscles and bones hurting. Couple of times I vomited, and I had more cold flashes than I could count. On the third evening the fever had seemed to have withdrawn, but I was lying on the bed without a strength to move my little finger. That was when Marie came in to see me. She brought me a bottle of fresh water and when I drank it voraciously, she asked me whether I was willing to take my medicine. I shook my head, I didn't need anything more from her. She smiled a hard smile and forcefully parted my jaws. She poured some white powder under my tongue and held my jaws closed until it melted in my mouth. Then she grew gentler and held me in her arms until I started to feel strength coursing through my veins. Soon my breathing became erratic and I felt a
burst of energy I just wanted to spend on something. I started pacing around the room and, amused by my enthusiasm, Marie laughed and put on some music. She took me in her arms and swirled me around. When the song stopped, she drew me near and said while holding me tight in her grip,

“Congratulation, Allie. You’re a full-blown heroin addict now.”

“Heroin?” I uttered confusedly. “I don’t use drugs.”

“Oh, really? What do you think was in your hot cocoa that made you feel so good?” she laughed. “Don’t worry”, she said in a softer voice when she saw me beginning to cry, “I made sure to gradually increase the dosage. You will be just fine. In our line of business we need a little something to take off the edge and still be energetic enough to serve our customers”.

She kept me locked in my room for another twenty four hours. When she came to see me, I was shaking so badly with a withdrawal that I didn’t fight her when she gave me the drug. She rolled me up a piece of paper and told me to snort the powder through my nose. I knew I shouldn’t have done it, but I was so tired of shaking and vomiting. Soon after I took it, I started feeling relaxed and sleepy, and so strangely happy, considering my circumstances. When she saw me tame like this, Marie took me to her quarters and let me watch TV and play with Danny again. I slept in her bed that night.

In the next two weeks she spoiled me with every little thing she could. In some twisted way she seemed to have grown attached to me and was relieved for us to be on friendly terms again. I thought of escaping all the time, but the need to get another fix was stronger than my wish to save myself. She taught me how to heat the heroin on a thin foil and then we inhaled the smoke together - she called it chasing the dragon. She tried so hard to make me laugh, make me trust her again, and I found fits of love and hate alternating inside of me. She showed me her books and taught me how to keep them.

“Allie, y’know that you’re special to me”, she told me one day taking a seat beside me and rubbing my knee. “I’m not only teaching you how to be a high-class whore, I’m teaching you how to become a madam. Did you know that a girl, not much older than you, came to stay here shortly after you? She started earning me money after only two weeks. The reason I’m pampering you here for four months, in my private quarters, is because I love you, Allie. You’re smarter than other kids and more mature too. You’re not only good at math and will be good at my bookkeeping, but I can see you have a sharp sense of business overall. One day, all of this will be yours and Danny’s. You will run this place and take yourself only the most important clients. I can see you love Danny like a brother, and if something happens to me one day, you will take care of him.”

“I don’t want any of that”, I said bitterly. “I just want to leave, I hate you.”

“No, you don’t”, she said and kissed my lips. I got up and rubbed my mouth. Even though she kissed me tenderly and skillfully, it didn't feel good as when Natasha kissed me in her clumsy, childish way. It felt wrong. She was three times my age.

“Yuck! You're a grown-up!”

“You're to have your first client tomorrow night, Allie. He paid a fortune to be your first man. How old do you think he is?”

“I don’t know. How old?” I said with a mixture of fear and anger.

“At least fifty! People don't get that rich before they reach fifty, Allie. And he's strong as an ox, so it would be better for you if you’d let me teach you tonight what to do tomorrow. It will hurt you less.”
“No, thanks”, I retorted with contempt, “you only want a first run at me, for free. I’d rather take my chances tomorrow”.

“Suit yourself.”

That evening, before we went to bed, she injected me with heroin intravenously. She said that way it will last me longer, until I finished with the client tomorrow night. “You be a good girl to him and your reward will be waiting for you at home”, she shook a bag in front of my eyes.

It was around half past one when I was sure she fell asleep. I snuck out of bed and silently put my clothes on. She always slept with keys under her pillow and when I crept close to get them, I couldn’t refrain from kissing her cheek goodbye. The villain that she was she grew deep into my heart and part of me wanted to stay, like a hostage with well-developed Stockholm syndrome. I have already figured out the code to her safe so I took some cash and a bag of heroin out of it, for I knew I couldn't stop feeding my habit.

I ran from her house the same way I ran from my foster parents’ home. I wanted to look around for the kids I hang around with before I met Marie, but I knew the alley I called home was the first place she would come looking for me, so I took a taxi ride to the furthest part of the town. I looked for places where homeless people gathered and they were so pitiful that my previous street lodgings seemed like a five-star hotel. There were almost no kids there: the youngest besides me were two girls who were nineteen years old. They were hooking on the street and spent all their earnings on horse. They took me under their wing and shared their blankets with me. I was careful not to betray that I was an addict too, for I knew they would have snatched my stash if they knew I had it on me. I snorted a line twice a day, just like Marie taught me.

A week passed by, and I gradually stopped looking behind my shoulder. From our conversation one day I learnt that one of those girls was a former tenant of Marie too. She spoke very highly of her and to the times spent under her roof she referred as to “glory days”.

“Why did you leave there if you liked it that much?” I asked her.

“I got too old for her customers’ taste so she asked me to leave”, she shrugged her shoulders and sighed. “That happens with all of her girls though. She always makes sure she packs us a bag with blankets and clean clothes though, and she sends us off with enough money to lasts us for two months”.

“You care for her too”, I was so shocked I didn’t even notice my slip.

“Sure I care for her, she was the kindest person to me ever. But how do you know her?” the girl turned the tables and that's when I realised my mistake. I told her I was only at Marie's for couple of days and I didn't like the prospect of becoming a prostitute so she asked me to leave too.

“You were a fool that you left”, the girl snorted, “what do you think you can do on the streets but sell yourself? At least there, you could have had a warm bed and every commodity and not a worry in the world for about five more years. Five years are a lifetime on the streets”.

The next evening I was just returning to the street we normally slept in, having snorted a line of heroin in a nearby park, when my new mate waved me over to follow her and help her out with something. She led me to a deserted alley, which was nothing more than a narrow passageway between two buildings. A limo was parked there and my mate knocked on the window. The glass rolled down and a hand handed her money and couple of bags of horse. She turned to leave and I followed her footsteps, but she stopped me in my tracks, placing her hands on my shoulders. I heard the car door opening behind my back.
“I did it for you, Allie”, my street mate said earnestly while I felt two arms gripping me from behind my back, “you will be better off with Marie than out here on the streets, trust me”.

She ran away with her spoils, while I was struggling to free myself from Marie’s grip. A man came out from the car helping her contain me and drag me towards the car. He pressed me against the door.

“I paid for the whole night”, he hissed to Marie, “not for a quick shag in an alley”.

“She’s a stubborn one, I don’t know what to do with her. She ran with my money, my drugs, she tricked me. If I just bring her home in this state, I cannot deal with her myself. You tame her here, and you can have her for two more nights at mine for free.”

The man sized me up and down.

“Alright, now let’s bring her in here”, he said getting into the limo and pulling on my arm.

“Wait”, Marie said, “she has something of mine”. Sitting on the backseat, the man held my hands crossed behind my back, while Marie searched me. She found the heroin bag and the little money I had left and hissed through her gritted teeth, “Don’t get too rough with her. She needs to stay strong to earn me back what she stole from me”.

She undid my pants and opened her purse. She took a lubricant out of the purse and rubbed plenty of it between my legs. “This is only because I love you, you little thief”, she whispered into my ear before she kissed it and shoved me into the car.

I realised that was it, I had nowhere to escape. I started screaming at the top of my lungs, I kicked in the man’s arms until I managed to bite him in the neck and jump out of the car. Marie tried to hold me back, but I kept kicking her, the whole time screaming for help. It wasn’t so easy for her to contain me, I was already almost as tall as she was, but she was doggedly not letting go. The man started getting out of his car again so I screamed even louder.

And then, in that moment when all hope was lost, I heard footsteps of someone running towards us. The next thing I knew Marie was stumbling on the street, holding onto her cheek, after have been smacked in the face. I sided with my rescuer - a small-framed blonde woman in nun’s clothes, about Marie’s age. That was Kaz, of course’, Allie smiled and turned on her belly to look at Bea, as if the very mentioning of her adoptive mother made her feel safe and she didn’t need the comfort of Bea’s tight embrace anymore. ‘She was on her usual route, feeding the homeless with several of her convent sisters, when she heard me screaming. She didn’t hesitate to run to my rescue, but that’s Kaz - always doing the right thing, even if it costs her her life. Marie’s client hesitated next to his car, this was getting above his head, but Marie pulled out a knife and darted herself towards Kaz. The first thing Kaz did was to get me behind her back and shield me with her body. When I look back, I think that was actually the moment she won me over. She wrestled Marie, trying to protect me from the blade, and didn't pay attention to her underarms bleeding from the cuts. I kept screaming for help and could see homeless people gathering at the end of the alley. Some of them recognised Kaz and ran to her rescue. She was helping out on these streets for years and people considered her a friend.

“Come help me! Why do you just stand there!” Marie snarled towards her client.

‘Fuck this!’ he said eyeing the approaching mob, got in his car and quickly drove away.

Kaz managed to snatch the knife out of Marie’s hand and in that moment homeless mob and other nuns came, pinning Marie down until the police arrived.’
Allie reached for a kleenex in her drawer. She dabbed it gently around Bea's eyes, which were so swollen she could barely keep them open. 'Don't cry, Bea', she said, 'that was such a long time ago'.

Bea propped herself up and blew her nose. 'Where does this Marie live?' she asked in a determined voice.

'Behind bars, where she belongs', Allie was glad it was so, for Bea just looked like she was about to go off the deep end and rip Marie's head off.

'She better stay in there if she knows what's good for her', Bea said gripping on Allie once again and pulling her into a protective hug.

Allie had to chuckle a little feeling Bea shudder with fear and anger against her, 'Don't worry, she's never coming out. She's serving life for drug trafficking, solicitation, multiple charges on kidnapping and organising child prostitution, child grooming and illicit sexual conduct with a minor. Apparently I was the only minor she ever got sexual with, but I made sure to testify and add that to her charges too. The court didn't force me to testify in trial, I could have only given a written statement, but I found courage to face her and make sure the world sees her for the monster she was. Once settled in rehab centres and sobered up, the other kids from her brothel testified too, and that cracked her defense of trying to picture herself as angel of mercy for those kids, who were prostituting themselves on the streets anyway, according to her. When I stepped down after giving my testimony, Marie got up on her feet in the full courtroom and screamed at me, “You broke my heart!”' Then she dropped down in her chair again and covered her face with her hands.

That was the last time that I ever saw her. She lost custody of Danny too. He was given up for adoption, but before that his name was legally changed so that she could never trace him. In hope to strike a deal to be transferred to a lower security prison, she gave up the identity of the man who paid for me and tried to force me in that alley, and the names of all of her other pedophilic clients she could think of. They all got lengthy jail sentences so at least some good came out of my ordeal. But the trial was many months after her arrest. Before that I had to get over my heroin addiction and over the trauma Marie inflicted upon me.’

Allie dragged Bea to her kitchen, insisting they ate something first before she finished her story. They poured milk over crushed biscuits and ate in silence. Bea was hardly able to swallow, her gaze fixed on Allie like she could disappear and get harmed if she let her out of her sight.

'How are you so strong today? So innocent? Like you never had a tough day in your life’, Bea asked in wonder, when they returned to the lounge room.

‘It’s all down to my mum’, Allie smiled with tenderness, ‘she taught me how to process what happened and then don't let it get to me and eat on me any further. She taught me not to forget it, but to leave it in the past. She turned Heaven and Earth to provide me with living conditions in which I could be a child again.’

Bea was breathing heavily, her eyes shut tightly. The horrors of hers and Allie's life were running through her mind, mixing until the world seemed a hopeless place to her. Seeing her ready to have another freak-out, Allie pulled her back into her front and hugged her from behind.

'What do you feel when I hold you?' she whispered into Bea's ear. 'Do you feel the energy coursing through my veins? That's my mother's strength. That's her gift to me, and now I'm giving it to you. She taught me how to love and hope and now I'm teaching you. The thing with you, Bea, was that
after what happened to you, you had no one to help you. But that has changed now. Now I'm here for you.’

'I don't deserve it, Allie, I can't reciprocate’, Bea whispered back.

'Mother taught me that in the eyes of Lord we are all equally deserving and undeserving in the same time. It is my choice to try to help you. You don't have to reciprocate anything.’

'So how did Kaz help you?' Bea asked after she'd pondered on Allie's words a little. 'How did it come to it that she left the convent and adopted you?’

'It was due to the fact that I didn't let them part me from her, not for a second. Especially that first evening I met her: I sat next to her down at the police station and wouldn't let go of her arm, not even for a toilet break. They had to conduct a hearing of two of us together, cause I got a panic attack when they tried to separate me from her for a while. When the hearing was over, they brought in Social Services and a psychologist and they all agreed in the end it would be the best if sister Agnes just stayed with me in the hospital they put me into. That was the name I knew her by. I didn't know she was a Karen Proctor until she adopted me. She was just sister Agnes. She used to be a social worker for eight years after the uni, but when she turned thirty, she joined her convent. She was thirty seven when we met and quite content with her life choices. I disrupted all of that. She went through my withdrawal with me at the hospital and it wasn't a pretty sight. I didn't let anyone but her touch me, I didn't trust anyone, not even the nurses in uniform. I was a mess. Kaz took me under her wing and got me off the gear. She held my head over the toilet when I spewed and cleaned me up when I shat myself. She calmed me down when I had my angry episodes and talked to me and held me when I needed consolation. Three weeks that I spent in hospital she never even once left my sight. I owed her my life. I didn't want to cause her any more inconvenience, but she was the only one I felt safe with and every time I tried to picture I had to let her go back to her life, I got an uncontrollable panic attack.

Eventually, all parties agreed that I went to live with her at her monastery for a while. After I explained what I went through with my legal guardians, no one from Child Services had a heart to force me to go to another foster home again, at least not until I was ready. The other nuns in the convent were very sympathetic with what I went through, and I can honestly say they spoiled me and pampered me all the four months I was there. I had daily visits from the psychologist in charge of my case and even though he helped me a great deal, I found the talks with sister Agnes even more useful and comforting. I made a great progress. I even started school again. It was a Catholic Secondary School and I could attend it for free, thanks to the influence of Mother Benedicta, who was the head of our monastery. I met Boomer and Regan there and life seemed good again. They even had a piano at school and I enrolled in a musical section and had a piano teacher again. I slowly began forgetting all about Marie Winter and my awful foster parents. After four or five months I stopped craving drugs and have never touched another drug again. One thing I couldn't make progress with though. I couldn't let go of sister Agnes. Child Services made it clear I couldn't stay at the convent forever. After lots of praying and talking with mother Benedicta, two of them came to decision to ask me whether I would agree for sister Agnes to adopt me. I was over the moon, of course, and she went to Child Services and made a formal request. She had to abandon the convent, and find herself a place to live and a job. She got a position as a social worker again, in her old office nonetheless, and soon we moved out into the small apartment she rented for us. We barely had two bedrooms, but I was happier there than I was ever in those three big houses I occupied before. She made sure I never lacked anything: Social workers don't get paid much so she got herself part-time jobs of cleaning offices and residential buildings after her regular working hours. I didn't want her to work so hard, I wanted to get a part-time job too, but she wouldn't allow it. She kept telling me I never got to be a child, and it's only right that I be one now. I excelled at school and she took a great pride in that. Even when I was older, she didn't want any job to interfere with my studies. Things got
easier when I turned eighteen and could finally inherit this house. The mortgage was paid off, and the tenant lease expired. That meant no more giving half of mum's salary on rent and she could quit her second job. We moved in here together: I took grandparents’ master bedroom and she my parents’ bedroom. When I turned twenty two and enrolled in postgraduate studies, she decided it was time for her to move back to convent. As I told you before, in her mind, she never stopped being a nun, and it was always her plan to go back once I become independent. By then, we were making an income from renting a basement here and I won a full scholarship for my master studies. I had insisted on taking a part-time job at a grocery store when I was in uni so thanks to that all I would have had more than enough income even if she left. Paul was already in the picture and she had a feeling of leaving me in secure hands. All of that reasoning made sense, but it didn't mean it helped me to take her leaving any easier. I told you, since then I feel abandoned again. But she sacrificed so much for me over the years and now that she wanted to do something for herself, I didn't want to stand in a way of her happiness.

And even though she sacrificed so much, and worked so hard to provide for me, our life has never been a martyrdom. It was all pure joy, it was endless love and happiness. I got to be a kid again and she got to be a mother - something she thought she'd never have, but then, as she often says, God sent me her way and she couldn't ignore God now, couldn't she? With her I also got an extended family: aunt Liz, uncle Oliver, and especially Artie and Sophie. Boomer and Regan were hanging around here all the time and I never felt lonely again.

'Finishing in an upbeat tone?' Bea smiled while rubbing away the remnants of her tears. 'Trying so hard to convince me there's always a possibility of a happy ending?'

Allie returned her smile, 'Little girl Allie did get her happy ending though. And I'll do everything in my power to make sure you get yours too.'

Chapter End Notes

So I went too much Charles Dickens on that one, huh? I was scared myself in some moments when I proofread it.

I know I have already stated in my comments on previous chapters how much I loathe the character of Marie Winter and the drug abuse overall. I think the adult Allie in the season six shouldn't have had any sympathy with her and I tried to make her younger version here smarter than that.
Chapter Notes

I have tepid feelings regarding how this chapter turned out. There's a touch of impatience in my ink while writing these transition chapters before the big bang, but I hope y'all can understand the urgency coursing through my veins as Day D approaches.

The next two chapters will be published on the next two Saturday mornings, early on, CET, that's a promise 😊

'I'm sorry.'

'It's too soon, I get it.'

Bea interlaced her fingers with Allie's strands and brought her head nearer so that their foreheads touched. 'It's not too soon. It was my idea to try again today.'

She felt Allie's hands snaking around her waist and soothingly caressing her lower back. 'That's exactly my point. You try too stubbornly, you have to give yourself more time. Only a day has passed, that's not nearly enough for you to recover from your freak-out.'

'I just want so badly for this to work', Bea said, her eyes moving to the floor. 'On Saturday, after I left Angels, I felt almost normal again.'

She saw Allie's hand reaching to touch her cheek and she struggled not to give in to her instinct and twitch, otherwise she would be only proving Allie's point. She managed to keep her composure for a minute, but Allie's palm lingered on her face, like it was provoking her reaction. Bea inhaled sharply, trying to concentrate on the familiar blueness of Allie's eyes. She relaxed a bit and saw those two sapphires sparkling and smiling at her as a reward. Her arms drew Allie's naked body even nearer, as the flame was starting to ignite inside of her once again. She wanted this so badly, she wanted them so badly. Her eyes darted to Allie's lips, cherry red and so kissable, so deserving of someone who would know what to do to them. By the small movement on Allie's throat, she could see her pulse quickening. Enchanted by the way the skin on her throat was rhythmically rising and falling, Bea couldn't look away, until she was mildly hypnotised. She finally raised her eyes, wanting to make a joke on her own expense, but instead of meeting two shiny drops of an ocean, for the second time that arvo, she was facing Helen's sinister expression. When she started to shake in Allie's embrace, she knew it was too late to hide it from Allie. This time she didn't lose sense of reality, didn't drift off in her head. This time she knew it was Allie who was holding her, no matter whose face she was wearing, but it was still equally hurting her, if not more. She has failed Allie again.

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They were dwelling with their promotion stand in front of the Zoo, the whole day long, exactly like they did it yesterday. Allie's idea of 'their thing' for this week's promotion was for Bea to paint on children's faces while Allie introduces their parents to the wonders of Rock Island.
Allie rented a storage for their promotion stand downtown, where the truck company came to pick up the stand from in the morning, in order to spare Bea being bothered by them at home.

Bea couldn't deny street promotion was fun. At first, she thought there was no way she could survive through the whole month without her drawing pad, but as the days passed by and she entertained herself with refreshing the layout of their website while in the office, and doing these dynamic and amusing promotions outside, she had to give Allie credit for making her reset her system. She didn't feel tired anymore at the end of the working day and has stopped obsessing about deadlines. After dinner, at home, she would relax and read or watch TV, instead of gripping her pad and designing on yet another room until she feels she is about to pass out. Her head was clear and ideas started popping in, ideas for new rooms, quite effortlessly. Allie would encourage her to write them down, for later, when her hiatus ends at the end of May, but wouldn't allow her to work on them. No one has ever urged Bea to take care of herself like Allie did, no one's before tried to save her from working herself to the ground. Bea had to admit she was incredibly turned on by Allie putting her foot down: not only sexually, but on a psychological level. She was always too independent, even as a kid, and to be bossed around for once, and out of such noble intentions, felt surprisingly good. She longed to give in to this determined but gentle woman, and at night she started dreaming of all the ways she would like to be submissive for her.

In the bright daylight, she got nowhere near that far. This arvo the two of them were heading to Holt Swim Centre again, cause Allie was putting her foot down once more, and insisted Bea needed to take pressure off herself. So she sheepishly followed Allie's lead, and as the afternoon was turning into evening, couldn't be disappointed with their time together.

It was the most enjoyable swimming session they have ever had together: to others they looked like a couple, with all the teasing, sinking each other in the water and then holding tightly around the other's neck when they emerged from the depths.

They stayed for another hour afterwards: Allie had been using sauna for fifteen minutes before she went to the gym to find Bea. It was highly enjoyable to watch Bea lift the weights, but when Bea got up off the bench press and urged her to do an exercise or two, she had to admit she didn't have a clue how to use any of the machines. After initial shock, Bea found a joy in getting to teach her. She showed her how to adjust and operate couple of less demanding machines: chest press and assisted pull-up machine. Allie found the chest press exercise to be boring, but Bea patiently explained it would help with her posture and balance out the strength in her back, which is her weak spot anyway, from too much sitting at the computer. The assisted pull-up machine Allie found fun at first, but soon started complaining it was too hard. Bea didn't allow her to stay long at any machine anyway, considering she was only a beginner and shouldn't overexert herself. They rode two stationary bikes together and Bea could see Allie frowning, even though she sat up the lowest pace. She reached with her hand to catch Allie's and was rewarded by an instant smile on blonde's face. She saw Allie starting to pedal with more enthusiasm while she held tightly onto her fingers and marveled how she could possibly have such an effect on another human being. As last, they used two adjoining treadmills, Bea showing Allie how to navigate it, then set up a slow walking pace. As soon as she stepped on her walking belt, Allie grabbed her hand and grinned. Bea had to laugh at her goofy face and a genuine silliness filled the air around them until Allie couldn't last anymore. She jumped on Bea's belt and laid her hands on Bea's ribcage.

'Piss off my treadmill, menace’, Bea warned, 'I don't know whether it is allowed at all, you'll get us kicked out’.

'Oh, will I now?’ Allie giggled, while her fingers started to tickle Bea. And damn it, Bea had to laugh too.
They had dinner at Bea's garage.

'Just because we're at yours, you don't have to wait on me and pamper me', Allie threw at her, trying to regain something of her adulthood under Bea's consistent tries to spoil her. Bea blinked fast several times with her long lashes, her eyes everywhere but on Allie, and her traitorous cheekbones just had to go crimson red. ‘Wait’, Allie exclaimed, 'it's not because I'm your guest, it's because of what I told you about my past!'

Bea forced herself to lift her gaze.

'You… you went through so much, I can't get it out of my head.’

Allie held her gaze, patiently demanding for her to open up more.

Bea gulped, 'I just wanna treat you how you should have been treated all along’. 

Allie stood up and went to Bea's side of the coffee table they were currently using as dining setup.

'Treating me like a child now won't help the teenage Allie have it any easier. Don't try to rectify something you are not responsible for’, she squeezed Bea's hands in hers. 'Besides, I'm just fine now.’

Bea looked at Allie’s positively radiating face and nodded shyly. She knew she was pampering Allie for days now, but she thought it was almost unnoticeable. She certainly didn't think she would be caught out and put on the spot for it. She didn't know what to say back and she felt wound up enough to start to cry.

Her mobile chimed. Relieved, she went to fetch it, while Allie plumped down on the sofa. 'I'm shattered’, she said.

It was a message from Franky. She invited her over, stating they haven't seen her in days.

'Sorry, I'm with Allie’, Bea wrote back curtly and turned off her phone.

Like there was no interruption, she walked over to the other woman and knelt on the sofa cushion beside her stretched-out body. 'Then let me help out with the tension’, she said, undoing her clothes.

Allie tried to wiggle out, 'No, no, it's too early. We said we'd skip tonight.’

'Relax, I just wanna give you a massage’, Bea smiled. ‘You worked out too much today.’

‘That you can do’, Allie grinned and helped toss her clothes aside. She pulled out the sofa bed while Bea went inside the house to fetch massage oil and stretched out on her belly. Bea's hands while she was oiling her were moving with more tenderness than ever and Allie couldn't help but sigh happily and think no matter Bea's freak-outs, they were inevitably heading into the right direction. Bea turned on a radio station on her cable TV, and even after the massage was over and they'd sat up, they didn't want to switch to telescast. Bea drew Allie in between her opened legs and wound her arms around her, not caring the very least that the massage oil Allie was soaked in was ruining her clothes. She draped her red blanket around them. Allie leant her head back on Bea's shoulder and quietly sang to the music for her. Several songs of that bliss later, Bea started moving her hands across Allie's belly. She caressed her, very gently, and thought of all the future evenings they could be sitting like this again if she only overwhelmed her demons. I will, I have to, she promised herself, squeezing tighter around her lover. When she started kneading on her breasts, Allie's song broke down to quiet moans. Bea stopped her movements, honouring their agreement and considering it was half past eleven and high time for Allie to head home. But she held her closer and whispered into her ear, 'Tomorrow
we'll try again’.

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The next morning when Allie woke up and turned off the alarm on her phone, she found a text from Bea already waiting on her display.

'I can't make it to the diner before work. You were late home last night so try to sleep for couple of more hours and I will bring pastry to the office.’

During their street promotion month, Wednesdays were the only days they were spending at the office. It was the most logical day to choose to spend inside, because their weekly meeting with the client was set up on Wednesdays anyway. Wondering what Bea was up to, Allie still took her advice and set up another alarm for eight o'clock. She woke up again at eight, feeling quite recuperated, then dressed formally and headed downtown.

Bea showed up at half past nine, holding two bags. 'First we eat’, she said joyously and sat down at Allie's desk. Allie couldn't figure out what she was up to, but by the devilish smirk on her face she could see Bea was quite satisfied with herself. When Allie cleared her paper plate, Bea dabbed a napkin to Allie’s lips, then started cleaning her desk. Allie gently grabbed both of her arms, then took her cramped plate out of Bea's hands and brought it to the bin herself.

'You're fussing around me again’, she said with an amused twinkle in her eye.

'Guilty as charged’, Bea grinned, raising her hands in surrender.

'What's in the other bag?’ Allie motioned with her chin. 'I'm curious what was so worth it to deprive me of your company this morning.’

'I'd show you, but I'm afraid you'd say I'm fussing around you again’, Bea shrugged her shoulders, the smug smirk on her lips again.

Allie frowned and opened the bag herself. She pulled out a metal frame with a tray and couldn't figure out what the hell it was. She blinked at Bea confusedly, who took it out of her hands and set it up on Allie's desk.

'It's a height adjustable laptop riser’, she said proudly, putting Allie's laptop on the tray. 'The tray is a cooler. It's completely silent, don't worry.’ She held out the chair for Allie to sit down, then tucked her in. She adjusted the height to match the height of Allie's eyes. 'Now you have no more excuses to sit incorrectly and hunch over your monitor.’

Allie turned herself sideways to look at Bea, 'You shouldn't have bothered so much for my sake. I don't know what to say.’

Bea's eyes twinkled again, 'How 'bout a “Thank you, Bea”? My only regret is that I didn't think of it sooner. If you sit upright, this will help you get rid of your obnoxious neck and back pain.’

'Thank you, Bea’, Allie whispered warmly, while Bea's hands snaked under her collar and her fingers gently massaged on Allie's cervical vertebrae.

After the meeting with Mrs. Rodgers and Tess, they had a lunch in a small Thai restaurant. For the
afternoon Allie had scheduled the final consultation with Emery, before she heads out to Rock Island and assumes her job position, so they went back to the office with a heavy heart. To Bea's surprise, Allie seated Emery at her desk, instead of taking her to the meeting room. An hour passed, during which Bea threw a lot of side glances. She listened to Emery's flirty but constantly arrogant tone and she had to give Allie credit for what she had said back on Rock Island. Allie was right about Bea underestimating herself so much that she thought virtually anyone would be better for Allie than her. If her confidence wasn't so low, she would never have gotten the idea someone so full of herself like Emery could be a suitable match for Allie. She didn't give up on the idea of Allie finding someone worthier than Bea one day, but for the time being it wasn't Paul, because Allie didn't love him that way, and it certainly wasn't this self-contented girl.

Bea looked up to check upon Allie. She seemed bored, her fingers striking along the metal frame of her new laptop riser as she listened to Emery's neverending palaver. As she felt Bea's gaze on her, she raised her head to meet it and sent a little smile her way. They shared an understanding look, then Bea rolled her eyes and laughed under her breath.

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That evening at Allie's she undressed the blonde very slowly, savouring each moment. The quality time they spent together in the past two days, just hanging out, gave her a fresh boost of confidence and in her mind there was no doubt this was the night she'll make it. She gasped when she sat Allie down into her lap and her smile was so bright before she took Allie's nipple into her mouth that it illuminated her whole face, hell, the whole room. The foreplay was getting so good and fast that Bea dared reaching between Allie's legs after only couple of minutes. Allie welcomed her hand with dampness and as her fingers slid through her folds, Bea looked down to guide them easier in, and lost eye contact with Allie. When she looked up again that wasn't Allie anymore, at first her hand froze on the spot but soon enough she raised her both arms to push the intruder off her.

'This won't be happening', Bea said through gritted teeth couple of minutes later, watching once again flustered and disappointed Allie sitting next to her. 'I'll pull myself together.'

She went to the bathroom and splashed cold water on her face dozen of times. When she returned, she suggested a different position. If she was on top, maybe she would feel more in control and wouldn't space out. Allie agreed, but by the look on her face, Bea concluded she didn't have much faith anymore in the successful outcome. She took her time, caressing every inch of Allie's body, until she managed to wipe out that doubtful expression off her face. When Allie closed her eyes and let go, she leant over her to evoke her sweet moans with her lips trailing across her chest. When Allie started to shake, Bea parted her still bent knees and started caressing her inner thighs until she shook even harder. Bea parted her legs some more, enough for her to find her entrance, but as Allie raised her body to meet her, she screamed and fell off her.

Allie wouldn't lie: the arousal between her legs turned into frustration and pain in the matter of seconds. But as she heard Bea starting to weep, none of it mattered. Bea lay at her feet like a broken arrow and couldn't keep her grief and anger inside anymore. She pulled her up to lie upon her and wrapped a blanket around them.

Bea cried for a long time into Allie's chest, feeling how all hope has left her. It didn't matter how many times Allie told her everything was fine, she knew she would never be fine, she would never be good for Allie. What she was doing to her this week was a pure torment and if Allie claimed otherwise, then she was consciously or unconsciously lying.

On the other hand, she was too weak to forgo the intimate meetings with the blonde. At least not yet.
'I feel like you felt two months ago in my garden’, she whispered into Allie's chest when she composed herself enough to talk, 'I just wanna kneel down and cling at your legs and beg you not to abandon me.’

Allie run her fingers through red locks. 'I have no intention of abandoning you’, she said softly.

'One day you'll have to’, Bea laid a kiss between her wet breasts. 'I want you to. You see that I have nothing to offer except meaningless sex in the same boring pose. I tried so hard this week, but that's obviously my limit.’

Allie draped her left arm tighter around Bea's torso and caressed her locks even more lovingly.

'There was never anything meaningless in our sexual encounters, Bea, and certainly I could never be bored by you.’

'You say that now’, Bea whispered bitterly. 'I'll see you in a year.’

When Allie tried to protest, she muffled her with her hand and stated, 'The only fair thing to you would be to end it all tonight, but I couldn't cope with losing your company now’.

'So what do you want for now, Bea? What do you need?’

Bea turned on her belly to meet Allie's gaze. 'This last few days of attempted intimacy were delightful, but they tore me apart. I need my dildo back. I need my rules back to keep me sane. Either that or do the right thing and finish it with me tonight, like I should have done myself after tonight's fiasco if I weren't so God damn weak and selfish.’

'Never’, Allie said, pulling her into a hug again. 'I'm never letting you go. If your rules is what you need, then I shall comply. I don't want you to hurt anymore like this.’

'Thank you’, Bea murmured against her bare chest. They were both exposed in front of each other, but neither took advantage of each other's weakness.

'I have a question’, Allie uttered a few minutes later. 'Does going back to our old ways mean you are going to see other people again? Seek out new girls?’

Bea propped herself up on her elbow, darting her surprised face to meet Allie's somewhat bitter look. She cupped Allie's cheek and said slowly and earnestly, 'While I'm with you, I wouldn't want anyone else’.

Allie laughed mockingly, she didn't know what else she could do, 'You're saying: an exclusive fuck arrangement?’

Bea smiled like a martyr, 'Well, exclusive from my part. I wouldn't ever want to keep you from dates, from meeting your potential soulmate’.

'Here we go again’, Allie sighed. 'Can at least the implementation of the rules begin tomorrow? I'd like to hold you some more tonight.’

As she nodded and melted into Allie's tight embrace, feeling her fingers dig into her hair and her lips kissing into her thick mane like it was their last time, Bea couldn't shake the sense of defeat. Allie's understanding and acceptance still couldn't mask the fact that Bea knew she failed her. She wasn't as strong as Allie to deal with her past and not to let it eat on her anymore. She failed both of them.
The next day's promotion was apparently as jolly as usual, but only if seen through customers' eyes. Even though Bea felt calm and at ease now that she wasn't at the same time fretting and anticipating Allie's touches, she also grew lonelier and did a bad job of hiding it. Allie didn't call her on that and the day rolled its usual course until four o'clock in the afternoon when a mother and daughter came to their stand.

'Would you paint a giraffe on my cheek, lady?' the five-year-old asked, making her mother snicker behind her back.

She was a cute little thing, with dark eyes and thick black ringlets, a carbon copy of her mother. Working around kids this week seemed to evoke a perpetual smile on Bea's lips so Allie was surprised to see Bea shutting off while she appraised the little girl and stating in cold manner, 'You'll have to excuse me, I was just heading home. Allie, you finish without me please.'

She grabbed her bag and left out of blue, a whole hour before their knocking-off time. Not that Allie was gunna report it to HR, but it was so unlike Bea to neglect her work ethic. When she shut down the stand at five and guys from the pickup company showed up to take over the stand for the night, she decided to drive straight to Bea's and check upon her.

But Bea wasn't home. She wasn't picking up her mobile either, it went straight to voicemail. Allie waited for half an hour, then she decided to leave. She would call Fridget later and ask them to drop by and check upon her.

Driving resignately towards the ocean road again, Allie suddenly spotted Bea's Jeep, parked just outside a small park in her neighbourhood. She pulled over and walked down the main trail until she spotted Bea.

She was sitting on a bench and watching a bunch of children play in the sand. Even if it was after sunset, the park was well-lit and full of people. Bea was near enough to follow the gameplay, but far enough that the parents couldn't distinct the tears rolling down her otherwise stonelike expression.

Allie approached warily and sat down next to her. Bea didn't turn her head to see the newcomer, but by the way she inhaled her parfum, Allie knew she was aware of who it was. Her tears spilled even stronger.

Allie didn't even know what to say. Bea's eyes were darting straight ahead, but the emptiness inside them was horrifying. Allie's thoughts went back to the little girl who triggered this behaviour and had to ask herself whether Bea has ever lost a child. A little sister more likely? But that wasn't a question one could easily ask, especially not a person so fragile as Bea.

'While I like that you don't hide your emotions from me anymore', Allie started hesitantly after a while, 'the amount of crying you exhibit lately cannot be healthy. You cry too often, too easily these past few weeks and I fear it's a sign of an approaching breakdown. I'd like you to see a specialist again’, she added bravely, even if it meant that Bea would unleash all her wrath upon her.

But Bea didn't get angry with her. Instead, she wiped away her tears, and waved dismissively.

'Therapists’, she said with contempt, 'none of them did anything to really help me’.

Allie thought a bit how to proceed.

'Why don't you talk with Bridget then? Like with a friend if not like with a psychiatrist? She cares about you and she's awfully smart. She might figure out something.'
'Nah’, Bea said after a short pondering. 'I'm sick of therapy. And besides, I will be just fine now that we've agreed upon honouring our rules again. I am fine. It's just today is an especially hard date on me, that's all.’

Allie noted the fifth of May in her head. She wanted to drape her arm around Bea's shoulders so badly, but Bea has just basically stated that the only thing keeping her together were her rules.

'Would you take me out to dinner?' Bea asked faintly, finally turning her head to meet Allie's worried gaze. 'I don't want to be alone tonight.'

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Friday night four women were sitting at Regan's for their usual weekly poker game.

'I can't believe Ballie didn't show up’, Boomer scoffed. 'They totally stood us up’.

'That's what happens in a honeymoon phase, Booms’, Franky tried to console her, 'you forget about your friends for a while’.

‘When I get a boyfriend, I'll make sure I forget about the two of them for at least a year’, Boomer pouted.

Regan draped her arm around Boomer's broad shoulders. 'Look what Allie texted me back’, she snickered, ‘’Cannot. Have plans with Bea. Sorry.’”

'I didn't even get a sorry from Bea’, Bridget acted offended and passed around her phone. 'It's like she skimped on her words: “Can't. Plans with Allie”.'

'Every word is a second less with her hot blonde, you have to understand that, babe’, Franky laughed at her wife.

'Sorry, I'm only schooled in hot brunettes’, Bridget shrugged her shoulders.

‘Good answer’, Franky pulled her wife into a kiss, never minding Boomer who kept making gagging faces at them.

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The same evening their friends were playing poker across town, Bea knocked on Allie's door and not long after, Allie answered.

'Did you get it?’ she asked excitedly the flustered redhead and she received a conspiratory nod in return.

Unlike the previous one, it was a non-realistic, non-phallic dildo, a bit slimmer than its predecessor and smooth all the way. The colour was pale pink and it was almost transparent. It looked as girly as silicone can get.

'Curved for your pleasure’, Bea smiled proudly as she put the toy into Allie's hand.

Allie rolled her eyes and burst into laughter, 'All right, smug face, let's wash it and try it on then.’
As Bea predicted, she didn't have any problems in performing once her rules were applied again. Lying down next to her afterwards, Allie saw just how relieved and relaxed Bea looked and didn't dare disturbing her fragile and hard-earned balance with any kind of touches. She needed to know just one thing.

'Bea, tell me something honestly: When you're asking of your sex partners to assume a pose in which you cannot see their faces, are you doing that so that you can imagine this Helen person instead of them? Do you think of her when you're with me?'

Bea twitched and looked at Allie angrily.

'I never think of her! Never! And I would never deceive you like that!'

'How come you saw her then every time when, you know, tried to be more intimate with me?'

The calm and still friendly tone of Allie's voice mollified Bea's outburst and she lay down next to the blonde. She sighed,

'I think my body remembers. It's like the harm she inflicted is woven into my tissue and pops up instinctively when I'm being touched. But when I'm with you, I don't fantasise about anyone except you.'

Seeing nothing but honesty in Bea's eyes, Allie respired with relief and initiated another successful round between the sheets.

First Saturday morning after Bea left Angels, Allie accompanied her to the park to meet the group of runners Allie hoped would facilitate Bea's transition from member of a pack to a lone wolf. She hoped that being part of another group would help Bea miss her old crew less. Bea didn't really want to go, and one could see she was only agreeing to do this to indulge the worried blonde. However, when she got to meet the people, she quickly warmed up to them and at the end of the morning she promised to come around next Saturday too. Once home, Allie got to feel the magnitude of Bea's awaken adrenaline and suddenly she understood the appeal Tina felt of being with a winner.

After that weekend there almost hasn't been a day that Bea didn't get it on with Allie. In silent agreement, every day after work they drove their cars closely together until they reached Allie's house, and once in the safe space and away from the world, Bea took blonde's clothes off, showing her that she needed her the only way she knew how.

For Allie it always felt like it was their first time, because every moment with Bea seemed so precious and unique that she commited it to her memory as an event separate from all others. However, she couldn't help but notice that Bea was overtrying to take a different rear-entry position on each of their sexual encounters. Was it one of the various doggy style positions, spoons’ sex, reverse cowgirl, lying on top of her back, lifting her up in her arms or pressing her against the wall, Bea always made sure she doesn't repeat her performance. By each time changing the way she situated hers and Allie's body, she changed the angle of penetration, depth, speed. She rarely had sex with her on the same spot in the house in the same week, wanting to keep the feeling for Allie as new and exciting as possible.

One particular Monday in the middle of May, Allie has just got out of her downstairs toilet, only to be ambushed by the redhead in the narrow hall in front of it. Bea went behind her back and placed each of her hands on the opposing wall. She unbuttoned Allie's jeans and lowered them to her thighs. Then she entered her and kept penetrating by holding herself the whole time only onto Allie's jaw, which she cupped in her palms. Allie came after only ten minutes, but it was a strain on her neck and back to be arched back like that, with her knees held closely together by non-stretch denim.
'I have to talk to you about something, Bea', she said during dinner, for they always had dinner together before Bea left. 'I can't help but notice that in the last couple of weeks you've constantly been trying to adopt a sex position different from ever before. I have a feeling you're surfing around the web, trying to dig out a hint on what you didn't try out before.’

Bea heavily blushed, eyes sunk to her plate, silently confirming to Allie that she's been doing just that.

'Well, stop it’, Allie continued, 'you don't need it. I am all up for it that we experiment with every single sex pose that we consider it might be pleasurable for us, but to do it only when we feel like it and not to make it an obligation. Like today: Did you really fantasise about taking me in front of my loo of all places, while my neck and your arms were turning numbingly sore?’

The red colour on Bea's cheeks deepened.

'I'm sorry’, she murmured, like a shamed kid.

'It's not about being sorry, there's nothing to be sorry about’, Allie dared to briefly touch her hand, 'and it wasn't just you. I could have said no, but I didn't want to. Once you set me off, I was desperate for you too, but that's not the point. The point is’, she lifted the shy chin with her finger to look into now insecure brown eyes, 'we would have had even better time on my sofa or on the floor, the armchair or any of the places we usually like, and none of us finds the toilet niche appealing. So I don't want you to do stuff that you don't really want, just so we can tick another thing off the bucket list. You think I will get bored of you if you don't find new ways to entertain me - well, that will never happen. I prefer us acting naturally, as we feel like it in the moment, and not overtrying. Just relax and go after what you feel like it, Bea, and when we get some true fantasy of our own, then we'll try it out. I am grateful that you've been trying so hard to please me, but I promise you it's not necessary, you could never bore me.’

Her eyes still on Bea's, waiting for confirmation that she understood her, Allie dared to stroke down her hair.

Bea woke up from her haze. Removing Allie's hand off her, she answered:

'Yeah, whatever. We're only fucking anyway, until you find better.’

'Right. Sure’, Allie retorted, as she stood up to take away the dirty dishes.

After that day Allie however noticed that Bea has stopped the artificial overtrying efforts and has relaxed during their sexual encounters. She simply enjoyed Allie, her mind free of any trouble, letting her drive guide her. Allie loved how Bea could let herself go in their intimate moments and take what she wants, but always made sure Allie's needs came first and she was left satisfied. She has always had a way of being gentle and caring while dominating her, and Allie loved her for it more than she thought possible. It was like during sex she provided a safe haven for Allie, where everything was joy and arousal, an endless pleasure without even a trace of pain or hurt.

Packed in a small cosmetic bag, the pink dildo was never leaving Bea's purse, for Bea couldn't allow the possibility of not being able to be with Allie.

Allie welcomed the change, addicted to their daily encounters. On Saturdays when Bea went for a team run, she would come to Allie's after, carrying big bags of groceries to last them for the whole week, considering she now took almost all of her home meals at the blonde's house. Afterwards they
cooked together, thus sooner or later inevitably resulting in sex. On Sundays they jogged in the morning, taking lunch in a tavern, and spent the afternoon watching movies or sports or enjoying Allie playing piano. Bea liked hearing her play and especially when she played popular songs and sang along. Allie had a beautiful voice that seemed to be able to resonate throughout Bea's soul. Sitting in the armchair, leant on her elbow, watching the young blonde play, was something Bea could do for hours and always begged for encore. Allie was happy to indulge her, seeing how ecstatic it made her, and Bea found her irresistible. One Sunday afternoon Allie came back from the bathroom to find her piano chair moved under the window and the massive armchair set on its place. Bea stood by the piano window, closing the drapes together, her harness attached at her waist, and when Allie gave her a questioning look, she said:

'You told me if we had a true fantasy, we can go for it, so here's mine.'

Her face went crimson red, but she didn't shy away. She went to sit in the armchair and Allie's heart soared. She was singing a blues melody while slowly undressing herself, looking Bea straight in the eye. She came to stand in front of her, then let herself down into Bea's lap. She played classical suites for about an hour, Bea's hot breath in her ear, until Bea started moving inside of her, tearing her apart.

Bea and Allie never noticed how all of their free time subsequently transmuted into Ballie time, neglecting family and friends.

Even though Allie recently stopped going to the pool, claiming it was too cold and she needed a winter break, Bea kept true to her workout sessions two times a week though, although they always ended in her showing up for dinner at Allie's, often jumping her right on the doorstep, with all the adrenaline that she accumulated in the gym, trying not to think of the hot blonde awaiting her. Allie loved those evenings when Bea took her all horny and sweaty, her chiselled muscles gripping tightly around her. She sometimes even purposely wore some particularly sexy piece of clothing to drive her wild even more and such stunt could never end in less than two orgasms.

She had to pull such stunts now and then for that was the only part Allie was not happy with when thinking about recent developments. Even though Bea seemed to have completely hooked herself on daily sexual encounters with Allie, all throughout May she continued to frantically holding onto her rules. She's recently started restricting herself to one intercourse a day and was still very careful not to touch her again in any romantic way. After agreeing to obey Bea's rules anew, Allie was again not allowed to touch her face or hands or simply kiss her cheek like her friends did, or she used to herself while Bea considered them only friends. During intercourse Bea has again started paying attention not to let her hands wander, she kept her palms firmly on Allie's waist or backside, not caressing her in any way, her fingers never even once finding Allie's breasts or clitoris ever since the week after she left the 'Burnt Angels' and got it on with her on her bike.

Allie hasn't pushed for Bea to open up more. For the time being, she was fairly satisfied with their sexual encounters becoming a daily routine and clearly a necessity for Bea. She let Bea consummate sex the way she was capable of and didn't put any pressure on Bea to progress faster. While she was missing the feel of Bea's hands and mouth on her skin, the warmth of her embrace, she was also aware that in the week following their trip to Rock Island Bea made a sudden and tremendous progress and if she was stagnating now, that was because she needed time to process all that was happening to her. Allie knew Bea will make the next step on her own, when she's ready for it.

Instead of putting pressure to move forward, as some less gentle, less patient person than her would, Allie concentrated on staying in the moment and making their journey through this phase as enjoyable as possible. She devoted herself to helping Bea recover from the exhaustions of her overdoing on room design in the last few months. As she had vowed, until its end May was a month
of relaxing street promotions, making work seem like a play date. And all the afternoons in May were time for playful intimate encounters, strengthening the bond between them until it became indestructible.
It was one o'clock on a rainy Sunday, half an hour after Bea and Allie had their first fight in months.

Heavens had been stable that morning so they met up on the East Side to do their Sunday routine, this time along ‘The Boulevard’ trail. They didn't stay longer than an hour though - despite her wool sweatpants and a short winter jacket, Allie was freezing and Bea had to massage and blow into her cold fingers to let the blood pumping.

Allie didn't manage to finish her reports for Monday's meeting with the ‘South Star’s accountant so given the work that awaited and the cold weather with dark, threatening clouds, they decided to skip on a tavern and just prepare an early lunch at Allie's.

It was a good decision, because Heavens broke down on Melbourne as soon as they entered the house.

They ate some cookies on Allie's sofa, chatting now and then in between Allie's diligent typing and Bea's relaxed surfing on her phone and texting her niece Melissa.

Just shortly after noon Allie had finished and printed out her report, and was about to get up and start on the lunch, but then decided to linger five more minutes by Bea's side.

They couldn't have been more content, lolling next to each other with their feet put up the table.

That is, that's how it was until shit hit the fan without any warning.

Allie stormed out into the kitchen, slamming the fridge door open, and Bea turned off the TV and remained to sulk on the couch.

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Allie had chopped all the carrots, cabbage, paprika and onions so now she threw them into the boiling water to cook them together with lamb chops she’d taken out of the freezer. She put in some spices, then just stood there, leant on the kitchen island, watching the stew boil. It wouldn't be ready in an hour, and there was no need to watch over it, but Allie didn't know what else to do, as she didn't want to return to Bea. She was huffing through her nose, her fingers squeezing around the workbench, while reminiscing the stormy expression in redhead's eyes.

Allie was gone forty minutes. Bea could hear her wash the vegetables then chop them, but for the...
last ten minutes there was no other sound but the sound of a deadly silence. She stood up to check on her, watching the blonde from behind. Allie was not moving for couple of minutes, staring in the deep pot. Bea could hear her gnashing her teeth though, so after a short contemplation Bea returned to the lounge to fetch something from her daypack.

Allie didn't hear Bea sneak up on her, until she felt hands on her shoulders, pushing down the spaghetti straps of her loose denim dress. The dress fell on the ground before Allie could protest, and Bea's brazen hands moved down to slide her panties down her legs. She managed to grab Bea's left hand, but in the same time she felt her right winding itself around her. She tried to wiggle herself out of Bea's arms, but Bea only clasped them tighter around her, gliding her palms down Allie's belly.

'Up for some mad sex?' Bea whispered in her ear.

'You don't strike me as particularly mad', Allie's voice trembled a bit from the lustful tones that were filling her ear.

'Oh, I am mad’, Bea feigned a threatening tone, 'mad about this’.

Her fingers slid down between Allie's legs and, having not felt them there for a month, Allie couldn't hold in a moan. She couldn't believe Bea finally found the courage to touch her again.

'Damn it, Bea’, she cursed leaning her back against redhead's front, 'just so you know, I still won't speak to you after.'

Bea smiled into her ear and bit lightly down her earlobe, knowing that would drive the blonde insane. She tucked her dildo in, then held Allie with both hands on Allie's lower belly, while her hips started moving in slow motion.

She took Allie so tenderly that she could feel her anger disperse. What was it all about, Allie tried to recall the fight. Oh yes, she spilled her coffee on my paperwork and then I snapped at her and then… ohhhh!

'Bea!’ she cried out, her fingers gripping tighter at the bench.

Bea kept a steady pace, pressing her pelvis lightly into the marble. She was building Allie's orgasm as slowly as it gets, wanting to prolong the momentum of Allie trembling against her.

Allie knew that mood in the redhead, she knew Bea wanted it to last, and in the same time she felt both her heart swell and her body dying of anticipation. She could feel Bea's slow rhythmic movements playing her strings as she could hear their music, and when, after a better part of an hour, they hit the g-note, she threw her head back onto Bea's shoulder and let out that very tone from a full throat.

The orgasm that ripped through her body made her collapse into Bea's embrace, who held her tightly, her nose stuffed into Allie's hair.

As she was regaining consciousness, she felt a warm stream coming down her thigh.

'Is that…?’ she asked, remembering something she read in a magazine once and took for an utter nonsense.

Bea nodded her head against Allie's hair.

Turning off the stove, where the stew has already been done, she said:
'I'm not even hungry anymore.'

'Neither am I', Bea rasped out and lifted her off her wetted dress into her strong arms and carried her upstairs. She put her gently onto her bed and lay behind her back, pulling a cover above them and draping her arm around Allie's waist. 'You tell when', she whispered into the blonde's ear and she saw her smiling and nodding.

They lay there for an hour, two hours, Bea didn't know and didn't care. Neither of them was sleeping, it felt so comfortable to be spooned under the covers.

At last, Allie's head half turned to enable her darkened gaze to meet up with Bea's.

'Now I'm ready', she declared.

But she wasn't ready for the warm feel of Bea's long fingers entering her instead of the lifeless silicone. The warmth spread out across her chest.

'Oh, Bea!' she purred.

She raised her right leg and bent it in the knee to give Bea better access. Bea's left hand slid under her neck, pulling her head up close to hers, so that her cheek was now lying across Bea's dishevelled locks. She took one curl into her mouth, intoxicated on coconut odor.

It didn't take her long, the mere sense of Bea's smooth skin inside of her driving her crazy, but it was perfect.

'Leave them there, please', she whispered when Bea started to retrieve her hand. To that, Bea rubbed her nose behind Allie's ear, and pushed her fingers deeper into her warm flesh. She stroked her inner walls with her curling fingertips, not to arouse her again, but to caress away her remaining convulsions.

'It doesn't even compare, it was perfect', Allie uttered, clenching the muscles of her vagina tighter around Bea's fingers, before her head sunk back into the mat that was Bea's spread-out hair. Her arm went back to pull Bea by her waist even closer to her side, and she breathed out in relief when Bea didn't flinch away but instead snuggled closer to her back.

Bea's eyes were heavy as led and she let herself succumb to slumber, Allie following her few minutes later.

It was four p.m. when they fell asleep and nine when Allie woke up to an empty, cold space behind her.

She reached for the lamp and in its light she could see a tray laid on her vanity table hocker, which was now placed near to her head. It contained a ham and tomato sandwich, a glass of milk and a note. Allie grabbed the note first, her heart beating fast when she saw few lines written in a familiar handwriting:

Hello, beautiful girl.

The stew is in the fridge, your paperwork for tomorrow is printed out again and packed in your briefcase. I had to lock you in so I will come in the morning to pick you up for work, in case you
don't have a spare key.

Sleep tight,

Bea

P.S.

Oh, and my hand wanted to let you know that your body feels perfect too.

Allie hugged the paper, soon peeling it off her chest to read it over and over again.

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After that Sunday Bea spent the next week refraining from sexual intercourses with the young blonde, but Allie could rightly sense that something was different this time. Bea spent each of her next ten afternoons with Allie, her legs up on Allie's couch, sketching by her side or watching a movie or whatever Allie wanted. She wasn't very talkative, giving away the impression she was contemplating something the whole time. It was like an oscillating pendulum and Allie was in anxious expectation, knowing her decision could fall either way.

Downtown at the office, she could often feel Bea's dreamy gaze falling upon her face, and she could only hope it was a sign of Bea finally tilting over to her.

Week and a half after their short-lived fight she informed Bea she had started to pack for her two-week vacation with her mother, and by the look on Bea's face it seemed that that trip totally slipped Bea's mind and has now brought her sorrow when she was reminded of it.

Chapter End Notes

So, which side Bea will tilt over this time: dark side or Allie's side?
Before Allie Left for Falls Creek

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was Friday, June 10th, and Allie was due leaving on her two-week vacation with her mother in less than 24 hours. She was supposed to pick up Kaz at noon on Saturday and drive 5 hours to Falls Creek. Winter Season at the resort officially began on June 8th so Allie was happy she made reservations on time, back in November, and got themselves a great apartment at a discount rate.

That Friday Bea and Allie took a prolonged lunch together, not in the canteen in their building but in a restaurant two blocks away. Bea didn't know what was happening to her, but the whole lunch she's been barely eating and couldn't take her eyes off Allie.

Allie on the other hand was happy she finally gets to spend time with her mum and gushed about how she already packed, what snacks did she buy for the road trip, described the apartment she booked them and the hiking and ski trails they liked last year and were planning on abundantly visiting this year too. Bea’s heart was melting at the sight of Allie so excited and joyful. She didn't speak much during lunch, but overly cheerful Allie didn't notice. She listened to Allie's every word, taking it all in like it was the last time she gets to hear her, see her...

It's not that Bea was afraid that something bad will happen to Allie or that she won't come back, she knew of course that Allie was due to show up at work on the third Monday from now, but she couldn't shake off the fear whether Allie was going to come back as the same person she left.

Allie will have sixteen days to think about their situation in a safe distance from her, Bea thought. Cool air, outdoor activities will provide her with a sense of clarity and she will see things as they were. Also, she will probably confide in her mother, as any loving daughter would, and what else could a mother advise but what was best for her child. And best for her child was not damaged-good-Bea. Fog will clear in Allie's head, Bea thought, and when she comes back, she will probably ask me to be only friends from now on. That's good, that's good, Bea spoke internally, that is what I wish for her. I'm just gunna miss you, beautiful girl, she thought and felt herself in ache when she looked at the sparks in Allie's blue eyes, as she leant in across the table and lowered her voice so that other guests couldn't overhear her sharing a somewhat silly story from their last year's vacation.

'You're coming over tonight, right?' Bea asked as they were leaving the restaurant, trying to sound nonchalant, but her heart stopped at the thought Allie might not have time for her before she departures.

'I'd love to, if you want me to come.'

'It'd love it very much, Allie, I'd like to cook you some proper farewell dinner, but it's also okay if you already made plans to go out with your friends.'

'Actually, I saw Boomer and Regan last night, we had a blast. I was really looking forward to spend some time alone with you before I leave, but you don't have to feel obligated just because I'm going on a trip.'

'I don't. I'm also looking forward to it. So I'll see you at seven at mine?'

'Deal', Allie smiled and opened the car door for Bea.
Bea left work at four, as she had done all that she'd planned for the day and really wanted to cook something nice for Allie.

Bea decided on a nutritious vegetable soup and spicy maple syrup salmon so she made a quick stop to the store to buy necessary ingredients. She bought a small chocolate cake for dessert too, and a bottle of red wine. By half six the soup was on the stove and the salmon was in the oven, so Bea set up a table in the garage then went upstairs to take a shower and dress before Allie gets there.

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Allie was surprised to see the front area of the garage transformed into a cozy dining room. Bea had brought out from her house a small dining table and covered it with a pink satin tablecloth. The rest of the garage was hidden from sight with a pink curtain she had hanged from wall to wall and in the corner near the entrance Bea had plugged in a standing lamp brought out from her living room. The lamp was shedding a subtle light on a stunned Allie and Bea took in the sight of her slender figure, so lovely in her beige blouse and fitted black pants and stopped in her tracks from surprise.

'I see you made the garage real nice for me', she said warmly, 'you shouldn't have.'

'Well, you deserve it', Bea replied, her eyes never leaving Allie's.

'I brought you some wine', Allie smiled and handed over a bottle to Bea.

'I guess we won't be running out of that then', Bea smiled back, pointing out to the bottle that was already cooling off at the coffee table, which Bea'd moved from its usual spot in front of the garage sofa next to the wall in the small dining area she'd improvised tonight. The coffee table was supposed to serve as a storage for the dishes she cooked, so that she can wait on her guest from there and not have to leave her alone every now and then to climb up to the kitchen in her house.

Bea pulled out a chair for Allie, then stood by her as she was filling her glass with wine.

Allie touched her forearm lightly with her finger:

'You look wonderful, by the way,'

Bea was wearing a simple black silk knee length dress, with three quarter sleeves, and didn't put any make-up on her beautiful face other than a lip gloss.

Bea didn't reply, just stood there watching her from above, gazing directly into her eyes. Her long locks were falling over her cheeks and shoulders, as she haft bent towards Allie and cupped her chin:

'I'm gunna miss you, sweet girl', she whispered.

When she saw Allie's eyes watering, she snapped from the emotions she'd succumbed to so unexpectedly and exclaimed:

'I meant to feed you tonight, not make you cry!'
And she brought over the soup and sat opposite Allie.

Allie was doing her best to enjoy the delicious meal Bea had prepared for her, but after the sentimental moment they just shared, she found it difficult to swallow. Her heart was aching as it was, for the last several days even, and as much as she repeated herself that this was only going to be sixteen days away, and that she would be back in no time, she couldn't suppress the tightness that clasped her chest.

They weren't saying much either, mainly watching each other in silence. When Bea brought out the dessert and started cutting the cake, Allie stopped her hand with hers and simply said:

'Just take me to bed, Bea.'

Bea looked down at her pained expression, realising that Allie was suffering from the same separation anxiety as she was. She cupped Allie's pretty face in her hands and kissed the top of her head. Not wanting to waste their precious time on the cake, she pulled out Allie's chair and took her by the hand.

Allie followed Bea behind the curtain, surprised to see the same looking curtain four meters away hiding the rest of the garage, where Bea's bike was parked next to her tools. Between two curtains was nothing but the grey garage sofa, pulled out into bed, with two white pillows and a white doona spread neatly on top of pink linen sheets.

Allie held her breath and everything turned black for a moment. Coming to her senses, she turned back to Bea, saying, 'I didn't know you were such a fan of pink.' She tried to pull a smile, but her shaking lips failed.

'Surprise', Bea said softly as she was turning around to close the curtain behind them.

That left them in their own isolated world, with eyes glued to each other's and too fast beating hearts in their nervous bodies.

Bea finally made a movement, approaching the bed. She pulled the doona a bit back, revealing a pink rose on the pillow.

'For you', she stretched her hand out to Allie and Allie barely held herself together not to take her in her arms and kiss her.

'The prettiest rose I've seen', she said kissing the rose with her trembling lips, then laying it on the bed next to the pillow and coming to stand in front of Bea.

Bea laid her hands on Allie's waist and watched her face for a while. She started unbuttoning Allie's pants, then crouched down, took Allie's shoes off and slowly glided her pants down her long legs, to finally set them free. As she got back up, she helped Allie out of her blouse, then folded her clothes and disappeared behind the curtain. She returned half a minute later.

'I folded your clothes over the chair', she said, 'so they don't get crumpled.'

It was silly, but as long as Allie was still there, she wanted to spoil her with every little comfort that she could think of.

That thought reminding her how it won't be long until Allie has to leave her, she lost her nerve and couldn't bring her trembling hands to unclasp Allie's bra. So Allie stepped away gently and took off her bra herself. She put Bea down to sit on the bed, then went to the front area herself and put the bra on top of her blouse.
Looking at Allie's shadow moving around behind the curtain, Bea saw her walking over to the entrance and pushing the button to completely close the garage door, which she had earlier left only two thirds down. As doors started noisily going down, Allie stepped to the right corner and pulled the plug on the lamp.

Bea started to shake even more; she suddenly got scared. She was not once alone with someone in the dark during the last nine years, and even if by now she trusted Allie enough to know that she wouldn't hurt her, she couldn't quite cope with the angst. She was about to run through the back of the garage and into the safety of her house, as she heard Allie speaking softly from the distance:

'Is this too much for you, Bea? Do you want me to turn the lamp back on?'

Allie's melodic voice sounded so soft and familiar that Bea relaxed on the bed and let out a breath of relief.

'No', she said, 'I will be fine. Just give me a couple of minutes to compose.'

Bea breathed into the doona, trying for Allie not to hear. She tried to apply a tactic she was taught in therapy: if she gets into panic for no reason, she is supposed to take deep breaths, think about something pleasant and calm down. Bea's mind went back to their first stay on Rock Island, when she held Allie's hand in hers, as they walked back to their hotel and Allie stopped to watch the stars. Sweet Allie. How beautiful she was, how patient with Bea in the last five months, as if she guessed the trauma Bea was hiding.

Feeling the grip finally releasing, Bea got up and opened the window. The sky was clear and the moonlight was mixing with street lights, illuminating the room just enough for Bea to breathe more freely.

'You may come in now', she called out in a low voice.

Allie crossed the room carefully then slipped back inside through the curtain. She watched Bea standing in the window and waited for a while until she dared approaching.

Once she reached Bea, she stopped and observed her face, her heart breaking for her. If she only could go back in time and prevent whatever hurt Bea from happening. She leaned her head into Bea's until their foreheads touched. She didn't dare stay long in that position, just a couple of seconds, fearing not to spook Bea again.

It was too much of a risk both closing the door and turning the lights off, she scathed herself. She stepped away from Bea and sat in the middle of the bed.

'You can come when you're ready. And if you can't, that's alright too.'

In the weak moonlight that was coming through the window, Allie wasn't sure if that was really a small smile she saw on Bea's face. But then she saw Bea's figure closing the window and moving towards the bed.

Bea climbed up on the bed and sat opposing Allie. She could guess her worried expression even in the semi-darkness, that's how well she already knew Allie. She reached out to stroke her locks and with that her panic disappeared and all that she could think about was Allie.

Bea lowered herself on one side of the bed.

'Lie down', she asked.
As Allie's body sank next to hers, she lifted herself and put her hand under the pillow to pull out her dildo, which she had hidden in this bed earlier that day.

Bea fastened her strap-on, then whispered: 'Turn around.'

Allie turned to lie at her stomach, arms stretched widely across the bed.

Bea stroked her hair and cheek with her right hand and with her left she held herself up on the bed. She moved her hand down to her back, tenderly caressing her up and down her spine. Allie hadn't felt her caresses in a month and the surprise she felt was mixed with fear that Bea would freak out any minute. Bea heard Allie trying to suppress the moan and rasped: 'It's okay. I am fine now. You can relax, you won't frighten me.'

Allie nodded, longing to be kissed all over so much that she kissed her own shoulder. At that sight Bea shuddered with passion and pulled Allie's panties down. Once she got her completely naked, Bea crept behind Allie's body, holding herself up on her hands and knees, watching Allie squirming in anticipation of her touch. Bea lowered her head to Allie's back so that she could deeply inhale the scent of her loin. She straddled her, feeling the strokes of heat ripping through her thighs. She never felt Allie's skin this close, as her dress skirt lifted and her black stockings were very thin, unlike the pants she always wore during sexual encounters.

Bea was running her fingertips up Allie's arms and neck, then soon all over her upper body, her passion consuming her more with each caress she's made.

'You beautiful girl,' she whispered.

Allie felt her eyes filling with tears, as she heard Bea speaking those words softly to her. She revelled in her caresses, feeling each emotion Bea was showing her to the core. It was as if this woman could enter her soul and show her the depths she never knew existed.

Feeling Allie writhing underneath her, clenching her fists, Bea brought her mouth to Allie’s ear and panted:

'What do you want me to do to you?'

'Take me', Allie moaned out, 'take me to be yours.'

At that Bea let out a small squeal, her whole body shook once. She let herself down on Allie, her arms on her arms, her legs on hers, completely covering her young, submissive body.

'Tell me again', Bea begged.

Allie turned her head as much as she could towards her lover.

'Take me, Bea. I want to feel you, I want to be yours.'

Bea kissed her ear and stroked her back along her spine until she reached the crack between her legs. Allie parted her legs readily so Bea raised herself off her so that she can lift Allie’s pelvis with her left hand and insert the dildo with her right.

'Is okay?' she asked tenderly.

'More than', Allie smiled.

Bea lay back down on top of Allie, low and close as it was possible in order for dildo not to fall out,
and intertwined their both sets of fingers. She kissed the back of Allie’s head.

‘You have the softest hair’, she murmured against it.

Allie was in heaven. If she could only freeze this moment in time and never let go.

Bea didn’t know what came over her. Nine years she didn’t kiss a woman, but as she started rocking gently into Allie, she couldn’t stop kissing her hair. When her thrusts became more rapid, she stilled her forehead on the small of Allie’s neck, pairing her cries with her lover’s. They moved in sync, as if they were glued together, their hands clasped firmly together.

‘Tell me, Bea’, Allie screamed, ‘tell me.’

Hearing the desperation and pain in Allie's voice alongside passion she was showing her, Bea found the courage to admit:

‘I want you, Allie. I want you so badly.’

At that she pushed her hips harder, as to convince this beautiful creature how much she really wanted her, then kept thrusting at the same hard pace, and Allie rocked right back. Bea could feel the excitement as if it was her who was being satisfied, for that is how much she could feel every impulse in Allie's body. They both screamed as Allie came, Bea collapsing on top of her, feeling completely spent and satisfied. She lay there with her face stuffed in Allie's neck and her hands still holding firmly onto Allie's.

An eternity later Allie spoke:

‘I will be thinking of you. Each second.’

Bea replied bitterly:

‘I'd give you the world, Allie, if I could, you know that. But I can't, so I need you to go, have fun, meet new people, reconnect with your mum, and smile, Allie, smile. I don't want you to dwell upon me. My biggest hope is that one day, soon, you will get over me, and meet someone who truly deserves you, who can give you everything you want.’

‘Oh Bea’, Allie said sadly. ‘You're already giving me so much and you don’t even know it.’

At that Allie felt hot tears wetting her neck then Bea's lips attaching to her skin. She kissed her behind her ear, slowly and painfully, and she kept kissing her there hungrily then moved to her neck and hair. Soon she started rolling her hips anew and brought poor Allie again over the edge of ecstasy.

They have been lying there not moving for half an hour certainly, Bea occasionally kissing into Allie's back.

Reluctantly Bea released her right hand from Allie's, to unclasp her artificial cock. She pulled it gently out of the blonde woman. As soon as she placed it in the upper corner of the bed, she returned her hand where it was and intertwined their fingers.

‘I guess I should go', Allie sighed.

‘Do you want to?’ Bea said.

‘Not really, no.'
'Then stay the night.'

Allie gulped. She couldn't believe her ears.

'Are you sure?'

'Absolutely.'

Bea felt pretty confident that she could handle it, after everything new she just dared in bed and not panicked.

'Thank you, beautiful girl,' she whispered, 'for making me feel so safe tonight. You made the darkness lovely again for me.'

Allie's heart ached for Bea. She brought their joint hands to her lips but did not dare to press them into Bea's smooth skin. Being in the dark was enough for Bea to take for one night. Allie knew her recovery can only take a small step at the time.

'Good night, Bea', she whispered. I love you, she added in her head.

'Good night, sweetheart', Bea whispered back and kissed her ear one more time.

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Being with another person in bed for the first time in ages, Bea didn't expect she would be able to fall asleep at all. However, she drifted off almost immediately and when she opened her eyes, it was already daylight and she could hear distant noise coming from the beach.

She was surprised to see that she didn't move a bit during night so she was still pressing already awaken Allie with the full weight of her body.

Bea rolled down next to Allie and stroked her hair:

'Have I smothered you?'

'Not at all', Allie laughed. 'You’re surprisingly lightweight, considering the strength you have in those muscles.'

Bea blushed.

'Were you awake long before me?' she asked shyly.

'Not long enough', Allie replied lovingly.

Bea smiled back a smile mixed with fear of Allie's openly shown feelings.

Wanting to take her mind off it, Allie stated simply:

'I'm starving. You think your delicious meals haven't gone bad during night?'

'No way', Bea said. 'It was four degrees outside and the heating shuts down automatically at ten. You wait here', she hopped on her feet and disappeared into the house.

Allie straightened out covers and found some cushions behind the sofa to arrange on the bed and
lean on as she sat up. She looked around herself and her gaze soon fell at Bea's new dildo, placed in the right corner. She liked its pale pink, almost transparent colour. She took it in her hand. You have given me so much pleasure I can't even describe, she thought. And I just love that I don't have to share you with others, like the old one. Allie sighed contently and tucked Bea's toy under the pillows. She then took her rose and brought it to her mouth. You I'm taking with me, she whispered against its petals.

Bea soon returned, having changed into a maroon pyjama, and holding a silver platter with a clean plate and a fork and two glasses of milk on it. She put the platter on floored Allie's lap and took the plate with her.

'Hold that', she said and disappeared behind the curtain. Three minutes later she came back, carrying the salmon in one and the cake in the other hand. She put them on the platter, then sat on the edge of the bed.

'It's 8 o'clock. How much time do you have?'

'I should make a start at 11.30 and pick up mum at 12. I have already packed fully, as I have detailely informed you yesterday at lunch…'

'Yes, several times', Bea chuckled. Allie slapped her on the wrist:

'So mean!' she exclaimed.

'I didn't say you were boring', the redhead rasped out and threw a glance at her that Allie could swear pierced into her soul.

'Anyhow', she cleared her throat, 'I've got everything covered, just need to shower beforehand and put on a sweater.'

'And your jeans, I hope', Bea joked, 'or are you planning on parading that sweet arse of yours to the good folks of Falls Creek?' With those words Bea slapped Allie's backside over the covers, and Allie got massively turned on, remembering how Bea inhaled her scent off her loin the previous night.

'This woman will be the death of me', she thought, as she drank some milk and said wiping her mouth: 'Better.'

Bea smiled in satisfaction and said:

'You know, you can take a shower here, if you'd like, and I have more sweaters and jeans than I need.'

Allie smirked.

'I'd like that. Then I am allowed to bug you until eleven, I guess?'

'You'd better', Bea replied and Allie's heart skipped a bit.

'It's Saturday. Isn't your cool, shiny new running gang awaiting you?'

'I'll skip it', Bea smiled. 'Let someone else win for a change.'

Allie laughed:

'Their win, my win.'
'Ya doofus', Bea laughed too and ruffled her hair.

Bea took a fork from the platter and took a bit of salmon filet with it. She brought it to Allie's mouth, who was too dumbfounded to part her lips, Bea not seizing to surprise her since last evening.

'Now open your mouth', Bea said, 'I fully intend to spoil you before you leave.'

'I see that', Allie whispered and took the offered bite. 'Mmm, it's even better cold.'

Bea fed them both taking turns on the fork, but letting Allie eat most of the cake. A piece of chocolate fell between Allie's breasts and Allie took it with her finger and put it in Bea's mouth.

Bea's cheeks went straight to crimson red and Allie couldn't help but gush out:

'God, you're adorable.'

Bea got cold feet again so to hide it, she took the platter and headed into the house.

'I'll bring you some nice clothes', she said.

Ten minutes later Bea found everything that she wanted, put a wristwatch on to secure Allie won't be late, and, having composed herself enough, yearned to return to Allie. She found the blonde sound asleep so she put the basket with clothing and fresh towels on the floor and sat next to her on the bed.

It was only quarter to nine so Bea decided to let Allie sleep a little. She lay down next to her, considering the doona between them to be a barriere solid enough. She watched Allie sleep so peacefully, her chest rising and falling, her eyelashes casting shadow until South Pole. She scratched her cute little nose a bit and frowned at something she was dreaming. Bea noticed a small scar on her left temple and swallowed her heart. How could I ever hurt you so, she thought in despair.

She swiped her thumb across the scar and twitched as Allie opened her eyes.

'I don't mind', Allie whispered, 'it reminds me of you.'

'Of my wrath', Bea said bitterly.

'Of your passion', Allie replied seriously, 'with which you took me and made me yours. You didn't hurt me, Bea', she added when she saw Bea's eyes filling with tears, 'well only with your words, which is actually my fault, because I pushed you into intimacy you weren't ready for.'

Bea's tears started rolling down her nose and cheeks, so Allie took the liberty of wiping them with the hem of the doona.

'You didn't hurt me physically, Bea', Allie continued. 'And after we sorted out what we both said that evening, those hurtful words disappeared into wind, I never remember them anymore. What I remember is how you held me, how you filled me completely, how you touched my soul and pleased my body. I remember your hands', she added tapping gently around Bea's eyes, 'how they warmed me and took my pain away.'

Bea shuddered.

'That's really how you remember it?'

'Really', Allie replied honestly.

Bea pulled herself up against the pillows and wiped the remnants of her tears with her palms.
'Come here', she said tapping between her legs and Allie forgot how to breathe. She battled herself out of covers and placed her butt comfortably against Bea's mound. She leaned her head back on Bea's shoulder so that she could look her in the eye:

'This what you had in mind?' she asked seductively.

'This', Bea whispered, with her eyes darkening and her left arm winding around Allie's naked torso until her hand reached Allie's right boob and squeezed. She glided her right hand down Allie's stomach and started playing with the short bronze curls on her beautiful mound. She started to stroke her trimmed lips up and down, until she got Allie wound up like coiled spring. She leaned harder into Bea, pulling her legs up in the air and bending her knees on impuls, wanting to provide Bea a better access. Bea ghosted over her whole mound with her opened hand and whispered into her ear, trying to make a full recreation of their first time together:

'Is this what you want?'

'Yes', Allie purred.

'What else do you want?' Bea teased her clit with one finger.

'Anything you want', Allie shouted out, 'I trust you, I want everything with you, do anything you want to me.'

Bea squealed into her ear and clamped her breasts even tighter with her left forearm. Her fingers found Allie's nipple and pinched it tentatively, to which Allie moaned.

Allie soon felt Bea's breath sharpening in her ear and her fingers stiffening above her clit, Bea starting to rub it with featherlight touch.

Bea knew Allie's clit has got too sensitive by now so she experiencedly kept her touch superficial but constant. Allie's legs started to shake, her upper body jerked against Bea's chest. Bea could see the contractions forming in her belly and she knew it was time. She pressed deeper into Allie's clit and rubbed left and right with even more speed. Allie started to wheeze hoarsely, her mound grinding up into Bea's hand. Bea pressed a little bit more, not losing the pace, so Allie started screaming at the top of her lungs. Grinning in content, Bea bit in her neck and that pushed Allie over the edge. She arched her back high and her scream suffocated in her throat, as everything in front of her eyes went black. She fell back into Bea, who was savvy enough to gently stroke her pussy, thus prolonging her pleasure. Allie orgasmed one more time, lightly, then turned on one side, wrapping her arms around Bea's ribs and putting her head on her chest. She could feel Bea stiffen and panic and she couldn't bare the pain it caused her:

'Please let me stay like this, don't push me away.'

Bea could see a tear gliding down Allie's cheek and immediately her fears were replaced with tenderness for the young woman, who has so completely surrendered herself to her. Instead of freaking out, she hugged Allie tightly and kissed the top of her head.

'You stay there as long as you like, sweet girl.'

Allie shuddered with relief and snuggled deeper into Bea's pyjama.

'Thank you', she murmured. 'I know it's not easy for you and it means so much to me.'

At that Bea lost her cool, she didn't care, didn't think anymore, she pulled the young woman up in her arms and hugged her so tightly she almost squashed her shoulders.
'You come back to me', she exclaimed, kissing the side of Allie's head frantically. 'You hear me? You come back to me. Don't meet a cute someone up there in the mountains, forget all that I said last night, and come back as you are right now. I will find a way, I will go to therapy again, you just come back.'

'I will, I will', Allie cried out, not sure if she was dreaming, 'of course I will. You're everything to me.'

Bea turned Allie into her arms so that she could finally see her face. She looked into Allie's ocean blue eyes and uttered:

'I am?'

'Look, Bea', Allie pulled herself up and said matter-of-factly, 'I know you're not ready to say it back and I will not repeat it again until you're ready, but I love you. I love you with all my heart. You're it for me. And I'll come back and you'll go to therapy and we'll take it slowly until you get better, okay?'

Bea started to cry again so Allie pulled her into her chest and held her until she calmed down.

'Okay', she finally replied, smiling against Allie's breasts. She was a fool to avoid them in the last several weeks, seeing again how beautiful they were. She kissed them passionately dozen of times, then she sat up next to Allie and continued:

'I cannot promise that I will make it, but I promise that I'll try. I can promise you one more thing though…', she murmured against Allie's scared temple, '...and that is that you are going to be very late today.'

Allie's heart stopped in her chest. Bea tilted her head so that she could look directly into Allie's eyes. Allie felt the world around her spinning, as Bea leaned in and pressed her mouth softly against hers.

They stayed like that for an eternity then parted their mouths to breathe in, and pressed their foreheads together. They smiled, Bea stroking Allie's cheek more lovingly than ever.

She looked at her watch, ten o'clock already.

Bea got up and disappeared behind the pink curtain, then returned soon caring Allie's phone.

'You call your mother, darling, and tell her something came up and you will pick her up at four.'

Allie shivered at Bea's words and took her phone in her shaking hand. Bea gave her some privacy, going to the garage bathroom to freshen up. When she got out, she saw Allie waiting her turn in front of bathroom door.

'Did you reach her?' Bea asked with trepidation.

'Yeah, I did', Allie replied. 'She is relieved, I'd say, because she was at the shelter until eleven last night, attended a long sermon this morning, so she didn't even start on her packing.'

'That's fortunate for us', Bea winked. 'I'll wait for you in bed.'

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When Allie returned from the bathroom, she found Bea stretched out on her side, holding her head up by her elbow. She halted on the foot of the bed to look at her, then crawled up the bed until she was stretched next to the beautiful redhead.

Allie looked into Bea's chocolate eyes.

'May I kiss you again?'

When Bea nodded, she joined their lips in a short kiss. Bea smiled and rolled on top of Allie:

'Let me show you how to kiss me properly', she rasped, as she was running her thumb along Allie's lower lip. Bea leaned her head in and started moving her lips against Allie's with such a passion, that Allie thought her heart would not take it. She inhaled deeply when Bea parted her lips with her finger, and readily welcomed Bea's impatient tongue. They tongues glided against each other hungrily, almost to the point of suffocation, then Bea pulled her head back, needing superhuman strength to do it. As Allie was still fighting for air, Bea moved to her neck, shattering small kisses all over her sensitive spots. Allie hissed through her teeth and put her hands in Bea's red mane.

Bea felt her hunger increase with each kiss she was placing. After nine long years, still it wasn't so much a hunger for human touch, as much as a hunger for this particular woman. She wanted to ravish Allie, to keep kissing her fragrant skin until they both die from extortion.

'Oh, if you knew how much I wanted you, how long I struggled…', she murmured passionately along Allie's jaw then kissed her stunned eyes over and over again.

Allie pulled her in into an open mouthed kiss again, putting her soul into each move of her tongue. Bea pushed her tongue even deeper in, as if she wanted to touch Allie's throat. At the same time, she put her hands on Allie's breasts and kneaded them. Soon she was so turned on that she pulled Allie by her hips lower down the bed, until she placed her in the center.

She clamped Allie's thighs between her knees and started kissing up her stomach until she reached her breasts. Then she went crazy.

Allie felt she couldn't breathe in fast enough, for that was how briskly Bea's mouth sucked the life out of her chest. She writhed, her breasts trembled, her nipples hard like diamonds.

'Oh Bea', she cried in disbelief.

Bea paused to look at her face, then she brought her head nearer and took her lips in a searing kiss.

Bea wriggled her left arm under Allie's sweat-soaked back until she held her with that arm up in her embrace.

'Look at me, baby, look at me', she pleaded, until Allie opened her eyes and met her dark orbs.

'I need you to look at me while I'm doing this', Bea rasped, as she lifted Allie's left thigh onto her shoulder and then pushed two fingers easily inside of her.

Allie's breath hitched.

'Please, my love', she whispered against Bea’s mouth.

Bea touched her lips lightly, as she started to move her fingers inside Allie. Allie was tight and warm, welcoming her fingers, and Bea felt that warmth transferring into her soul.
'Sweet, sweet girl', she repeated between pecks to her lips.

Allie started to moan into Bea's mouth and that spurred the movements of Bea's hand on into frenzy. Allie threw her head back and dug her fingers into Bea's locks.

'I love you, I love you', she repeated breathlessly as she was coming all over Bea's hand.

After Allie collapsed, Bea took out her hand slowly but kept it on Allie's mound, as if she was afraid Allie might catch a cold.

She watched Allie's beautiful face as she was coming back to reality, then kissed her briefly.

'How was it?' she teased, bringing her right hand to her lips and sucking Allie's juice off her fingers.

Allie's eyes went wide and she choked on her breath. No one has ever done that for her.

'More', she said laconically, her blue eyes blackening.

Now it was Bea's turn to choke and she howled, as she pulled herself back on her heels.

Bea lifted Allie's legs abruptly over her shoulders and placed a cushion under her buttocks before she buried her face between her thighs.

It was Allie's first. And it was incredible. She mostly wasn't sure whether Bea was kissing her or devouring her, but it didn't matter, as long as she felt in the hotness of her breath how much she wanted her.

'You taste like cherry', Bea murmured before she took Allie's clit into her mouth again. Allie felt Bea lowering herself completely into the bed, she raised her head to see her. Bea kept sucking passionately at her clit, but her right hand went in her pyjama pants.

'Oh God!' Allie screamed at the sight.

Bea was in a delirium. She pushed her tongue up Allie's clit, simultaneously pushing her fingers up her own clit. As she felt Allie's nectar running against her mouth, she pressed her fingers deep into her clit and came together with her young lover.

It was her first orgasm in nine years and in some way it felt like the first one ever.

Bea lifted her head to kiss Allie's soaked mound, then she pulled her hand out of her panties.

'Oh no, you won't', Allie said with determination, then rolled Bea over and wiggled her up the bed, until she got her to sit leaned against the cushions. She straddled her then and kissed her.

Allie took Bea's hand and helped her get it back into her pyjamas.

'You do it again', she croaked. 'I wanna watch you.'

Allie started to rub her tits into Bea's face to spur her on and with such incentive Bea couldn't resist and came again as she nibbled on Allie's porcelain white skin.

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It was ten after three as Bea was pressing Allie against her car, pulling her in by the lapels of the coat she’d put on her earlier and joining their lips in one last, breathtaking kiss.

'You drive safely, aye', she murmured against Allie's mouth.

Allie smiled against her lips:

'I think mum will have to do the driving, as I can't feel my arms and legs anymore.'

She pecked Bea's lips again:

'I'll call you as soon as we get there. Don't worry please.'

'It's the last one, I promise', Bea said, as she pulled Allie anew by the lapels and connected their lips one more time.

'Woo-hoo!' they jumped on the sound coming from behind their backs.

They parted slightly to turn their attention towards approaching Franky and Bridget.

'What are you two up to?' Bea asked in a plain voice, trying to sound nonchalant.

'Well, we were planning on a movie day, but we had to leave our house and stroll around the beach aimlessly, as someone in our neighbourhood was strangling cats all morning.'

Allie hid her reddened face into Bea's shoulder.

'Yeah, I thought it was your voice, Blondie. Sounded like a bloody cat.'

'Alliecat', Bea whispered into Allie's ear, then kissed it.

Franky teared up at the sight and went over to them to pull them both into a crushing hug.

Bridget stood by, her eyes also watering, her fingers pressing into her mouth.

'Let's go, babe', she said to Franky. 'Let them say their goodbyes.'

After they had gone, Bea felt she had to repeat her goodbyes all over again.

Chapter End Notes

So... the big bang: more or less or different than you thought it would be?
Hello everyone!

Thank you for being so patient while waiting on this update. As most of you know by now, the reason behind this delay was me losing myself in what was a two-week non-stop writing of another Ballie story (One Night in a Lifetime), which I then published seven days ago. But I believe you enjoyed that story and that I'm forgiven.

The next chapter of Rock Island will be published definitely on the next Saturday morning, because that's a chapter I've written ahead and just need to proofread it a bit.

Allie has just turned off the lights and got under covers when her phone vibrated. Afraid that lit up screen could disturb her mother, who was already sleeping in the bed on the other side of the room, she pulled the blankets above her head and opened her inbox.

She had already spoken with Bea shortly after their arrival so she didn't really expect to hear from her again tonight.

'Did you manage to settle in already? If not, leave it and get some sleep', she read.

'All finished, just went to bed, don't worry', she typed out.

'Can't help but feel guilty for keeping you awake and holding you up', a reply came straight away.

'You honestly feel guilty for holding me up today?!' Allie typed back, a huge grin forming on her face.

'No, not really… But I wish you had more time to rest before you left.'

Allie had to stifle a laugh.

'We both know that wouldn't have happened, not even if I stayed for another three days.'

'I guess not.'

'I'll just sleep in tomorrow. Goodnight, Bea.'

'Goodnight, sweet girl.'

Allie couldn't refrain from typing out another text:

'xxxxxxxxxxxx'

Within seconds, her phone vibrated again:
She opened her picture application and found a picture of Bea. She placed a kiss on the screen before she turned it off, pulled the blankets tighter around her and succumbed to sleep with a happy smile on her face.

***

Despite having slept for nine hours straight, Allie was the first one to wake up. She looked at her mother, lying in the same position she saw her last night. The poor woman was so exhausted by her all day duties at the shelter last week that her body yearned to recuperate.

Allie decided to stay in bed in order not to wake her. She turned her gaze towards window. She could see snow falling in large flakes and there was that grin again on her lips. She couldn't believe Bea had kissed her. And held her. And told her she needed her back.

In all of the previous months she had been firmly holding onto her belief that Bea cared about her and that one day she would find a courage to act upon it. But now that it actually has happened, Allie thought it was too good to be true.

She closed her eyes to try to remember the feel of her lips pressed against her own. That was the softest and most loving touch she's ever felt.

She grabbed her phone, 'Good morning, beautiful. Hope you’ve slept well without me.'

‘:(‘, came as Bea's only reply so Allie had to laugh, pressing the blanket onto her mouth.

She spent some more time staring at glorious white flakes that flew before her window. A song was echoing in her soul and in her head she was singing along:

You're just too good to be true
I can't take my eyes off you
You'd be like heaven to touch
I wanna hold you so much
At long last love has arrived
And I thank God I'm alive
You're just too good to be true
Can't take my eyes off you
Pardon the way that I stare
There's nothing else to compare
The sight of you leaves me weak
There are no words left to speak
But if you feel like I feel
Please let me know that is real
You're just too good to be true
I can't take my eyes off you
I love you baby
And if it's quite alright
I need you baby…
‘Bubba, you’re humming’, her mother’s sleepy voice interrupted her little concert.

‘Sorry, mum, didn’t mean to wake you’, Allie replied with a guilty voice.

‘It’s okay. But it sounded like we need to talk.’

Allie smiled back, ‘We do indeed. But not before breakfast. I’m starving.’

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Seeing there will be no further texts from Allie, Bea got up from her bed and stretched her cramped back. The sad smiley face she sent over to Allie a few minutes ago has been an understatement: She tossed and turned the entire night and the few hours she actually slept, she was lying in such an uncomfortable position that she now felt each muscle in her body aching. She couldn't believe one sleepover with Allie has had such an effect on her that it left her unable to sleep on her own. The better part of the night she spent imagining Allie's soft flesh pressed against her body, her own face nuzzled into the small of Allie’s neck. While inside her chest she felt an unbounded amount of happiness, she rightly realised there was a significant heap of yearning piling up in there too, and that she would never come out sane through this two-week tunnel if she doesn't find something to take her mind off Allie.

‘You have a task ahead of you in the following sixteen days’, she said out loud to her reflection in the mirror, and the reflection nodded.

Bea went first to her basement gym and worked a little while on her strained muscles. After a shower and a breakfast, she poured two mugs of coffee and headed over to Fridge't's. She paused briefly on her gate, her usual fear flushing over her once again, but then she opened her eyes, inhaled deeply and pepped herself up, ‘You can do this, Bea. For Allie. For yourself.’

When she entered her friends’ front yard, she immediately saw the person she was looking for. Never minding the early hour and the winter chill that came with it, Franky Doyle was diligently soaping her car, running around it only in a sleeveless t-shirt. She lifted her head to see the owner of the approaching footsteps.

‘Hello stranger!’ she smiled at the redhead. 'Fancy seeing you here.'

'Don’t be like that. I've been busy’, Bea retorted to her friend.

'Yeah, and yesterday I could see just how much’, Franky smirked, noticing how she was already making Bea blush. 'Are at least congratulations in order?'

Bea shifted from foot to foot, but then she raised her head bravely and looked Franky straight in the eye,

'I believe they are so thank you.’ And she smiled an open, happy smile Franky has never seen on her lips. Oh my, the brunette thought, her heart fluttering from being both excited and fearful for her friend.

Bea cleared her throat, 'Actually, I wanted to talk to you about something’.
Franky paused her movements to throw a quick, appraising glance at the redhead. She concluded this clearly wasn't the time to be joking about in her usual manner, so she only replied earnestly, 'Wait two minutes until I finish here then I'm all ears'.

She took a hose and let the water run over her four-wheeled pet, washing away the foam.

Few minutes later they were seated shoulder to shoulder in the breakfast nook in the kitchen.

Bea shifted closer in the round booth and handed Franky one of the mugs, 'I didn't bring one for Bridget. I was hoping she's sleeping in like she usually does on Sundays so that we can talk privately'.

Franky raised her hands, ‘Whoa, Red! Hold your horses! If you came here to confess Bridget came onto you or something like that, just skip it and let me die in a happy oblivion’, she grinned from ear to ear.

Bea grinned back, ‘Actually, no, that secret I will be carrying into my grave’.

Franky swatted her arm and laughed at the top of her lungs. Then she wiped the corner of her eye and said more seriously,

'She's still upstairs. We had a small celebration last evening, we just couldn't help it, honestly we were so happy for you. When we came home, we actually did a little victory dance, and then one thing led to another. Bridget went heavy on the wine so she's still lost for the world’.

Bea was touched so she gave Franky a hug.

'How come you're not hung-over then?’ she asked curiously.

'I didn't drink’, Franky shrugged her shoulders. 'What?! Can't a girl stay sober for a night without that being such miracle in this moral slump of a planet!!'

'Easy there, preacher, no one's judging you. That's actually one of the things I love about Allie’, she added in a softer voice, 'she's always so sober and together, no matter the occasion’.

'So you came here to talk about Blondie?’ Franky's eyes glistened with mischief, as her teeth bit into her lower lip. 'Alright, bring it on.’

'It is about Allie. And myself. I want things to work between Allie and me. And for that to happen I need to get rid of the burden of my past.’ She cleared her throat, 'I have a huge favour to ask you, Franky’.

Franky placed her hand on top of Bea's, 'Anything’.

The redhead tried an insecure smile, 'Wait until you hear what it is. You'll change your mind at lightning speed’.

'Try me.’

'I see now that I cannot pull through without professional help. As much as I cringe it, I have to try again. I can't go on like this. This is no life. You know my bad record with therapists, but I'm willing to try with anyone who comes with good recommendations. B-but…’, Bea stuttered and lowered her eyes, 'but I'm aware of a high possibility of me freaking out again if talking to a stranger. I don't want to relive it all just so I can fail. It-it would be easier for me if I could talk to someone I trust, someone who cares about me, someone who is top notch in her field. Someone like Bridget.’
Franky stroked the back of Bea's hand again, 'You're saying you want to go into therapy with Gidge? Isn't she the one you should be talking to about it then?'

Bea took a deep breath.

'Bridget gave up private practice and found a job in that sanatorium for mental health so that she can spend her afternoons with you. I know a quick fix won't do it for me. If she agrees to work with me, that will consume a lot of her energy and free afternoons. I will disrupt your marital life for a while. That's why I wanted to check with you before I ask Bridget. If you're not okay with it, I will just seek out another psychiatrist.'

Franky looked at her as seriously as she looks at judge and jury while wearing her black prosecutor robe.

'You know me too well, Red, for me to even try to sweet-talk you. I won't lie, if it was anyone else, I'd say no way in hell. That kind of intense therapy would consume most of my quality time with my wife. But it's not just anyone, Bea, it's you. We would do anything for you, as you're doing everything we need for us. For so many years you've been landing a hand when we needed it before we even asked, and now is the first time that you're asking a favour from us and you're acting so insecurely as if you're talking to a random acquaintance, like we weren't a family who would do anything for each other.'

Bea batted her eyelashes in a nervous tremble, 'It's a humongous imposition on your marriage'.

Franky shook her lightly by her shoulders, forcing her to look at her,

'Hell, Red, there wouldn't be even a marriage to talk about if it weren't for you! Who took me in into her garage after I screwed up seven years ago? Who let me sleep in there for a month? Who came over here every day to talk to my wife until she agreed to let me return home?'

'Bah! You're giving me too much credit', Bea waved dismissively. 'She would have forgiven you anyway. It's not like you were cheating on her or something.'

'She might have, she might have not', Franky shrugged her shoulders. 'All I know is she had you to lean on during that month. I had you to be my messenger, to reassure Gidge I would never neglect her again, never let another case get into my head again so much that all I can do is work until I pass out or go out and party myself to oblivion.'

'I'm not saying we're not a family, Franky, I'm just saying it's an awful lot to ask. You're absolutely sure you're fine with it?' Bea searched Franky's face for any signs of hesitation, but found none.

Franky squeezed her hand between hers, 'Look, Bea, it will benefit not only you, but all of us: Gidge and me, Allie, Boomer, our whole circle of friends. Do you think it won't augment our happiness to see that terrible burden falling off your shoulders? If you pull this off, it will be a cement to hold us all together for a lifetime.'

When Bea remained silent and lost in her head, Franky lifted her chin to look her in the eyes, 'Trust me on this, Red, we are thrilled to help. You've made an excellent decision in coming here, now you only have to wait for Gidge to wake up and talk with her.'

'Talk with Gidge about what?' they heard somewhat horse but upbeat voice coming from the hallway. Bridget's tiny figure in a silk navy blue robe followed seconds later, she kissed Bea's cheek first, then her wife's, wrapping her arms around the brunette's neck and looking at Bea questioningly.

'Babe', Franky said trying to hide the overexcitement of her voice, 'Bea has realised that she needs to
go to therapy again and she wanted to ask you whether you would accept her as your patient’.

As soon as the words left Franky’s mouth, Bridget's eyes sparkled with joy. She let go of her wife and threw herself at the redhead, 'Of course I accept! I've been praying for years for you to ask!'

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Back in their apartment, after having had a breakfast in the hotel's restaurant, Allie joined her mother in a short prayer then asked her where did she want to head out first.

'Why don't we just stay in for couple of hours, bubba?’ the older blonde suggested. ‘Between all the driving and recuperating from the driving I haven't even seen you properly. I just want to talk with you for a while and catch up. I missed you, baby.’

'I missed you too, mum’, Allie shifted closer on the sofa and snuggled into her mum's embrace. 'Just the two of us, like in the old times, huh, mum?’

'You're always gunna be my little girl’, Karen kissed the crown of the young blonde's head.

They stayed silently in that heartfelt content until, half an hour later, Allie stood up to make coffee in the kitchen. Returning to the lounge with two mugs, she sat down again on the sofa and laughed,

'Alright, spit it out! Begin with the inquisition already, I can see you're barely holding it in!’

Kaz swatted her shoulder, 'Like you haven't been dying to tell me! You're practically glowing!'

At that Allie laughed even harder, before she began, in selected words and leaving out the details, to tell her mum about the progress she's made with Bea and the bright expectations she had for the continuation of their relationship after her return to Melbourne.

'You mentioned once Bea was troubled by some things in her past? Judging by the slow development of your relationship, I'd say it's pretty serious stuff.’

‘It’s not my place to tell you, mum, and I don't know much about it myself yet. But I know she's willing to work on it with a therapist so that she can get better and our relationship can advance.’

Kaz patted her knee, 'I have to admit: it doesn't sound ideal and I fret you will come out of this hurt. But I see the bond between the two of you is strong and you speak of her like she's your whole world, like you two are meant to be. So I won't advise you to pull back. Instead, I will include Bea in my everyday prayers, like I include you, and have faith that she will get through and become a partner that you deserve.’

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Bea looked around her garage. There was a mess everywhere. Yesterday, after Allie had gone, she only took away the dirty dishes and washed them in the dishwasher, but she didn't have a heart to take off the pink curtains and hang them back into the spare bedroom they belong to. She especially didn't have a heart to tidy up the bed they were sleeping on and looking at the crumpled bed sheets
and messily piled up doona, all she could do was to plump down on the sofa and hug a pillow, breathing in Allie's scent from it. Vivid memories of their yesterday's enjoyment came in front of her eyes and that filled her with the strength she needed to go through her first meeting with Bridget that supposed to happen this evening. After initial excitement that overtook both of them, Bridget and Bea fell into an argument which would have broken the deal if the occasion was any less serious. Namely, Bridget didn't want to agree with Bea paying her for the sessions, and Bea insisted, given the fact that the three of them all knew Bea could very well afford it and that Fridget could use an extra income to save up if they indeed decide to adopt. At last, Bea managed to persuade Bridget, stressing how the act of paying will make her take the therapy more seriously, how it will provide them with a feeling of a professional relationship and help ease Bea's guilt for taking up so much of Bridget's free time. They agreed to have a session each afternoon until Allie returns and twice a week after that.

Bea's phone chimed, bringing her out of her thoughts. Allie sent her a photo of her and her mum. They seemed to have just gotten out of a cable car and about to ski downhill. They both had huge grins plastered on their faces and Bea had to smile too, seeing Allie in such high spirits. She was wearing the cutest burgundy beanie with a pompom, a coincidental match to her frozen lips, and Bea just had to crop her portrait and set it as her wallpaper. She groaned at how sappy she's become, but nevertheless she liked to have Allie's face greeting her every time when she checked her phone.

'Reckless? Me? Please, I'm a couch sloth! There's a better chance that I'll stop to take a nap before I reach half way down than to ski fast. Can't wait to talk to you tonight, I miss you already.'

Allie added a small heart at the end of her message, which reminded Bea of how she had told her yesterday that she loved her.

Bea nervously ran her fingers through her hair. That was a huge declaration, not smaller than the mountain Allie was standing on. But, like a mountain, it was immovable, it wasn't coming for Bea, it didn't demand or expect anything from Bea, and she dared staring at it from afar and admire it, knowing no one is forcing her to climb it until she's ready.

Ready, she has to be ready for Allie's return. Instead of focusing so much on her absence, she really should be preparing for her comeback. There is so much to improve before that, on the inside, but also on the outside. Look at this sofa, Bea thought, look at my bike, look at this whole damn garage! Why do I need two gigantic garages anyway? I'm not a car collector like a person who built this, I have two vehicles and that's all I'll ever need. Everything around me is just a reminder of my biker days, of sex with other girls, of times when I was lost. But now, now I'm found - Allie has found me and I'm beginning to find myself too - and these things belong to the past. I want Allie to be comfortable when she sleeps over, she deserves so much better than this sofa full of oil stenches and other girls’ hairs.

And just like that, in a split second, Bea decided to rebuild her garage into an entertainment room for the whole gang of friends. It would fill her time before her lover returns and make the loneliness fall easier on her. It would also help her not to obsess about her meetings with Bridget, make her sweat out any negative energy that might accumulate during those trips down the memory lane.

She transferred the complete bedding from the garage into her bedroom and replaced her sheets and covers with it. It might be easier to fall asleep if her bed smelt of Allie. Then she transferred the small screen TV to one of the empty bedrooms in her house and ordered a big screen TV online. She hang
the curtains back where they belong and then she drove her bike into the other garage. Then she started to carry her tools over there too, arranging them on the empty shelves of the car garage. She was just bringing in the last pieces when Boomer and Franky barged into her garden. They were surprised to see her workshop dismantled, and she tried to explain her intention was to remodel it into an entertainment centre. But during her speech, a sudden realisation hit Boomer and she started to skip on the balls of her feet,

'Oh, my God, Red, you're building a love shack!'

'I do not!' Bea roared.

'You so do!' Boomer picked her up like a small bag of potatoes and shook her about as gentle as she would those potatoes. Franky was doubling up with laughter watching Bea wriggle unsuccessfully.

'Boomer, put me down!' Bea protested but to no avail. 'Put me down now or I will drop the idea of installing a recliner into my new entertainment room with your name on it!'

Boomer stopped shaking her for a moment, 'A recliner for me, really?'

'Not if you don't start behaving, no.'

Boomer put her down then, but still didn't let go of her. 'Seriously, Red, you and Allie, I'm so happy for the both of you.'

'Not a word to Allie, d'ya hear, it's supposed to be a surprise for her!' Bea glared at both of them.

'I would never ruin a surprise for my Al-pal', Booms finally let her loose.

'Make yourself comfortable, I'll go fetch beer', Bea said, starting to walk away towards the house.

'We can't stay', Franky stopped her, 'we only called in to say goodbye'.

Bea quirked her eyebrow.

'Ever since Boomer made us those shelves I wanted to do something nice for her in return and only recently I figured out what would make us both really happy. We talked about it before, but we didn't exactly set the date on it. However, after your visit this morning, I started thinking now was the perfect time. Bridget and you will be consumed with your sessions, Blondie's away, I don't have any capital cases right now, and Booms here apparently has three very capable assistants in whose hands she's not afraid to leave her shop…'

'Well, maybe the last one I'm still not sure about, but the other two will straighten him out', Boomer mumbled as for herself.

'Anyhow, what is it?' Bea asked impatiently.

'A road trip, baby!' Boomer clapped her hands in excitement.

'Yeah', Franky hugged around the large brunette's shoulders, 'just me and my best Booms and ten days of fun! The bags are in the boot, we're good to go.'

'Boy, do I envy the two of you', Bea sighed.

'Now, come on, Red, you have a pretty important job to do yourself.'

'I know, Franky, I know. And scary as it is, there's nowhere I'd rather be right now.'
Allie turned around after a snowball hit her right behind her ear and wetness started to drip into her collar. She was ready to yell the hell out of whichever kid did it, but the only one she saw standing behind her was her mother, with a mischievous look on her face. She scraped some snow into a snowball and chased after her, finding just a perfect moment to throw it. As they engaged in a playful battle, Allie felt her spirits and one part of her heart elevated to the maximum. In the same time, she understood there is an ache in that heart too, a yearning so deep that nothing can still it until she's with Bea again. Both times she made this vacation while she was with Paul she never even for a second felt poignant and incomplete, like she felt now. Her mum's presence was not enough for her anymore to feel completely content. Next year, she concluded, I will plan this trip for all three of us.

Bea looked away from her drawing pad for a second to check the time on her watch. It was six o'clock and almost time to see Bridget. She felt the walls closing in on her and she breathed in sharply. Then she returned her gaze to her pad, so that she can forget for a little while more that she has to go soon.

She has already done the design of the new entertainment room. She picked out all the furniture and ordered it online to be delivered in ten days from now. That will leave her five days to set it all up and clean it before Allie returns, and she'll have the following ten days to do all the previous rough work.

She was looking at her draft now, trying to figure out whether she could add something, whether she has omitted something, but her mind wouldn't focus anymore. She couldn't stop hearing her wristwatch ticking away the remaining minutes until the dreadful meeting.

She turned off her drawing device and stretched out on the sofa. She closed her eyes in sudden despair. Will Bridget make some lengthy introduction? Or will she cut to the chase right away?

She could imagine herself getting dissected into the smallest parts tonight. She could feel Bridget's words dig into her like tiger claws dig into its prey and she knew her soul will be torn apart first before they can start to build it up again.

She started thinking about all the things she refused to dwell upon for years and the thought of laying them out in the open made her wanna vomit.

Why am I doing all of this? she began second guessing herself. Why do I want to let myself be ripped apart only to hope I will be somehow assembled better? Why do I walk willingly through the gates of hell?

She opened her eyes.

'Allie’, she said out loud, 'that's why'.

Bridget had texted her to let herself in so Bea just opened the front door and headed towards
Bridget's office. She was trembling from head to toe, expecting to find Bridget behind her desk like she never saw her before - like a two-headed dragon at the very least, that will suck the life out of her. She walked bravely towards her demise though: she will hurt now so that she never gets to hurt Allie again.

But the office was cold and empty.

'Over here', she heard Bridget shouting from the kitchen. She followed the voice only to be greeted with the most tempting smells and a sight of delicious meals waiting on them. Bridget was looking as friendly as usual while she stood there, pouring two glasses of wine.

'Since it will be only the two of us the next couple of weeks, I thought we might make it a thing of keeping each other company for dinner before sessions’, the blonde chirped out jovially.

'Sure’, Bea rasped out and took a seat, still nervous as hell though.

But Bridget talked so much during dinner about her wife and Boomer and the itinerary they made that Bea forgot why she came there in the first place. It felt just like another normal evening with her friend.

She relaxed maybe too much, because she didn't even notice when they cleared their plates and Bridget moved their sit-down to the lounge. Bea poured them both another glass of wine and almost hit the power button on the TV remote. That's when Bridget's short monologue reminded her of the reason they actually got together tonight.

She looked like a deer caught in the headlights.

'I know you are frightened, Bea’, Bridget said in a voice that was so dripping with affection that it sounded most pleasantly unprofessional, 'but I want you to know that you are in control of these sessions. We will move only at the pace that you are comfortable with and I won't do anything to hurt you. This is your safe space, okay?’

Bea stared in her bright eyes, as if she sees them for the first time, feeling her own have started to tear up already.

'Okay’, she choked out hoarsely.

'I know what frightens you most is having to relive your trauma during these sessions. But you know what? That doesn't need to be tonight. In fact, I'm not that interested in hearing about that tonight. You've already told Franky and me the jist of it, I can work without the details for now.’

'You can?’ Bea's tears dried as she looked at Bridget hopefully.

'Sure’, Bridget assured her in her warm, calming voice. 'What I'm really interested to start with it's the reason you decided to finally find help.’

'You know the reason’, Bea smiled bashfully. 'It's Allie.’

Bridget leaned back more comfortably into the sofa, tucking her feet under her.

'Then tell me all about Allie. From the beginning, from how you two met to how you've grown into this couple.’

Bea's smile was as bright as the sun as she felt a tremendous relief coursing through her limbs.
'I can do that, Bridge.'

***

When she accepted a video call from the woman she was pining for the whole day long, Allie immediately knew she was up to something. She was radiant, giddy even. And she seemed a slightest bit of tipsy, but that was besides the point.

She wouldn't tell Allie the reason behind her good mood, not until Allie has told her all about her day. For Bea knew, once she's revealed to Allie that she has started therapy, Allie wouldn't be able to talk about anything else.

And that's how it was, once she actually confessed it. Allie let out a shocked gasp then choked on something resembling laughing sounds which came out of her throat. Bea's anxiety, fear, the sweat she broke into like a thousand times that day before she found the courage to go over to Bridget, it was all worth it to see that mixture of love and pride on Allie's face.

Even after Allie hung up, she still couldn't believe her ears. It's not that she didn't believe Bea when she promised that she would get into therapy, she just couldn't believe Bea has acted so promptly on that promise. She wasn't a fool, she knew Bea had a long road of recovery ahead, but it was a start, and judging by Bea's behaviour tonight, quite a good one. When Bea told her about her angst and cold feet, and then how Bridget put her right back into driver's seat, she couldn't help but marvel at how clever the older blonde was. She felt in her bones that their friend was the right choice for Bea, not only because being ingenious, but also because she truly cared and knew her way around Bea.

She trusted Bridget not to inflict any more damage upon the one she held dearest.

She grabbed her phone again and typed out to Bridget,

'Thank you, thank you, thank you!'

***

Bea was turning in her chair, completely unable to concentrate on the work that was patiently awaiting her. Her eyes kept shooting towards the empty chair across the room and with every glance the echo in that void inside of her was getting louder and louder.

Nothing was right inside this room. She felt completely out of place.

She tried getting a glass of water, she tried second coffee, as well as keeping both windows open, no matter it's friggin’ wintertime. Nothing worked.

When the clock showed eleven o-five, Bea got sick at the sudden thought of going through lunch alone. She pushed away her desk and marched straight into HR office to demand a two-week vacation. They were happy to grant it on the spot, given how they usually had to fight a long battle with the stubborn redhead to make her use at least the legal minimum.

Bea locked the office without taking a second look, without any regrets. For the first time in her life she didn't have a guilty conscience for taking a break from work. The only work she ought to be doing now is the work on herself and the work on the garage. That was where her heart and mind was now and she just couldn't redirect her attention towards the hotel. Not without Allie.
She headed to their diner and on the way there placed a phone call to a home remodeling company whose services she’d used before. They agreed to come to her place at three o’clock and do an assessment.

The diner was almost empty, given how it was still a bit early for lunch but too late for breakfast. As soon as she took a seat, Molly came running, not hiding her surprise to see her again today. Bea never liked their choices of lunch-type meals and never took a lunch there, but she offered her a house specialty anyway.

‘Just bring me another one of those heavenly blueberry pancakes, love’, Bea said to the young girl.

‘But you just had those three hours ago! It’s not healthy to eat that much pastry’, Molly protested, making Bea smirk.

‘You’re lucky it’s not your shop, cause with that attitude, you’d be facing bankruptcy soon!’ the redhead laughed.

Molly rolled her eyes.

‘Alright, sorry I care. Black coffee as usual then?’

‘Actually, bring me a glass of milk.’

‘I can’t wait for Allie to return’, Molly huffed, ‘you used to be so charming, but now you’re just impossible when she’s not around. Hit it off with her already, will ya, so you can be normal again.’

She marched away, not waiting on an answer from the highly amused Bea. She appreciated Molly caring about her all these years and since the things between her and Allie were going so splendidly, she didn’t mind the teasing. Or nudging into the right direction, as Molly would call it.

She explained to the constructors that she wanted to build in another side window and two skylights, whereas the garage door had to go and be replaced with a regular front door, the same one she had at the main entrance, and another front window. The whole front side had to be rebuilt with bricks first, of course, after they dismantle the garage door. Next she wanted to add inner walls’ insulation, like she had it in the rest of the house, and then do cement rendering and repaint the walls. She wanted to build in two additional inner walls and install sliding doors. The bathroom was modern and stylish, she only had it built in five years ago by this same company, but she wanted to install electric in-floor heating mats under the tiles. And lastly, she wanted laminate flooring throughout the room.

Bea was prepared to pay for how much it takes to engage all the manpower necessary to finish work in a week time so even if they weren’t accustomed to be hurried, they struck a deal with her fast enough. They promised to be there at eight o’clock tomorrow.

Around five thirty Bea went over to Bridget to help her prepare dinner. Bridget was at work the whole day and Bea felt bad enough that she had to work with her at home too, the least she could do is cook a meal for the two of them.

This evening Bridget wanted to learn about Bea’s time with ‘The Burnt Angels’ and other coping mechanisms Bea had developed over the years. And even though it wasn’t a topic as enjoyable as Allie, Bea did well on it. It wasn’t too unsettling for her and Bridget promised her that she will not jump her with heavy questions until they both agree it's time.

‘How was work today?’ Allie asked later on.

‘Fine, the usual’, Bea lied, making her best poker face. ‘But you are not allowed to ask anymore
about work while you're on vacation.'

Allie was not allowed to know she will be using all of her energy on a surprise for her.

***

In their third session Bridget asked about the previous therapies and what Bea thinks went wrong in them. In their fourth, she asked about happy memories from Bea's childhood, but then again all of Bea's memories from the cradle until the end of uni were happy, with the exclusion of dogs, cats and grandparents dying. And an old Harley that went rusty beyond repair. On the night number five they have both agreed to have 'the talk' on Sunday after lunch.

***

'You're wearing it on purpose, admit it!' Bea laughed in the camera.

'So what if I am?' Allie laughed back.

'Then why won't you let me have a good look at it then?'

'I can't, mum's here.'

Bea groaned, 'She's in the lounge room, for Pete's sake! There's a closed door between the two of you!'

'Still!' Allie shouted back in a subdued tone of voice.

'Then have mercy and cover yourself', Bea mumbled.

'It's damn hot in here, they're overheating the rooms', Allie batted her eyelashes innocently.

'That's it, I'm hanging up.'

'No, you aren't.'

'I so am.'

'No, you ar... Bea?!' 

***

Franky and Boomer kept sending photos from their trip to whomever wanted ot not wanted to look at them, even though Bridget heavily suspected they only get to see a PG version. She was happy her wife finally got a break from her stressful job that was taking a toll on her, mostly on her psyche. It was a burdening thing, having to put away people for a lifetime or a better part of it, even if they were hardcore criminals. Under her armour, Franky had a sensitive heart, and though she did not have any compassion for their wrongdoings, she often wondered who or what made them into bad guys and whether that could have been prevented by treating them right in their childhood. Bridget thought it was a survivor's guilt more than anything, for she has grown in an abusive family, then in foster care, and yet hadn't turned bad, but fought for a better life.
Guys doing a remodeling work were making just fine progress so Bea inspected the room only every now and then, concentrating on her own work with Bridget instead. On Thursday and Friday Bridget taught her strategies how not to freak out when she tells her about her trauma on Sunday and in between talk they practiced on those strategies. Among others, there was this one where Bea had to choose her safe place she can always drift off to whenever she feels threatened and thus avoid hyperventilating and panicking. Bea chose that nook that was formed in between adjoining rocks on the Rock Island. She explained to Bridget how Allie held her there and how secure she felt in her arms, especially knowing there wasn't a soul around but the two of them and no one could impose a threat to them.

'I never really meant that I will get to experience that again - being held in someone's arms in that way, but then it happened', Bea shrugged her shoulders and then blushed while continuing, 'she moved in very smoothly on that and by the time I realised what was happening, I was already comfortable in her embrace and didn't freak out'.

On Saturday morning Bea locked up her house but left the former garage open for remodeling crew to continue with their work while she goes out shopping. Even though she didn't feel her workshop as part of her inner space she had to protect at all costs, and never minded people coming in there, she was still very uncomfortable being in there alone with all those men and was usually avoiding hanging around them while they worked.

She was in need of new curtains, sofa cushions and other decorations for the new room so she had invited Regan to help her pick some out. Not that she didn't know what she wanted - it was already neatly entered in her design on the drawing pad and she could have ordered the stuff online, but she wanted to get to know Allie's other best friend better and this was a perfect excuse. Besides, she really needed a distraction to take her mind off the upcoming trauma revival the next day.

Regan proved to be a lot of fun. She was witty and warm at the same time and Bea could see why Allie loved her so much. She didn't want to give Bea a hard time and was thrilled with how things with her and Allie were progressing, but Bea could see loyalty to Allie hidden deep inside her hazel eyes, as well as unspoken reprimands of how Bea behaved in their earliest months and also anxiety whether she was gunna hurt Allie again. She did her best to reassure her, with her actions if not with her words, and at the end of the day, when they were packing the stuff they bought into the boot of Bea's car, she imagined she could see a certain amount of newly seeded trust in those light-coloured irises.

On Sunday evening, when Bea didn't video call at their usual time after her session, Allie firstly waited for an hour, not wanting to interrupt if the therapy was by any chance prolonged. She knew today was the Day-D for Bea and knew Bridget was supposed to spend the whole day with her. She was worried out of her mind so at half past ten she finally dialled Bea's number, ready to hang up if Bea doesn't answer after first couple of rings.

To her surprise Bridget was the one who answered the video call.

'Hey, Bridge, how are you? How's everything going today? Bea still with ya then?’ Allie tried to sound upbeat, to mask her overwhelming anxiety.
'Shh’, Bridget whispered, moving the phone so that camera can catch the sight of Bea, sleeping on the sofa in Bridget's lounge room.

Allie's heart ached at the sight. Bea was just lying there, like a broken flower, eyes puffed, life completely drained out of her.

'She was so brave today, you'd be proud’, Bridget whispered in a tired voice. 'But she needs to rest now, and so do I’, Bridget shook her head, 'what I've heard today, well, I cannot tell you, but it was the most disturbing day in my entire career. Probably because she's my friend and I couldn't avoid feeling it on a personal level, but I think I'd be this upset if she was a stranger too. It's harsh, gruesome stuff, Allie, what she went through, and you have to be prepared to have the patience of Job with her.’

Allie was quietly crying.

'I'd do anything for her, Bridge, you know that.’

'I do, darling. We'll all just sleep it off, okay? I'll sleep here in the armchair so that she doesn't feel alone.’

‘Um, Bridget, that's not a good idea. I don't know if it came up in therapy yet, but she's afraid of being in the dark with other people.’

'No, she hasn't mentioned it yet’, Bridget shook her head, 'but it makes perfect sense after what I've heard today’, she choked on a sudden outburst of tears, making Allie cry harder too. 'What do you suggest I do then?’

'Just go upstairs sleep in your bedroom. Make sure the front door is locked, cause she will need to know she was safe when she wakes up in the morning. And leave the lights on in the lounge and the whole ground floor so that she understands where she is if she wakes up in the middle of the night.’

'You know her so well already’, Bridget whispered softly. 'Don't worry, I'll do all of that. You go rest yourself. Goodnight, Allie.’

'Wait, Bridge! Do not hang up. Can you leave the line open and put her phone on the coffee table so that I can watch over her?’

'Sure’, Bridget placed the mobile against the vase on the table and left the room to go upstairs.

'Hey, baby’, Allie whispered through her tears, lying down on the lounge sofa herself. Her mother was already sleeping in the bedroom for quite some time now and she wasn't afraid that she could be accidentally overheard. 'I hear that you've been very courageous today. I just wanted to let you know how much I appreciate all that you've been doing. I know it's tough as hell, but the most important thing is that you will get better. You must…’

Allie cried soundlessly into her hands for another ten minutes, then wiped her eyes and pulled herself together. Her fingers caressed Bea's figure on the display and she started to sing to her frazzled soulmate. She sang the gentlest, most soothing melodies until deep into the night, and after a while, before she sank into much needed sleep herself, she could see Bea starting to smile in her sleep.

***

There was only a day left until Allie's return and Bea was trying to do all the remaining chores, but
really running around like a headless chicken.

'Relax, you'll be fine', Allie texted her. 'Mum already loves you. And she's a nun, y'know, she's sworn to show understanding and pass no judgement.'

But nothing could truly calm down Bea, not even when she drove to Boomer's that Saturday evening, to enjoy a little get together with her and Fridge after the two women arrived from their road trip.

Allie and her mum were supposed to leave the ski resort at five a.m. and arrive in Melbourne somewhere around ten. Allie arranged it that way, because she really wanted for Bea and her mum to meet and for her to have some time later to spend it with Bea, before they return to work on Monday.

Bea was supposed to wait on them in front of a restaurant tomorrow so that they can have an early lunch and get to know each other. Ever since she's agreed to that plan, Bea couldn't stop sweating and she wiped her palms on her jeans on more than one occasion, making the other three women giggle. But it was the first time since her freshman year that she's was meeting a girl's parents, and it wasn't just any girl, it was Allie. What if she screws up?

Seeing Allie was video calling her, she ran out of Boomer's lounge before she answered the call to close herself in her bedroom and enjoy some privacy while talking to Allie, followed by girls' snickering and a plentitude of whoa and aww sounds.

***

Late Saturday evening, when she came home from Boomer's, sleep was the last thing on Bea's mind. She couldn't stop obsessing about seeing Allie again tomorrow and meeting her mum. She looked herself in the mirror and suddenly everything about her appearance seemed wrong.

That dark red hair, that was also a part of her defence mechanism and Bea felt she didn't need to defend herself as much as before.

She wanted a change.

So shortly before the clock struck midnight she shortened her hair to a shoulder length. She even did an undercut above her ears that would remain hidden when she wears her hair down, but look badass when she ties it in a pony. She dyed her hair a much lighter shade of red, because she felt much lighter than only half a month before, some of her burden having fallen off her shoulders, and she added quite a few light brown highlights, to remind her of how she used to be, before all that.

***

While riding in a taxi to her way downtown, on Sunday morning, Bea couldn't stop checking herself in her pocket mirror every couple of minutes.

‘Relax, lady’, the taxi driver smiled in the mirror, ‘whatever the occasion is, you look very beautiful.’

Bea smiled back, but couldn't quite relax. It wasn't only meeting Karen, it was all that has to follow.

In the last several days Bridget and she have been concentrating on working more on Bea's future instead of Bea's past and, following Bridget's instructions, Bea practiced at home envisioning future situations with Allie. She imagined the things she would like to do to her and the things she would like to be done to her, from everyday's little things to scenarios in the bedroom, so that she doesn't freak out when they actually do happen down the line. During yesterday's therapy session they actually rehearsed Bea meeting Karen and what she's gunna say to her, but Bea now felt that the words have flown out of her head and that she cannot remember them anymore.
She paid the driver and sat on the bench in front of the restaurant.

‘There was a jam when we were exiting M31, we're running a little late’, Allie texted her.

'It's cool, just drive carefully’, Bea replied and made herself comfortable on the bench.

She closed her eyes and went back in her head to that perfect day on the rocks of Rock Island. It was, indeed, her safe place and she could feel Allie's love streaming through her whole being.

It has finally calmed her down.

It has filled her with strength and enthusiasm so when mother and daughter finally arrived, she didn't meet them a mess that she was that morning. She met them her usual, charming self and, after she’d shortly enwrapped the half of herself she has been missing dearly in a crushing hug, she stretched her hand out confidently to the older blonde.

The lunch was going very well. Karen steered clear of any potentially unpleasant topics - she never even thought to ask what Bea's intentions were, even though that question was burning the tip of her tongue - while Bea asked a lot about Karen's life: her family's Yorkshire origins, her childhood with Liz, what made her devote her life to help others, her everyday schedule and tasks at the monastery. Kaz seemed to be enjoying the attention and Bea's genuine interest in her life so she answered all the questions with agility and at a fair length.

Allie sat back in her chair, nibbling on her lunch and then on her dessert, leaving to the other two to keep the conversation flowing, while they were getting to know each other.

Chapter End Notes

Lyrics belong to Frankie Valli's song "Can't Take My Eyes off of You".
After hugging her mother one more time, Allie let her walk inside the convent, her eyes tearing up a bit as she watched her go but a happy smile still on her lips.

She returned to the car and as she sat in the driver's seat, her eyes locked with Bea's and her happy smile faded away.

'Your mother seems like an incredible woman', Bea said softly, assuming Allie was sad to part with Kaz.

Allie blinked for a few seconds, then stated,

'Thank you for making such an effort to get to truly know her. I think she took a liking to you.'

'But of course', Bea replied, her voice still soft, her eyes never leaving Allie's strangely pensive face. Allie's eyes were fixed on the windscreen, she was looking straight ahead but really into nothing. Her hands on the wheel, she didn't even flinch, when Bea reached and gently stroked her underarm.

'Righto', Allie fake-smiled, 'I'll drop you off first.'

Bea was taken aback by those words, but still determined to be patient with Allie's strange mood.

'I'd rather you take me to yours', she said in a low voice, 'to help you unpack'.

'No rush, I plan just to throw my bags into the laundry room and unpack it whenever I feel like it next week.'

'It was just a figure of speech, Allie, I meant I wanted to spend my time with you today.'

When Allie didn't reply, her eyes still firmly glued to the street ahead, Bea cupped her chin and turned her head towards herself.

'I missed you', Bea's voice was getting insecure.

Allie lowered her gaze quickly, but not before Bea spotted a jolt of pain that flashed through her blue eyes.

'What's wrong, honey?' Bea pleaded. 'Please talk to me.'

Allie lifted her eyes again, but this time her look was filled with anger.

'You missed me?!' she hissed. 'Oh really?'

'Of course I did', Bea replied, confused, replaying their phone conversation last night, when Allie
sounded so eager to see her and everything between them seemed so great and solid. 'I missed you very much.'

'Well, you have one funny way of showing it!' Allie yelled.

'How do you mean?' Bea shuddered.

Allie looked at her in disbelief.

'The whole lunch you were ignoring me, didn't even greet me properly, let alone kissed me, barely looked at me', as her voice started to screech two tears travelled down her cheeks, 'and now you have the nerve to act all innocent and try to blame it on me! You know what?' Allie unbuckled her seatbelt, 'You take the car and I will take a taxi, I don't even want to ride with you.'

Allie opened the door, starting to get out, but before she could put the other foot on the street, Bea grabbed her by the waist and pulled her back down. Allie started to protest, but to no avail, as in few seconds she found herself straddled by Bea, who wiped her tears with her fingers and, to Allie's surprise, started to laugh lightheartedly, feeling the weight has lifted off her shoulders.

'That's it?' she grinned lovingly into Allie's ocean blue eyes. 'Ya doofus.'

She cupped her chin and kissed her frowned forehead.

'I've missed this smart little head', she whispered against her frown, 'this cute little nose', she murmured as her lips trailed it down and her hands moved into blonde hair, 'these soft locks, these cheekbones', her lips followed her words then moved up to kiss away the remnants of Allie's tears, 'but most of all, I've missed the most beautiful eyes I have ever seen.'

Bea kissed her eyelids a dozen times, her hands caressing pale cheeks and messed up hair.

When she felt Bea pulling slightly back, Allie opened her eyes, greeted by redhead's dazzling smile.

'Then why did you act like you hadn't even noticed I was away?' she pouted.

'I was trying to be respectful to your mother. I focused on getting along with her and didn't want to alienate her with public displays of affection.'

Bea lifted Allie's chin again and leant her head towards the young woman until their foreheads touched.

'I thought you didn't care and it hurt all day.'

'I'm sorry, baby', Bea whispered against her mouth, 'I only wanted to impress the most important person in your life, so I kinda concentrated on that during lunch, thinking we will have the whole afternoon for ourselves. It was hard for me too, y'know, sitting there, next to you, and not being able to touch you.'

'Yeah?' Allie looked up at her hopefully.

'Yeah', Bea let out a warm breath against her plump lips.

Allie's hands raised to tangle with Bea's locks.

'I love what you did with your hair, love the colours and that undercut, oh my God… To think that you were the sexiest woman on Earth anyway, and now you're like hundred times sexier…'
'Yeah?' Bea murmured, her lips even closer, almost touching Allie's.

'Yeah', Allie choked out before she launched herself at those lips, her arms wrapping themselves around Bea's body, pulling her close as possible. Bea responded immediately, her tongue begging for entrance. As their tongues glided against each other, Bea felt her hunger only rise with each second. Afraid of losing all control, she used all her strength to pull back. Her hands still restlessly ruffling Allie's hair, her dark pupils dilated, she rasped out, 'Start driving, if you don't want me to ravish you in front of a monastery.'

Her voice stuck in her throat, Allie only nodded so Bea started to climb off her but stopped to place one more kiss on those perfect lips. As Allie parted them, she felt Bea's teeth biting into her lower lip and let out a small, startled shriek. Bea soothed the bite with her tongue,

'It's payback for what you've just put me through.'

Allie laughed and buckled up, impatient to get the redhead home.

'You paid me back a little more than you owed me, I'll make sure to look up for change at mine.'

Bea chuckled, fastening her own seatbelt.

During the ride, Bea's eyes never left the beautiful woman beside her, she was resting on her side watching the blonde drive, and twenty minutes never passed sooner and at the same time never seemed longer. Finally driving into Allie's part of the town, Bea felt like she could not take it anymore. Her hand travelled up the blonde's thigh, until it brushed over her core, making Allie shudder and grab her hand.

'Soon', she said, her voice thick with passion, 'just to arrive home in one piece.'

With that, she brought Bea's hand to her lips, her eyes concentrated on the road.

After that Bea decided to behave, settling for admiring Allie from her seat.

As Allie finally parked in front of her house, Bea was the first to climb out, opening the boot and grabbing Allie's luggage.

Allie's hand on hers stopped her from taking it out, Bea's eyes questioning blonde's face in surprise.

'Leave the bloody bags behind', Allie panted out, closing the boot and pressing Bea hard into it. Bea readily returned the kiss, her tongue battling for dominance, her hands slipping to Allie's backside, her arms squeezing their way under Allie's thighs. Allie happily jumped at her and wrapped her legs around her waist.

'Your keys', Bea murmured, not breaking the kiss.

Allie reached into the right pocket on her jacket, pulling out a set of keys.

Their lips still glued to each other's, Bea carried her to her front door, taking away the keys and unlocking the door.

'Don't let go', she sputtered against Allie's lips, her right hand fumbling with locking on the inside.

'Never', Allie kissed her jaw over and over again, her arms holding firmly onto Bea's neck, her thighs clasping redhead's waist.

After finally locking them away, Bea spun them around, then pressed Allie up against the wall next
to the coat rack, unzipping Allie's ski jacket and helping Allie wiggle her arms out of it. She hung her jacket on the rack and started unzipping her own, wanting to put Allie down in order to take the jacket off. But her eyes fell on blonde's now exposed neck and she couldn't help but launch herself at that milky white skin, kissing, sucking, gently biting. Allie moaned under her lips, making Bea forget her plans.

'Wrap your arms tighter around me', she said in a thick voice, and as Allie did, she freed her hand and started to unbutton Allie's jeans.

'God, how strong you are, it never seize to amaze me', Allie panted out, watching Bea removing her boots and jeans with one hand, while she held her firmly up in the air with her left arm around her torso. Her long legs finally freed, Allie wrapped them up around Bea again, Bea pressing her again against the wall.

Bea's hands impatiently wandered to Allie's backside, quickly finding the seam of her underwear.

'I'll have to owe you another pair of panties', she mumbled, her fingers tearing at the fabric.

'Good riddance I'd say', Allie chuckled, but when Bea brought her undies to her nose and inhaled their smell before tossing them to the side, her face slackened, her amused expression faded into a look of serious lust. She kissed the redhead with all she's got,

'Take me', she whispered.

'Because you're mine?' Bea fished for love words.

'Because I'm yours', Allie looked her dead serious in the eye, and Bea felt warmth spreading in her chest. She entered her lover slowly, their eyes locked as she tentatively pumped in and out couple of times. She could feel Allie's wetness increase with each push, so she soon allowed herself to completely let go and lose herself in the moment. She kissed her eyes and down her jaw until she reached her neck again. As she began sucking on her pulse, Allie started letting out excruciating moans, spurring Bea on to speed up her hand. Soon she had blonde's walls contracting around her fingers and her legs trembling around her waist. Bea's lips caressed relentlessly Allie's throat, smiling against it, as she felt Allie's chords vibrating under her mouth, when she couldn't refrain any longer from getting vocal.

'Don't hold back, baby, I love it', Bea rambled, mesmerised by this woman, by the way she reacted to her touch.

'You're driving me wild, Bea', Allie half-moaned, half-screamed, her nails digging deeper into redhead's jacket.

'Yeah?' Bea mumbled, capturing her lips, her tongue going deep inside, as her thumb found Allie's swollen clitoris, making her gasp into her mouth. Bea found her little gasp an incredible turn on, so she kept her lips on Allie's, leaving some space between their mouths for Allie to breathe in and pant out, but still close enough to be able to swallow her moans and screams. Those kept coming more and more often, until Allie was a squealing mess under her strong jaw and her hand was bathing in her abundant juices.

Sensing Allie was near, Bea picked up the pace a notch, making Allie's contractions even more violent, until she screamed hard and let go. Her long legs hung loosely down Bea's thighs, while her thin arms held even tighter around Bea's neck. She trembled fiercely in Bea's embrace, her face nuzzled against her shoulder. Bea caressed her pussy gently, a feeling of protectiveness washing over her.
Several minutes later Allie raised her head, only to find brown eyes watching her with such tenderness that she's never encountered in the eyes of another human being.

'My beautiful girl', Bea rasped out, her voice so strained and raw that Allie's heart jumped.

'My Bea', she smiled, her fingers stroking her prominent cheekbones, before she leant in for another kiss. Bea's lips moved slowly against hers, while her right hand was wandering up her naked leg.

Bea pulled away too soon for Allie's liking.

'Your thigh's got freezing cold', she frowned.

'Yeah, I turned off the heat before I left.'

'You poor thing', Bea said, lifting her up from the wall and wrapping her in her jacket, as she carried her into the living room. She put her gently onto the fourseater and wrapped her up in a blanket which was on it.

'I'll come back in a second', Bea said, 'Where is the entrance to your basement?'

'Oh, I hadn't turned off the main tap, because of the tenants. You just need to turn on the termometar by the door.'

'Okay, be right back then', Bea said turning the heat on and leaving the blonde alone until she hung her jacket in the hall and used the bathroom. Entering the lounge again, she smiled at the young woman who just opened up her arms, lifting her blanket up for Bea to settle in. Bea fell into her embrace so naturally that she had to wonder how could she have ever feared being close to this gentle creature.

She spread herself over Allie's body, trying to warm her up by rubbing her thighs.

'The room will warm up soon. Sorry I got carried away and didn't notice how cold you were.'

'I didn't feel anything but heat though', Allie giggled, forcing Bea to kiss her sweet smile. Bea sighed happily and laid her head on Allie's chest. She loved hearing Allie's heartbeat and how it increased every time she accidentally moved against the young woman.

'I can't believe you're finally here', she sighed. 'At moments, it seemed like an eternity.'

Allie wrapped her arms tighter around the redhead.

'Sorry I doubted you earlier', she breathed out.

'Sorry I seemed distant, I was trying so hard around Kaz that I didn't realise how I come across to you.'

'Don't be sorry, it means a world to me how you made my mum feel special today.'

Bea lifted her head and looked straight into blue eyes,

'Yeah?'

'Yeah', Allie nodded.

'Aren't we both articulate today', Bea chuckled and placed a series of light kisses on blonde's face. Allie kissed back Bea's face and hair, giggling under her tickling fingers.
At one moment, after she put away one blonde lock that got stuck into Allie's eyes, their eyes locked again and Bea's expression changed from playful to serious. She stroked Allie's cheek with the back of her hand and murmured,

'Welcome home, sweetheart.'

Allie's heart swelled at those words. Her voice stuck in her throat, she wasn't able to respond with words. Instead, her eyes glazed as they roamed across Bea's face and she opened her legs slowly, bending them in her knees.

'Again?' Bea said, her eyes darkening.

'Again', Allie whispered, pulling her lover between her spread legs.

Bea wrapped those legs around herself again, loving the feeling of closeness it provided. She dragged her nails slowly up Allie's legs and when she reached her waist, she let them wander under her red sweater, soon finding her breasts. Allie let out a sweet moan, which Bea felt compelled to swallow and turn into a heated make out session. After a while of hot kissing, Bea helped Allie wiggle out of her sweater and unclasped her bra, leaving the gorgeous blonde completely naked. As her hungry eyes took time to admire the body in her arms, Allie's hoarse voice started pleading,

'Bea? Would you do something for me? Please?'

'Oh, I will do plenty for you, very soon', Bea winked.

'Please, Bea, I'm serious. I need to feel your skin.'

When Bea's eyes went wide and panicked, Allie's voice had a touch of panic too when she hurried to reassure her, 'I didn't mean it like that, don't frighten, I know you're not ready for that. I just meant, could you please take off your sweater too? You were already in your vest with me in late summer.'

In the same time, her ocean blue eyes were filled with both lust and fear she'd overstepped, and she calmed down only after Bea caressed her cheek.

'That I can do', Bea rasped, raising her arms and letting astonished Allie remove a piece of clothing off her for the first time. Then she removed her bra herself, under her red vest, leaving her upper body in only that tiny piece of clothing.

She watched Allie as she was lying underneath her and added shyly,

'I'm working with Bridget on doing more, for you', her eyes fell to the ground as she spoke.

'Please don't feel like I'm pressurising you, Bea', Allie spooked. 'I want you to get better, but I never want to push you into something you don't really want. I have patience for you like nothing I felt for anyone and I can wait forever if I need to. Besides, what you've been giving me by now, is amazing already.'

She relaxed completely when she saw Bea smiling down on her, then she heard her voice,

'I know you would never put any pressure, sweet girl. That makes me desire even more to get well and give you a relationship you deserve. I want you too, Allie, y'know? Don't ever doubt it. I want to be normal for you, I crave your touch', her shy voice turned to whisper as she watched Allie's eyes fill with love and tears, 'I just need more time to do everything properly, I fear I might spook and push you away if I act prematurely.'
Allie raised her upper body and took Bea into her embrace.

'Thank you, thank you', she whispered into her ear, 'you're so brave, you will make it one day, you have already made such a great progress'.

Bea smiled, Allie's gentle embrace calming her instantly. She tangled her fingers into blonde locks, kissing those plump lips like it was her last. She laid Allie back on the sofa cushions, her hand caressing the smooth buttcheek then mound. To that, Allie shivered. She pulled lightly at Bea's neck, bringing her down with her, to lie between her parted legs.

'Come close, darling', she pleaded. Bea didn't need to be told twice, she lay down, showering her girl with hot kisses, her hand trailing up and down her wet mound.

'May I already?' she smiled a guilty smile at her own impatience.

'Please do', Allie's face cramped from anticipation.

After Bea inserted her fingers into the young woman, she flipped them over so that Allie was fully laid on top of her, feeling the need to be submissive for the young woman.

'Are you sure?' Allie whispered, half-thrilled, half-scared.

'I trust you', Bea replied, looking her straight in the eye. 'I have thought about it a lot when you were away, and every time I imagined this scene, I was never worried that you would do anything I'm not ready for. I know that you will stop if I ask you to. I trust you', she assured the blonde again, wanting to chase away the remnants of fear in her blue eyes.

Allie's eyes filled with tears, she tried to stop them, but just couldn't.

'I'm so proud of you', she choked.

'Don't cry, Alliecat', Bea kissed her face, 'these are good news. You can kiss any part of skin that you can see', she nudged the blonde playfully as she continued sobbing, smiling when Allie's tears froze after she saw her dragging her fingertip across the swell of her breasts.

'Really?' Allie's eyes lit up like kid's on a Christmas morning.

'Really', Bea replied, gently kissing her lips. 'It's daylight, and I think I'll be okay. Just don't break your gaze for too long, so that I don't forget it is you who's on me.'

'Oh Bea', Allie spoke sadly, 'what would I not give to be able to go back in time and prevent whatever hurt you from happening.'

Bea cupped her face with her left hand, her right still comfortably buried into the young woman.

'Those words mean more to me than I could ever explain, Alliecat. Because I know they are not only words, I know you mean every syllable. Sadly, it's not possible to change the past, but you have helped me so much already. You make me happy, beautiful girl, and those are words I thought I was never gunna say again.'

She raised her head to reach Allie's lips, happy when she felt her lover crashing into her mouth. They swallowed each other's lips, their tongues danced around one another, their moans complementing. When Bea was left without breath, Allie continued kissing her nose, making sure she made a long eye connection before she moved to nibble on Bea's earlobe. It turned out to be Bea's soft spot and Allie could feel in delight how the other woman started to writhe underneath her. She kissed her lips
again, her eyes fixed on Bea's. Seeing nothing but affection and desire in them, she dared to lower herself to the place she longed for, beginning with that beautiful neck, which she kissed, licked and caressed with her teeth. Bea started letting out loud moans, Allie revelling in the sound but still finding strength to pull away for a second and connect her gaze with Bea's wide open eyes. No matter her amount of pleasure, the poor thing is still scared she'll see ghosts instead of me, Allie thought and placed the gentlest of kisses on Bea's cheek.

'It's me, baby, I won't let you go, okay?'

Bea nodded in response, pulling the blonde closer, wrapping her legs around Allie's backside. Allie gasped, her tits almost in Bea's face. Bea smirked, relaxing visibly, and with her free hand she brought Allie's right boob into her mouth, sucking and biting on the sensitive nipple. Allie jolted with arousal, which was a cue for Bea's skilled hand to start moving inside of her, evoking the waves of pleasure from the young woman.

Allie needed the utmost connection badly so she parted Bea's lips from her breast and melted them with hers.

'My perfect Bea, my darling', she cooed, as she continued kissing along the strong jaw, making the redhead's heart swell with tenderness.

Bea bathed in those emotions, never fearing them, because it was her Alliecat above her, falling apart while riding her relentless fingers, giving herself wholly to Bea. She chased her lips again and dared to briefly close her eyes when she finally caught them.

The look of pleasure in Bea's face, fully revelling in her submission to her lover, made Allie scream in excitement, causing Bea's lids to open, yet nothing but desire in her eyes. Allie's face lit up again and she kissed her lover's nose before she lowered herself to her neck again. This new pleasure Bea allowed was making Allie insatiable and spurring on Bea's fingers to move fast inside her. Soon enough, they both started moaning and rocking in unison, picking up the same rhythm.

'Bea, honey', Allie battled to pant out as a time-out between moans and light screams, 'I would want to go a bit lower, but it still will be me even though you won't exactly see me, alright?'

Bea nodded, then gasped loudly when she felt Allie's lips ghosting over the swell of her breasts. Bea's breasts were perfectly round, her hardened nipples touching Allie's buds through the thin layer of cotton. Allie felt weak in the head just by looking at them bulging from the hem of the vest, and when she dared to kiss them, Bea screamed and pressed hard into her clit, making her come down Bea's hand.

'Come up', Bea pleaded, 'I miss you.'

Allie's heart almost burst with happiness, even though she shook vigorously, she managed to prop herself by the elbows and connect her mouth with the other woman's.

'Don't break it, don't leave', Bea murmured against her lips, as she removed her hand from Allie. It was dripping wet with Allie's nectar and Bea shoved her hand quickly into her pants, not wanting to waste any of the precious liquid.

Allie was watching her, fascinated by her movements, so that Bea had to pull her head down with her free hand, to remind her she was waiting for her.

Allie kissed her hard then shoved her face into Bea's breasts, sucking and kissing on the exposed skin. It spurred her on when she heard Bea scream, her kisses getting wilder, her fingers roaming all
over Bea's thin vest. When she felt Bea starting to shake underneath her, it was the best feeling in the world. Sensing that she was close, Allie shifted to her face, wanting to watch her climax, to share that experience with her. She pulled Bea's lower lip with her teeth, their eyes locked, and in that moment she felt Bea's body stiffen, then shake heavily as she fell apart underneath her. They kissed as Bea climaxed, Bea parting her lips, asking for Allie's tongue to enter her.

As she brought her hand out, minutes later, she reached for kleenex on the table to wipe her fingers, but Allie grabbed her hand and licked Bea's juices clean.

Watching the blonde with her fingers in her mouth, Bea felt the throbbing between her legs again, like she didn't just recover from a heavy orgasm, she squealed in excitement, flipping the blonde over, her mouth attaching to her breasts immediately.

Surprised, Allie hardly had time to process the attention her breasts were suddenly getting, when Bea's lips moved to her stomach and soon to her mound. Once there, Bea took her time, taking care that she doesn't send Allie over the edge before she managed to enjoy her body to the fullest.

Allie was having the feeling that Bea was making love to her vulva, like she was doing it with her lips earlier. She kissed her folds with passion, glided her tongue up between them, sucked on her clit gently, causing her legs to jerk. She teased her like that for what felt like eternity, causing Allie to break eventually and beg for release.

At those whimpering words, Bea lifted her smiling gaze to Allie's, and continued kissing her clit while still locking eyes. She could spot the desperation in those blue orbs and enjoyed the tight clasp around her head of Allie's shaking thighs. When she heard Allie's whimpers turn into little cries, she knew it was high time to release the blonde, otherwise her desperation would turn into frustration and pain. She slipped her arms under Allie's buttocks, lifting her higher up, thus gaining even better access to her core. She pushed her tongue into the young woman, driving it in and out at merciless pace, until she felt Allie's walls contracting. Then she twirled her tongue inside, lifting the tip to reach the g-spot, and when she stroked it couple of times with her pointy little tongue tip, Allie screamed her name and collapsed. Bea withdrew her tongue, but continued to ride Allie's orgasm, stroking up her inner lips with her lower lip, enjoying the uncontrollable shaking around her ears. When Allie's orgasm almost subsided, Bea started flicking her tongue fast over her clitoris, causing startled Allie to cry out in pleasure and disbelief this can continue. Bea never lost her rhythm and in couple of minutes she had almost oblivious Allie arching her back towards her mouth, as she yielded to yet another ripping orgasm.

As Allie fell hard back onto sofa, Bea placed a gentle kiss on her clit, before pushing herself up to blonde's face. Once she opened her tired eyes, Allie took Bea's head into her palms and gave her a tender kiss.

Not being able to speak, she pulled the other woman onto her chest, finding the discarded blanket under their feet and wrapping it around them. Her lids were heavy like led, she found the strength to place another kiss into the red mane, but then succumbed to sleep, lost for the world.

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When Allie woke up, first thing she felt was a pleasant weight on her chest. She opened her eyes to see the redhead sleeping soundly on top of her. She gripped at her tighter, lying there contently, grinning like an idiot as she replayed everything they did to each other before she fell asleep. It took
certainly half an hour until Bea started to steer, her lips attaching to Allie's breasts as soon as she regained consciousness.

'What is it with you and my breasts?' Allie laughed aloud.

'I will tell you', Bea murmured while continuing to kiss them, not at least disturbed, 'when you tell me what is it with you and my breasts.'

'Touché', Allie laughed, pulling the redhead up. 'Come here, I've missed you', she muttered, as she captured her lover's lips with her own.

Bea submitted her soul into that kiss, pulling apart only when they were left out of breath.

Allie rubbed her nose against Bea's, and Bea happily snuggled into her neck. They lay like that for couple of minutes, then Bea pulled herself up into sitting position, looking through the window.

'It's evening already', she stated.

'Please don't go', Allie jumped, 'stay the night.'

Bea cupped her startled face,

'Relax, I wasn't planning on going anywhere.'

'You weren't?' Allie teared up.

'Of course not, silly', Bea leant in and kissed her.

Bea stood up, heading for the bathroom to freshen up. Returning she smiled at Allie,

'It's ten to six. I went through your fridge, there's enough stuff in there to make a decent dinner. How 'bout I start on it while you unpack your things and shower?'

'You're the best', Allie smiled back.

Until half past seven they have both been showered and dressed in Allie's loungewear, sitting in the dining room, feeding each other green beans, ham and eggs, and sharing kisses between bites.

'Thank you for the dinner', Allie said. 'Tomorrow night I will cook for you', she choke on her bite when she realised that she probably assumed too much.

Bea tapped her on her back until her airways cleared, Allie's blue eyes piercing through her soul as she continued sheepishly, 'That is, if you'll want my company tomorrow night.'

Bea stood up from her chair and sat in Allie's lap.

'What's there not to want?' she said seriously, looking deeply into the blue eyes, tangling her fingers into soft locks.

Allie grinned in disbelief, wrapping her arms tighter around Bea's waist.

'However, I'd like us to go over to my place tomorrow, I have a little surprise for you, and I have already cooked for another five days, wanting us to have as much as possible of our free afternoons once you come back.'

'Can I cook for you next week then? If there will be a next week, that is?' Allie joked.
'Of course there will be a next week', Bea shook her by the shoulders, 'and the week after that, and the week after that…', she assured Allie between kisses.

'What do you want to do now?' Allie asked after they finished washing the dishes. 'Wanna take a walk or watch a movie or talk business or...?'

Bea pulled Allie close by her hips so that their foreheads were touching.

'I want to go to your bed with you, and talk, for like two hours, about every silly thing except business, fall asleep early so that we can wake early and have breakfast together and watch sunrise together.'

'That sounds perfect, Bea', Allie kissed her lips and led her by the hand upstairs into her bedroom.

The redhead went to ensuite to get changed into pyjamas Allie gave her. She brushed her teeth, smiling when she looked down at pyjama legs, being a bit too long for her and dragging on the floor. By the time she got out, Allie was already in bed waiting. Bea slipped under doona, pulling the blonde into a hug, letting out a shocked gasp when she realised that blonde was wearing nothing. She hit gently on her shoulder, 'You little minx!'

'What?' Allie pulled an innocent face, 'I like sleeping naked. Should I put some clothes on if it bothers you that much?'

'No, no', Bea said, 'sleep as you feel comfortable, but only so you know, I really wanna just talk, and I'm too shattered for anything else', she threatened.

'It's your fault really that you don't know when to stop. You were insatiable today.'

'Did it bother you?' Bea asked in an uncertain voice, wanting to make sure she didn't cross Allie's boundaries of comfortable or pleasant that day.

'No, no', Allie jumped to ease her mind, 'quite the opposite actually. It felt so good to be wanted that much. When I woke up and was lying there watching you sleep, I can honestly say that was the happiest moment of my entire life. I know I thought it several times already with you, but each time it was true, as each time you made me feel even better than the last. And the sex, Bea… It was incredible, the best ever with us. I know our sexual encounters have been mind-blowing in the past, but the feel of silicone cannot ever compare to the feel of your skin when you touch me with your bare fingers or kiss me down there with your mouth. I could really feel you, the essence of you, and even though I am not pressurising you, I know that when the time arise for you to defeat your insecurities and dare to give yourself fully to me, I know that feeling will be incomparable to anything existing in my world before or after you. You are my world now, Bea Smith.'

Even though Bea was blushing profoundly when Allie was describing the sex part, she was so moved by her little declaration that she couldn't shy her eyes away and kissed her heavily after she finished to assure her she was not alone in her point of view.

'I can't get enough', she said with her head buried into Allie's neck, 'because I've never wanted anyone as much as I want you, not even…', Bea bit her lip, suddenly aware that she revealed too much, but Allie didn't push, sensing that that sentence was somehow connected with Bea's trauma.

'The last 16 days without you were the longest days of my life', Bea continued, 'I didn't even go to work.'

'Really?' Allie was surprised, she lifted Bea's head, examining her face.
'Well, I went the first Monday, but the office seemed so empty without you, it was unbearable. So I headed to HR and asked for ten days off of my accumulated vacation, saying I cannot continue a quality work without your consult. They were happy to agree, firstly they are already in trouble with the law because I don't use my legal minimum vacation, and secondly because it's really more convenient for the project if the two of us take vacation at the same time.'

'So what did you do the whole time?' Allie asked curiously.

Bea shrugged her shoulders:

'Hired people to remodel my garage a bit - that's actually a part of my surprise for you tomorrow, had a session with Bridget each day, rode my bike, thought about you.'

'Nice thoughts, I hope?' the blonde winked.

'The best', Bea replied sincerely. 'You're my light in the darkness, Allie.'

Moved beyond words can express, Allie leaned in for a kiss, but as she finally pulled away, she didn't dare to ask questions. She was rightly sensing that Bea was on a verge of nervous tears so she stirred the conversation into lighter topic of her hiking and skiing and earning a muscle inflammation. She exaggerated her pains a little, happy to hear the redhead chuckle, so she went into detail, while Bea buried her head into her chest, trying to muffle her laugh with her hair.

An hour later they were both yawning, deciding it's time to sleep.

'Good night, sweetie', Bea said, as she laid a kiss into Allie's chest.

'Good night, baby', Allie returned as she kissed the crown of her head and reached for the night stand to turn the lamp off.

'Allie? Could you please leave the lamp on?' Bea asked slightly embarrassed.

'Sure', Allie replied, 'but I thought that we were good the last time.'

'We were, we were', Bea hurried to reassure, 'don't ever think otherwise, it was a perfect night and I slept like a baby. Just... The thing is, I don't feel that brave tonight and I'm so afraid that I might wake up in the middle of the night, not knowing who I'm with, and I might end up hurting you.'

Allie felt her shudder, followed by hot tears on her chest, Bea's dams that threatened their peace all evening finally breaking. Allie let her cry it out, rocking her lightly, and when the sobs subsided, she lowered herself next to her head and kissed away her tears.

'We will leave the light on, beautiful, and my face will be next to yours at all times so if you startle from your sleep, you will know right away that it's only me, okay?'

Bea nodded her head in trust and gratitude.

So Allie’s got nearer yet, nose to nose, hand protectively wrapped around Bea's waist, breathing in the sweet air Bea was exhaling, lips barely touching, loud heartbeats lulling them into sleep.
The next morning the blonde woke up to the sensation of warm lips kissing hers, inhaling the coconut scent that has spread across her pillow.

The redhead's eyes were full of joy and lust for life, not a trace of the nervous wreck that she was last night.

'Good morning, beautiful, slept well? You're by far the best alarm I've ever had.'

Bea chuckled,

'It's half past five, we've slept for seven hours straight, it's time to seize the day.'

'It's an hour before the alarm clock, Bea', Allie groaned, 'the best course of action is to nap a bit more.'

The sun wasn't supposed to rise yet, but the sky was of that bright colour that sometimes appears before dawn, making each thing in the neighborhood visible, so Bea reached with her hand and turned off the light. Next thing Allie knew was the weight of a warm body stretched above hers, full lips attached to her neck igniting a fire in her.

'I can see your point', she heard Bea murmuring against her skin while going down on her, 'but yet again you are in no position to judge, not being the one who has a gorgeous, naked blonde in her bed.'

'When you put it that way, I can see your point too', Allie almost whined the last part out, feeling Bea has already reached her destination and was now rubbing her lips and nose into her supple flesh.

'What is it with you and cherries? Did they feed you only that when you were a child?' she heard Bea joke after her tongue had voraciously licked up her slit but couldn't even let out a giggle, being
already aroused to the state of paralysis.

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Half past seven they were both fully dressed, light makeup on, and were sitting on Allie's porch, sipping coffee, holding hands, watching the sunrise.

'I can suddenly see the appeal of an early start', Allie said timidly, her thumb gently stroking over Bea's.

Bea kissed her knuckles and looked at her wristwatch,

'Almost twenty to eight, time to go to see Molly, princess.'

'The hands are overlapping again so why break the tradition', Allie replied dreamily, as Bea pulled her up to her feet. Bea was beyond beautiful in the morning light, Allie loving the fact that she was hugged by the fabric of Allie's blouse and skirt. She asked Bea to drive them, so that she could perv on her more, and fifteen minutes later they walked through the doors of 'their' diner, Molly gasping happily when she saw them walking in hand in hand.

Ten to nine, they were alone in the elevator, riding to their office, Bea pressing her lips against Allie's one last time,

'See you after five, sweetie, no fooling around in the office.'

'I mean it', she added, as she saw Allie barely holding in laughter. And even though she laughed, Allie knew she'd better not be joking with Bea's work ethic, if she wants to stay in her good graces.

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The day passed before Allie knew it. There was so much to catch up on, and even though she kept her nose to the grindstone and skipped lunch, at five she felt like she's barely managed to scrape the surface. From behind her, she felt fingers running through her hair.

'How 'bout you go ahead, babe?' Allie sighed. 'I'll follow in an hour.'

'What part exactly of "I have a surprise for you" did you not understand?' Bea smiled and booped her on the nose.

'I'm sorry, I haven't forgotten, it's just… There's so much to do. I promise I won't stay longer than an hour.'

Bea bent over her shoulder to reach her laptop.

'Two words for ya', she said calmly but clearly into her ear, 'Alt, F4'.

And then she did just that, force closing the running programs and shutting the laptop lid.

Allie half-turned in her chair to throw a shocked look at the redhead.

'Please, do remember this the next time it even occurs to you to bring work home', she was grumping as she was slowly standing up.
But the redhead's smile only grew wider. She wound her arms around the blonde and started kissing down her neck.

'What were you working on?' she rasped out one hot minute later.

Her breathing irregular, her eyes half-rolled back, Allie sputtered incoherently, 'I don't, I don't k-know'.

'Exactly!' Bea laughed and headed for the door. Turning around, she reached her hand out for Allie to take it, and even though she shook her head, Allie couldn't help it but burst out laughing too and put her hand into Bea's.

'I'll trip', Allie protested as Bea covered her eyes with her hands and guided her up her driveway towards the former garage.

'It's only a couple of steps. And there's nothing to trip on… Here we go. You may open your eyes now', Bea said excitedly.

Allie looked up, but instead of garage door her eyes were expecting, she saw a facade much like the one at the main entrance to the house, a window and the door a smaller replica of those up front. When Bea unlocked the door and turned on indoor entryway light, she entered a totally unfamiliar room, jaw dropping in surprise. She stepped in and looked around in shock. She has expected to see an upgrade to the garage, not a total transformation. The whole place was one giant open space lounge with two small niches hidden behind sliding, frosted glass doors.

Funnily enough, Allie's first thought went to the thing which was missing.

'Where's your bike?' she asked worriedly.

'In the other garage. I'll show it to you after dinner.' Bea appraised her face, 'So… What do you think?'

'You've outdone yourself, Bea. But I still cannot wrap my head around how, when and ... Why?'

Bea draped her arms around Allie's waist and pulled her into her front. She placed her cheek on Allie's shoulder blade and crooned dreamily,

'I needed something to occupy me while you were away; I couldn't hold Bridget hostage 24/7, now couldn't I? And I wanted a clean slate', she sighed, 'you deserve so much better than my old cave. I didn't want you to have a constant reminder around you of my…', she stuttered in sudden embarrassment, '... of my past … shenanigans.'

Allie turned around in her embrace and lifted her chin. 'Hey, it's in the past, and you've done nothing wrong.'

'I know. I just wanted you to feel comfortable here. And what's more, I wanted to do something ceremonially, celebratory, to mark a new beginning! A new chapter in life!' she smiled excitedly again, dazzling Allie.

'Even if it costs a fortune?!' Allie couldn't quite overcome her disconcertedness, but looking at Bea's smiling lips she cared less and less.

'Don't you worry about that', Bea murmured before she leant in and placed a lingering kiss, and not
solely for the purpose of shutting Allie up. Soon she felt Allie going limp in her embrace and when she parted their lips, Allie remained calm and seemed to have accepted Bea's unilateral decisions. She held onto the redhead for quite a few minutes until she finally raised her dreamy head.

'Show me then', she said simply.

Bea turned on all the lights and they walked deeper in.

The first thing Allie noticed was that there were only four nuances: solid darker shade of gum tree flooring against the wall colour of a pink so pale that it almost seemed transparent. The sliding glass doors were the same colour as the walls. All furniture had the basswood nuance of natural wood, but all decorations were deep pink, as well as curtains.

'This pink as a motif', Allie asked turning to Bea, 'it's to remind us of the night we spent here together?'

*When you told me that you loved me*, Bea thought to herself, but wouldn't say it, because she wasn't ready to speak about love. Instead, she only nodded and took ahold of Allie's hand.

The centre of the room was a lounge area with a massive pull-out sofa and a 65 inch TV mounted on the wall facing it. Throw cushions were deep pink, as well as short cube footstools, positioned around the coffee table. On the right side of the sofa stood a tufted fabric double chaise.

'For Fridget', Bea shrugged her shoulders like it was understood.

Allie moved to the left side of the sofa, to feel the soft velvet of a full body massage recliner. She was astounded to see a pink headrest chair protector with embroidered word 'Boomer'. She threw herself around Bea's neck,

'You're amazing! Absolutely crazy, but amazing! Boomer's gunna love this! You know she's never had a normal family? Her sister treats her so poorly, no matter how hard Booms tries. And her mother always sides with her sister. Her spot here will make her feel like she finally belongs somewhere. Thank you!'

She kissed Bea ever so ardently.

'Well, Boomer will always belong to our circle. I love her as much as Franky does, even though I smother her far less', Bea smirked. 'You know what else Boomer will like?'

She dragged Allie across the room where in the upper left corner stood a long dining table with elegant fanback Windsor chairs around it.

'Booze, of course', Allie huffed, motioning to a well-stocked bar built-in in the corner behind the table, with a basswood coloured counter and two pink Zig-Zag bar chairs.

'Of course', Bea smirked, 'but that's not what I had in mind.' She slid the dining hardwood table top to reveal a deep pink felt and six pocket inserts beneath it. It was all-in-one pool dining table. 'And I bought a rectangular poker table cloth so we can use the table for our poker nights too. I intended this space to be a sort of entertainment room for all of our friends.'

'I see', Allie shook her head, 'a regular grown-up Disneyland'.

'You haven't seen anything yet', in her excitement Bea failed to notice a slightly worried look in Allie's eyes. She slid the glass door next to the entrance, making the hidden niche part of the open-spaced main room. Allie walked over to discover an indoor tennis table with play-back function, a
pinball machine and a retro sixty-games arcade machine.

'That's it, once they come in, they will never leave', Allie tried to make a joke, but she couldn't shake off the unsettling feeling. Her purse is none of my business, she said to herself and bit her tongue.

'Okay, we're done with the bit for Franky and Boomer. Come on, let's show you what I've installed for you!'

'Oh, and here I thought the bed was for me', Allie winked.

'That', Bea blushed, 'but also - this!' she opened the other sliding glass door in the deep right end of the room and pulled Allie inside.

It appeared to be a 16m² study room, with a double desk, two comfortable revolving chairs and two laptop risers, but Allie barely grasped its purpose, because she was busy gawking at artistically designed planters, mounted on two of three walls. They were made of a deep pink glass and each contained two orchid plants so that the room was filled with two dozen flowers.

Following Allie's eyes, Bea explained with a poorly concealed passion in her voice,

'These white, reddish and beige are called moth orchids, and these orange here are dendrobium. The yellow ones are so-called boat orchids, over here is cattleya, then green catasetum, and these purple, pink and blue are my absolute favourite - laelíá', she presented with hand gestures that revealed a childish excitement.

After months and months of watching Bea both silently and loudly hurting, Allie couldn't take in keenly enough the delightful sight unravelling before her. This woman had so much light in her, she just did a good job of hiding it.

'I've always wanted to grow orchids', Bea went on, 'but the rooms inside the house are not suitable, facing either east or west. When this one was finished, it occurred to me that it has just the right amount of light - you see I've built in two windows so that your study can be bright - but at the same time the windows are facing north so the room has the right climate for orchids. And, most importantly, that will give you something beautiful to look at while you work.'

'I see two desk spaces', Allie smirked, 'so I will definitely have something beautiful to look at'. She couldn't resist any longer to place kisses on Bea's adorably blushing face. 'But thank you', she murmured before she captured Bea's lips. 'Wait, you're not expecting me to water them, are you?!' she exclaimed, parting their lips after sudden realisation struck her.

'No', Bea giggled, 'that will be on me. But if they happen to grow on you', she pulled her closer by her waist, 'you're welcome to help out'.

She placed a quick peck on Allie's lips before she turned to the glass wall separating the study from the lounge. The sliding entrance was partially blocked by an object covered with a white sheet.

'Now, before you say I went over the top, consider that I did this more for me than for you', Bea said before she pulled down the sheet to uncover an upright, lavender-coloured piano.

'You did go over the top!' Allie shifted uncomfortably on her feet, knowing that, even though it was only an entry-level instrument, it couldn't have cost less than six grand.

But Bea was having none of it. She certainly didn't want to justify herself how she spends her money.
'As I said', she threw over her shoulder while walking over to the desk and leaning on it, 'who I really bought it for is me. I think of it as a foreplay', she started to laugh, curling her index finger to summon Allie.

Allie rolled her eyes and even though she was simmering inside, she couldn't resist to approach the redhead.

'You'll warm up to me again when you see the thing I got for you only', Bea smiled confidently, draping her arms around Allie's waist.

'God! There's more?' Allie whined.

'Just this one last thing', Bea retorted, opening the door on what Allie thought was an office closet cornered between the desk and a tree bookshelf that spread across the wall, its branches beautifully combined with orchid planters. 'Your wardrobe.'

She opened the top drawer, revealing an angel-shaped keychain with two keys. Bea shrugged her shoulders,

'See? You can't get mad at me, because you're an angel.'

Allie swatted her arm, 'Now that's plain cheesy. And premeditated! Don't you think that I don't see through that!' she laughed against Bea's lips.

'This one is the garden gate key and this one is to this… Well, we can't call it "garage" any longer; now it's a regular granny flat. Minus the kitchen that is. So what do you say? Would you take these keys and maybe leave some of your things behind when you sleep over?' as Bea continued to ramble, her expression changed from joyful to nervous.

Seeing her like that, Allie got serious and stroked down her cheek with her finger,

'Why are you getting flustered? There's absolutely no need. Like I would have ever said no to you', she pecked Bea's lips and took the keys from her. 'Honestly, you didn't have to do all this remodeling. I would've been happy with keys to a hay barn, if that included sleeping next to you.'

'Don't you think I know that?' Bea said in a low, hoarse voice, letting their foreheads touch. 'That's why you deserve everything, more than this… but I'm still working with Bridget on the more part', she sighed. 'So please, please, let me have this; I know I went over the top, I know I often do, but it was a pleasure doing something for you, it was redemption if you'd like to call it that. Can you not reproach anything and just enjoy it the way that I do?'

Allie was deeply touched. She pulled the redhead into a tight hug and murmured,

'It's all very beautiful, Bea. In every little thing that you did I can see how much you care about me, how much you care about our friends. It means to me more than I can say.'

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After taking a better part of an hour to recover from the heavy meal Bea had served her, Allie finally agreed to get up and check out the garage.

'This is your parking space here, next to my Jeep', Bea chirped out, 'add this remote opener to your keyring'.
Allie took it, marvelling at how much her situation in this house and with its owner has changed in a matter of only a couple of months.

'I set up my workshop in the back', Bea led her down the path between the two car spaces.

And there it was, polished and shining like a diamond, Bea's new bike. It was deep red and looked unusually girly - well, maybe it was masculine enough for a common Joe, but certainly not for Bea. Allie watched on that racing circuit. The vexing feeling gripped her again, this time for entirely different reasons.

'Don't give me a hard time about this too', Bea clasped her hands at her chest, 'I sold the Night Rod for almost as much as I originally bought it. And I had to sell it, it kept bringing back bad memories'.

*Like Juice swinging you over that bike. Like my crew betraying me. Like your blue eyes going wide when catching me with Tina.*

Bea shook off the sadness that tried to take over her.

'Why not another Night Rod? A newer model?' Allie asked moving closer.

Bea looked up, 'Night Rod is a racing bike.'

'So?'

'I'm not a racer anymore, Allie.'

'Bea, I don't want you to settle. You don't have to adjust to my lifestyle. I won't allow you to give up what you love.'

Bea's fingertips skimmed down the shiny body of the new motorcycle.

'Look at this beauty, Allie. This is Electra Glide 2016, the latest Harley Ultra Classic model. She has six gears and V2, four-stroke engine. Surely, she has not as much power as a racing bike, but it's still impressive enough. No one settles for her. And she has many advantages that suit my current needs better than the Night Rod. I'm not going against my wishes, my priorities have changed, simple as that.'

'How so?' Allie bit her lip, her still disbelieving eyes darted at Bea.

'For starters, I don't need racing anymore to help me chase away my demons. Now that I'm working through my issues with Bridget I don't want to flee and shut myself down. I'm learning how to stand my ground. By the way, I stopped going to Saturday running races too - that was basically the same escape strategy as "Burnt Angels", just more smiley and a lot less leathery. I still love bikes, of course, but y'know, before the shit parade on my life, I didn't need races to enjoy them. My mother, father and I used to spend our Sunday afternoons just slowly cruising around the city on our bikes and those are some of my fondest memories. I want to have that again. First time you sat behind me on that bike I felt a piece of my soul falling back into its place. When you wrap your arms around me, that feeling... it's incomparable. It's pure happiness. And I know you feel it too. So how can you say that I settle? For this new bike, for you?!

As if Bea's fiery look wanted to pierce through her, Allie shut her eyes for a second, to stop them from watering. In a second she was standing next to Bea, pulling her down to sit on the bike and holding her in her arms until she calmed down.

'Tell me more about this model', she asked after a while. 'Why exactly her and not some other?'
Bea started to smile again, her face as bright as a meadow after the storm has passed.

'The red colour was an obvious choice, looking good on both of us', she laughed, 'but the rest was also no brainer. On the old bike you didn't even have a proper passenger seat, and here you have one so large and comfy you could sit in it all day and not tire. Look, you have a backrest too. There's a windscreen to shield us from wind and dirt. There's GPS and electronic cruise control. It's a touring bike, with two glove compartments and two saddle bags and one big storage box behind your back. It has six gallons' fuel tank! We can go on weekend road trips, excursions, hell, we can pack a blanket and food in these vast storage compartments and have a picnic wherever we like!'

'Seems like you planned a lot ahead', Allie smirked. 'I dig that. So, why don't you give me a little preview tonight?'

'I was hoping you would say that!' Bea beamed, jumping off the bike and opening her metal wardrobe. Next to her black biker outfits hung one Allie hasn't seen before. It was red and had a matching red helmet and gloves. Without a word of protest, Allie changed into the soft faux leather. She didn't need a mirror to conclude how good she looked - the glimmer in Bea's eyes told her everything she needed to know.

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An hour of lazy cruising later, Bea parked the bike at Burke's Lookout. They sat on a rock, enjoying the night view of the whole city stretched out before them.

'I must admit, it was a much smoother ride', Allie gushed, 'it's a grand bike'.

Bea smiled like a Cheshire cat. She moved to sit behind Allie and draped her arms around her torso. 'As soon as I saw her, I knew she would be perfect for us.'

She relaxed her chin on Allie's shoulder and stroked down her plump cheek. For a quarter of an hour she gazed at Allie's delectable profile, while Allie unsuspectedly continued to admire the faraway city lights.

'Allie', she finally found the courage to speak of what's been on her mind ever since Allie got back from her vacation.

'Mhm?' Allie hummed lazily, stretching like a just woken cat in her arms.

'Would you do me the honour and go out tomorrow evening on a first official date with me?'

Allie turned around in her embrace and searched her pale face. She stopped herself from making a witty remark, for Bea's expression was for some reason way too serious. Call it official or not, they've had a plentiful of lovely lunch and dinner dates since they've met. The way Allie saw it, there was no need for ceremony now.

Nevertheless, she leant in and kissed Bea's nervous lips, then gratefully accepted the proposal.

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Even though it was past midnight and they were cosied up in their brand new bed, neither of them could sleep. They've spent the whole day together and were still not ready to say goodnight to each
other and drift off to different dreamlands.

'Maybe if we could dream the same dream, we wouldn't have to part', Allie fantasised snuggled into Bea's chest. She didn't have to look up to know that she was making Bea laugh with her silliness and she indeed soon felt Bea's breasts slightly trembling with mirth she unsuccessfully tried to suppress.

She started kissing along the hem of Bea's vest until Bea's muffled giggles turned into moans. She pulled Allie up to find her lips and as she kissed her, she let her hands wander more and more freely.

Feeling Bea's hands tuck on her undies, Allie pulled back.

'No, no, I don't want sex tonight.'

She saw Bea respectfully withdraw her hands right away, but her face was pretty baffled.

Allie cupped her cheek.

'Bea, our sexual intimacy is an ineffable experience, and even now that I'm refraining from it, I still crave it like crazy. But, if this makes any sense, there is a thing that I've been craving even more, and I want to enjoy it tonight, without sex getting in the way.'

'What is it?' Bea asked curiously, in a warm voice.

Allie shifted above her to cradle her head.

'This. Us. Just being together. For so many months all the intimacy I had with you was coming down to one simple act until I orgasmed - not that I'm complaining', she winked, relaxing a slightly terrified Bea with that single friendly expression, 'and afterwards you'd take off and leave me daydreaming about your kisses, your embrace, you by my side keeping me company. No, don't apologise', she pressed her fingers on Bea's mouth to stop what was a beginning of a guilt-tripped outburst, 'for the hundredth time, you've done nothing wrong. I admire the strength it took you to come this far. But look at us now! I've got in my arms everything that I've prayed for, and I could care less about orgasming tonight, I just want to look at you and hold you and kiss you until my lips go numb. So what do you say? Can we spend a few hours making out like a couple of crazed teenagers?'

Bea tried to answer, but she found her voice to be stuck in her throat. So, instead, she only nodded and smiled, before she offered her lips for Allie to take them.

It was the single most gentle kiss of Bea's life. It seemed to have no ending. The beginning soon looked blurred too - the sense of time started crumbling around them as they closed their eyes and slipped further and further into the darkness under their closed eyelids.

When they parted for breathing, Bea opened her eyes only to be met with Allie's radiant face. Bea felt like she has lit a light in Allie, for her eyes were glistening and her skin was glowing.

Slowly, piously she touched her cheek. 'Sweet girl', she murmured, before she pulled her down on top of herself, nearer, closer, like she wanted to suck her inside. She felt a burning need to melt them together, any atom of space between them was an offending and unwanted element. Their tops were bunched up under their breasts from all the pulling, and as they ardently kissed, Bea could feel the skin on their bellies gluing together. She moaned as Allie felt up her breasts over her vest and pressed their mounds together.

Allie paused, looking up to marvel at her reaction. Bea was lying under her like there was no other place in the world she'd rather be. She didn't look shy, she didn't look scared. All Allie could see was sense of belonging rushing upwards to engulf her. She propped up her head, resting on her elbow.
She brushed the short hairs of Bea's undercut and smiled down lovingly at her. She could swear she could see Bea starting to shine, as she conveyed with her strokes all that her lips still mustn't betray. Her fingertips wandered down Bea's face, streaming a tenderness so powerful that it left no place for doubt or uncertainties. Her lips brushed lightly over Bea's until Bea's sensitive labial skin started to prickle. She licked her lips to soothe them, evoking a mischievous grin from Allie, who knew very well what she was doing to her.

'Come 'ere, you tease', Bea lifted her upper body to capture Allie's provoking lips. She kissed her hard trying to erase the all-knowing smirk off her pretty face but gloriously failing. For the more Allie smiled, the more beautiful she was. Some of that beauty must have reflected onto Bea, cause Allie pushed her back down onto pillows and stated while palming her face,

'You are the most dazzling, most bewitching creature on Earth, do you know that?'

'Why don't you show me?' Bea said bravely, provoking back. Sex being off the table for tonight really took a pressure off Bea and, as Allie's lips travelled down her neck, she could really feel herself relaxing and just succumbing to all the marvelous sensations they were evoking, free from any trepidation. She didn't have to shield herself this time, for she knew Allie was there to shelter her. She was attentive to her needs, but respectful to her inhibitions.

'Look at the curve of your neck', Allie drew a trail with her forefinger before her lips followed down the imaginary path. 'Look at the graciousness of your collarbones', she murmured leaving hot kisses across them. 'And the swell of your breasts - pure perfection.' She caressed across the heaving bust with her protruding lower lip until she felt Bea trembling under her. She then placed slow, heavy kisses to calm her, focusing on the spot where her heart was beating loudly against her breastbone.

'I want to kiss your heart too', Bea flipped them over fervorously, but halted for a moment once she caught sight of Allie, swooning over her. She bowed her head ever so slowly and kissed through her sleeping shirt.

The amount of her affection was overwhelming her. She lay down next to Allie, facing her. Allie entangled her fingers in Bea's curls.

'Look at you, all of you', she whispered with a voice so tender like it was coming from the depths of the Universe. Her hand glided to the base of Bea's neck, bringing their heads together so that their lips can meet again.

It took only a few seconds of the feel of Bea's tongue sliding down hers for Allie to become addicted. She wished this night could never end. All she wanted was to stay right there where she was, in those pink sheets, in that warm embrace. Bea's hands, drawing lazy patterns on her back, under her shirt, lulled her into a state of tranquility and it was before they stopped kissing that she fell asleep.

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'You're thinking about last night again', Allie smirked before she bit into her breakfast muffin.

'What? I'm not', Bea fumbled with her cutlery, feeling like she had two left hands. So what if she was thinking about their time together? It was nothing to feel embarrassed about, especially not in front of the person who she created those memories with. But Allie was teasing her on purpose, those blue eyes glistening mischievously while reading her thoughts like a book.
Allie took a sip of her milk and Bea couldn't help but stare as the tip of her tongue swept over her full lip. Allie caught her hungry expression, causing Bea to blush momentarily. The blonde burst out laughing while Bea pleaded under her breath for her to stop. She had an impression all diner could guess what went on between their sheets last night, and she didn't want to share.

Allie composed herself as Molly approached their booth to bring over their coffees.

The youngster smiled broadly, 'Here you go, ladies. And may I say, being together really agrees with the both of you'.

Bea smiled back, but warned her, 'We're keeping it a low profile at work for the time being. We don't want chastity police patrolling around our office. So be careful not to tell anyone'.

'No sweat, Bea. And it's not like Ms Hagurson is gunna come dine in our modest establishment. Anyhow, I just wanted to say you both look better than ever and I'm so happy for you guys.'

Molly turned to leave, but was pulled back by Bea.

'Come sit next to me for a bit', Bea tugged the girl down, and when she did, Bea's eyes flitted over her babyface.

'I wish I could return the compliment, Molly, but ever since we came back from the vacation I've been thinking how exhausted you look. Tell me, what's going on?'

'It's nothing, just a rough night's sleep, no worries', Molly gave a small, reassuring smile and tried to stand up.

But Bea wasn't letting go of her hand.

'Don't you bs me, missy! You seem to forget that I know you for three years too!'

Molly sighed and remained seated.

'I failed one of my graduation exams', she admitted ducking her head. They gave me a chance at supplementary exam, but I have only three weeks until that and it's quite voluminous. I waste ten hours daily on this job so I try to stay up learning as much as I can at night.'

'Why don't you go back to your parents', Allie suggested, 'quit here and have them helping you out for a few months'.

'They can't even help themselves', the twenty-year-old uttered in embarrassment. 'But I'll pull through. I just have to hold on for a few weeks. I need to go back now, thanks for caring', she stood up again, straightening her apron.

Bea squeezed Molly's hand before she let go, 'You haven't come this far just to fail now, I believe in you'.

This time the smile actually reached Molly's eyes. She's always had the cutest, most innocent crush on Bea, and when Bea reassured her, piercing through her with the confidence of her conviction, she couldn't help but believe her that she could actually make it, no matter how dire her situation was and how slim her chances.

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Twenty past five Bea dropped off Allie in front of her house. She'd come back later at half past seven to pick her up again. It seemed like plenty of time to prepare oneself for a date, but after she'd heard where Bea had made her reservations, Allie knew better and got jitters in her guts. She ran around the house like a headless fly, the toughest part being deciding what to wear.

All the commotion she was still feeling in form of butterflies in the pit of her stomach was well-concealed when she opened her door for Bea. She leant on her doorway in a confident manner, letting Bea's eyes rake all over her formal but sexy black dress. It was midi length, with a fishtail and generous front and back cleavage. She almost made a joke of Bea drooling over her, but looking at Bea with a bunch of roses in her hands, she knew it wasn't the time nor place.

Anyhow, that joke would have only backfired on her. When Allie took the flowers from her and they walked inside together to find a vase, Bea took off her grey coat, revealing her perfect form in grey trousers with a high-rise waistband and a burgundy halter top. Her curly hair was gathered in an elegant ponytail that was falling until between her shoulder blades, completely covering her neck strap, leaving the impression from behind that nothing was holding the shirt up.

She went to open the front door for Allie, but the blonde hindered her to do so, by grabbing around her waist and pulling her into her front.

'Wait', she muttered, 'I haven't thanked you for the flowers'.

She kissed up Bea's bare back until she reached the sweet spot on her neck and grinded her teeth against her carotid. The whimpering sound that escaped from the back of Bea's throat ignited a fire in Allie. She didn't care about the fancy restaurant.

'Let's stay in', she propositioned most seriously, her kisses hungrier and hungrier, her hands sliding down the length of Bea's curved sides.

But her straightforwardness seemed to have sobered Bea up. She broke the embrace and turned to face Allie.

'Not tonight. I want to do this properly.'

She kissed the blonde briefly then escorted her out.

Allie was flattered by all the attention, Bea was bending over backwards to open the doors for her, walk closest to the curb, help her out with her coat. Even though Bea has always displayed gentlemanly behaviour towards ladies, Allie couldn't escape the feeling that she was going over the top tonight, the same way she overdid the remodeling of the garage. She pondered upon whether this could be a part of the redemption attempt Bea spoke of last night. I have to talk to Bridget about it, she needs to help me assure Bea that she has absolutely nothing to atone for, Allie concluded, but looking at Bea she wouldn't reveal her worries for the world. Bea was trying really hard to make the night perfect and the least Allie could do was show her appreciation.

'How did you manage to get reservations?!' she wondered, while Bea was pulling the chair out for her.

They were seated next to a window in the prestigious 'Vue de Monde', the city view below them breathtaking.

'As soon as you were gone off to Falls Creek', Bea smirked while taking her seat across Allie, 'I called Ms Hagurson and asked her a favour'.

'Isn't that a bit risky?' Allie quirked her brow.
'It told her I was taking my niece out for her eighteenth birthday', Bea sang out, awfully pleased with herself.

'Melissa is already nineteen and a half!' 

'Well, she doesn't need to know that, doesn't she?'

'Besides, I wasn't aware you were that cosy with our boss', Allie blinked a little insecurely.

'I take lunch with her every few months. She's a very interesting woman, very worldly', Bea replied casually, sipping on her red wine. Then she noticed Allie looking away. 'Wait, don't tell me you're jealous of a seventy-one-year-old?'

'Maybe I wouldn't be if she was slightly less beautiful. Or slightly less interested in you', Allie mumbled under her breath thus making Bea laugh.

'You doofus', she said tenderly, leaning over the table to place a brief kiss on Allie's lips.

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Couple of hours later they were walking hand in hand down the Collins Street. They were in no hurry to return home. It was pretty warm for a winter night and central business district was full of leisurely strollers.

Eventually they found a spot to rest. Allie sat on a low wall, pulling Bea down into her lap.

They remained silently hugged for a while, Allie simply enjoying their closeness, while cogs were turning in Bea's head.

Their evening has finally come to the point Bea was waiting for the whole time and now all she needed to do was build up some courage.

It wasn't as easy as she'd been imagining. Her throat was dry and her palms sweaty. She didn't even want to think about what she'd do if she doesn't get the answer that she needs.

Bea took a deep breath and said looking right into those big blue eyes,

'Do you want to be my girlfriend, Allie?

Allie took Bea’s face into her hands.

‘Oh, silly, I have been your girlfriend for a long time now’, she laughed lightheartedly, thus effectively breaking the solemnity of Bea's intentions.

Bea’s eyes teared up.

‘I have been pretty slow in catching up, I’ll give you that. But I am not as dumb in this thing as you hold me for. Of course I know you are my girlfriend, but I wanted to ask you, officially, to be exclusive, because that is a right thing to do’, she wiped her eyes on the sleeve of her coat, ‘and ever since the beginning I haven’t been doing anything right by you, I…’, her voice broke off and she
couldn’t control her sobs any longer.

Allie took her in her arms, her fingers undoing Bea’s hairdo and entangling themselves deeply into red hair. ‘I guess I'm the one being dumb now,’ she smiled sheepishly. She lifted Bea’s chin to look into her chocolate eyes. 'I want to be your girlfriend, Bea, I want us to be exclusive, I want all of it with you.'

‘You do?’ Bea uttered through her tears.

‘I do’, Allie replied placing a kiss on her wet eye, ‘I do’, she repeated reassuringly while placing another kiss on her eyes, then another. She kissed down her slippery nose, her fingers burying themselves deeper into Bea’s curls, until she reached her lips. She pressed softly into them, then started caressing both of them with her full lower lip, until Bea’s mouth slightly parted and started moving against hers. Allie poured her whole heart into that gentle encounter and Bea gave herself back fully, holding nothing back. Bea deepened the kiss, entering her girlfriend’s mouth like she was entering a temple - she latched on that slick flesh like time didn’t matter, she sank, she flew.

‘Oh, Allie’, she whispered.

Blue eyes glimmered with sadness, ‘Sorry that I made you cry.’

‘Sorry that I asked you to be my girlfriend six months after you’d become my girlfriend’, Bea sniffled.

Allie caressed her hair, ‘You were worth the wait, baby.’

Bea raised her head again, ‘You never give up on me’.

‘Never.’

Bea shifted in Allie’s lap to straddle her, then placed peck after peck on her lips until they both started to smile. She pushed her tongue deep through parted teeth and Allie welcomed her readily. Bea’s tongue was warm, caressing deep into her soul.

‘My Bea’, she whispered into her ear, ‘I finally get to call you mine’.

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Bea was propping herself on her left forearm on Allie's bed, while her right was deeply buried into her girlfriend. In the weak lamplight Allie’s body was glistening with sweat and her eyes were sparkling with devotion. Bea wanted to see it all. She wanted to make love to her, but she wouldn’t want to lose sight of her either. She was way too beautiful to miss out even on a second. Whenever Bea kissed her, she kissed her with her eyes open, making Allie giggle. The silky nightwear Allie gave her was soaked in sweat, but she still didn't want to speed up her thrusts and bring the blonde over the edge. It was too early, it was too soon. She needed to watch her more, she needed to feel her body longer.

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‘Bea’, Allie started after Bea had already thought that she’d fallen asleep.
'Mhm', Bea hummed sleepily.

'Why did you say you had asked me to become your girlfriend six months after I'd become your girlfriend? It's only four months since we first slept together.'

Bea was suddenly quite awake. She untangled herself from Allie to be able to look at her.

'Because', her tone was as serious as Allie has ever heard it, 'when you think back, we were together ever since the moment we met. It's like after we locked eyes that first time, nothing and no one but us continued to exist. I just needed time to figure out that it irreversibly happened.'

Allie wasn't in the mood for her usual wittiness. She cradled Bea's face.

'Bea, I've always felt that too. From the second you walked into my life, I knew where I belong and I thought of us as a couple. You are my soulmate.'

Bea kissed her suddenly serious, suddenly shaking lips,

'You are my soulmate too, sweet girl.'

***

Of course they've overslept. It was half past eight when Allie pulled out a clean shirt for Bea and ran out of the house. She drove ahead to buy some to-go pastry in their diner while Bea followed suit in the shower. Even though the restaurant last evening had so many courses that she overate, the overnight activities burned out all of her energy and she didn't feel she would be able to work unless she swallowed down some food.

'I ran into Molly on my way out', she said to Bea entering the office with a paper bag full of goodies, 'but funnily enough, she only came in today to return her uniform and keys and to receive her last paycheck. She told me that you, apparently, came back yesterday morning, and to quote "quit for her", handing her a check for ten thousand dollars'.

Bea looked like a deer caught in the headlights.

'Well, for what it's worth, I never meant for you to find out. You were in that meeting with the guy from Department of Education and Training who wanted to negotiate a price for an early booking of hundred rooms for the teachers' convention in April'.

'I didn't think we were keeping secrets, Bea.'

'We aren't. It was stupid of me to slip out like that, but what was I supposed to do, Allie? She was so tired she could barely keep her eyes open, let alone learn something when she gets home. She would have never made it. I'm watching the kid work herself into the ground for three years now and to allow her to fail when she's so close to her goal? No way.'

Allie sighed and brought her chair over, sitting down and taking ahold of Bea's hands.

'Bea', she started, 'you are a wonderful, overly generous person. I don't want to pry into your finances, but you've certainly spent half of your yearly wages on the garage and bike alone. Now this too. Honestly, you worry me. I admire your kind heart, but it's not right if your kind nature brings you to cripple your life savings or bury you into a huge loan.' She kissed both of her hands and squeezed them onto her breasts. 'What you've done for Molly is very noble, but I want to take that
cost on me. I'll write you a check back and the girl will still make it through her finals. And the piano, ping-pong table and arcade machines - it's not too late to return them to the store. We can keep Boomer's chair, but what do we need that king size TV for?"

She kissed Bea's lips and pleadingly batted her eyelashes.

'You sweet, silly girl', Bea said returning the kiss. 'Do you think me that irresponsible to fall into debt? You want to talk money? So let's talk money then so you can see there's nothing for you to worry about.'

She took out the pastry, handing Allie a paper plate with a croissant.

'I come from money. Both my grandparents were moderately wealthy, and my parents' business was worth millions. When they died in the accident, the worth of the bikes on display for sales was alone over five millions. I sold the bikes, the salons and the office space together for fourteen millions. Add to that my parents' savings and insurance premium, as well as the profits from selling both of my grandparents' houses, I've been sitting on the sum of over twenty five million for a decade now, without ever spending a dime. Really, I never needed it, I could very well earn for myself. The only time I spent something was when I bought and furnished my house with the money that came from selling my parents' house and now on this. So I'm more than good and certainly not irresponsible.'

She paused for air taking in the confusion on Allie's face.

'But you were so sweet when you offered to help', she kissed Allie's lips, 'I will never forget it'.

'I don't understand', Allie was still taken by surprise, 'you used to work as a hairdresser to pay your way through college?'

'I didn't want to be a spoiled rich kid', Bea shrugged her shoulders, 'I wanted to pull my weight like all of my friends did'.

Allie felt the worries and guilt she carried on her shoulders for days now lift off her and disappear. Bea wasn't in any trouble and she didn't spend on her commodity more than she could afford. She could finally accept her gifts and make peace with the price they cost.

She took a big bite off her croissant. Now that her stomach had stopped twitching, she was hungry again.

'Good thing we got together before I found out about your inheritance', she joked with her mouth full. 'So you can't suspect me of being a gold-digger.'

***

'So, Bea', Bridget crossed her legs and shifted in her armchair to assume a more comfortable position, 'this is our first meeting since the return of your special someone. Tell me, how did the reunion go?'

Franky was home so they held a session in Bridget's study. Oddly, Bea did not feel uncomfortable, like she usually did in therapists' offices.

'Magnificent', she grinned. 'Honestly, Bridge, I'm so taken with her, it's sickening to watch.'

'Does it still scare you?' asked Bridget.
Bea searched herself for a while.

'Now I only fear my lack of fear.'

***

Friday after work Bea and Allie went from work straight to a superstore, and made sure they bought enough snacks and drinks for their friends coming to greet Allie after three weeks of not seeing each other and check out the new entertainment room Bea built for the gang.

Bea had asked Allie for Todd's number, reckoning since the party was in her house, it was only polite that she makes the invitation herself. But Allie didn't want to put Todd in the awkward position of having to conceal their relationship from their boss Elaine so she stated it would be for the best if they didn't include him at all.

'Tom will be bummed all night', Bea expressed her concern. 'He'll be the only man in the room, and he barely knows these women. Do you want me to invite Paul? They get along splendidly and I don't want you to think you can't be friends with your ex on account of me.'

Allie looked at her, clearly surprised.

'You are, indeed, overly kind and overly generous. But I don't think it would be a good idea to invite Paul. It would be awkward for him, it would be awkward for us. As good of a friend as he is, I just have to accept that I can't keep hanging out with him like nothing ever happened between us. And Tom will be fine. So what if he doesn't know the gang? He'll have a perfect opportunity to get to know them. It's about time anyway, he's getting more serious with Regan with each passing day. By the way, thank you for taking Regan shopping with you. She has really warmed up to you since then.'

'Anything to make you happy', Bea stole another kiss between the aisles.

The party was a total success. Everyone was in a great mood, especially Boomer, who was incredibly moved by the recliner with her name on it. When Franky tried to push her out, to have her turn on the massage session, Boomer shoved her off like a toy, stating that that is, in fact, her chair.

Allie burst out laughing, 'You do realise, Booms, that I'm extensively using this chair whenever you're not around?'

'You're free to use it, mate', Boomer cleverly retorted, 'as long as you're using it alone. I don't care if it's your girlfriend's house, I won't allow any hanky-panky business in my chair'.

The whole room burst out laughing, that is all but Boomer herself. She wanted to appear deadly serious, and thus she was making all laugh even harder.

'Oh Booms', Franky held onto her belly, fighting for breath, 'I believe these goodies-two-shoes here will honour your request, but the first time they are out of town, Gidge and I here will defile your chair.'

'You wouldn't dare', Boomer jumped up, trying to catch the unashamed brunette.

As Allie predicted, Tom didn't have a dull moment. He spent the better part of the evening trying to
outplay Franky and Boomer in every single game the entertainment room had to offer. Regan on the other hand got along with Bridget and Bea like peas and carrots.

Allie was very pleased to see how the gathering unfolded. But her fondest memory of the evening wasn't one she remembered herself. It was what Boomer told her days later, when she dropped by her place for a quick visit.

It happened after they'd all decided to finally sit down and watch a movie on Bea's new TV. It was a suspenseful horror story and everyone was watching with their eyes wide open. Everyone but Allie and Bea, that is. Not rested enough after their night-after-night activities, they dozed off as soon as the lights were dimmed and they'd curled up together on one end of the sofa. Boomer was closest to them in her chair so when, around the end of the movie, Allie wiggled her foot her way, Boomer leant in to tickle her. But before she could lay a hand on her, Bea startled from her sleep. Still semi-conscious, she snarled at Boomer, possessively pulling Allie closer between her legs and falling asleep again.
warning: With this and the next few chapters I might give you diabetes. Or diarrhoea. Depending on your personality.

Chapter Notes

I finally had my surgery yesterday. It went well but I felt poorly for 24h. I feel much better now, although everything hurts. I think they broke my shoulder and spine to fix my uterus 😇 I wrote this chapter the day before surgery, in my hospital bed. I didn't have time to proofread it before they rolled me into OR and now I really can't. So please be my proofreaders: tell me where I made a mess and I'll correct it. Or just keep me company in my hospital bed with your comments.

Good news: Chapter 33 I have written app. seven months ago so I will be able to update next week when I proofread it and see whether I should add something.

Bad news: Until mid September the updates will be scarce, as previously announced.

Saturday started out slowly for the newly-declared couple. They truly took their time to sleep off the party: Bea slept even longer than Allie, for Allie was awake certainly for half an hour before she got bored and blew air in Bea's face. It was only a waft so Bea scrunched her nose a bit, but did not wake up. Allie repeated the deed, causing Bea to rub her face and murmur. She laughed at her and drew air into her lungs then she unleashed it all onto Bea, who jumped into the sitting position, her mind still not catching up with her body.

'What the heck, Allie!' she protested, but the blonde was laughing even harder. Bea pinned her down to get back at her and the whole "punishment" business lasted for another hour, so it was past midday when they actually got up.

They cleaned the little mess that was left after the party and then, as Allie was taking out the trash, Bea brought lunch from her kitchen. Afterwards, they went for a long walk on the beach and, enjoying pleasant twelve degrees, only returned home when the sun began to settle. One short hour of cuddling later, it was already six o'clock and time for Bea's session with Bridget. Bea left Allie to catch up with the book on her Kindle she hadn't opened for a month and sauntered off to Fridget house, in a splendid mood. So, fifteen minutes later, Allie was more than surprised when she got a phone call from Franky, stating that Bea needed her to come over.

Bea was practically grinning at Bridget as she took her seat in her office.

'I won't ask you how you've been', Bridget grinned back, 'for you wear it on your face. And I saw it last night too'.

'We had a great day, Bridge, we were on the beach for hours and it just felt so right holding her hand
'I'm happy for you, Bea', Bridget cut her off, 'and while I know your favourite topic is Allie, it's time for us to return to processing your past. It made sense that we focused on Allie's return and prepared you to open up to her, but now that you've managed that so very well, we will leave it be for a while and address difficult issues again'.

Bea's expression changed into a more sombre one, 'What do you want to talk about exactly?'

'I want you to retell me those three months again. And any new thoughts and feelings you might be having on the subject. I know it seems like a torture to you, but the more times you tell me about it, the more you will be able to accept things which happened, and leave it in the past. Also, it will fall easier on you once you decide to tell Allie and maybe other significant people in your life.'

Bea nodded in acknowledgement of Bridget's logic, but her eyes seemed very wide and full of terror.

'Can Allie be here?' she finally blurted out. 'I mean, not in the room, but, dunno, maybe in the lounge with Franky? I'd feel better if I knew she was close.'

'Of course', Bridget blinked sympathetically, 'I'll tell Franky to fetch her'.

Bea met Allie outside. She felt guilty as soon as she saw Allie's freaked-out face.

'I'm okay, I'm okay', she hurried to reassure her, as she felt Allie's arms wrapping themselves around her. 'It's just that Bridget wants to talk about the difficult stuff again, and I'd feel so much braver if I knew you were within reach if anything goes wrong.'

'I'm glad you called me', Allie tightened her embrace. She couldn't block out sudden flashbacks of Bea lying broken on Bridget's sofa, lost to the world. She couldn't hold her back then, but she certainly can comfort her now.

'Just remember that you are survivor, whatever happened, you are the fuckin' winner, cause you got out of it and came this far', she whispered into Bea's ear. 'I won't let anyone hurt you ever again, and I'll be here for you, tonight and always'.

Bea jerked her head, triggered by the word 'always'. She searched Allie's face to make sure Allie means it, and when she was met with nothing but honesty, she exhaled and relaxed in Allie's embrace. She pulled Allie's head down by her neck and kissed her passionately and gratefully. With every stroke of their tongues against each other, she felt more and more grounded and more and more herself. She felt armoured.

'I'm ready', she said after she broke off the kiss. 'Let's go in.'

Allie was sitting with Franky in the kitchen, one ear in the conversation, and the other listening for any sound that might come out of Bridget's office.

Franky covered her hand, 'Don't worry, Blondie, she's a tough cookie'.

'I wish she never had to be', Allie sighed, her eyes watering.

'Y'know what?' Franky got on her feet after a short consideration. 'Why don't you help me cook a
nice dinner for all of us? It will take your mind off what's happening in the next room and it will give our girls a refreshment when they get out. They will be not only mentally, but also physically exhausted.'

Allie smiled a bit and stood up. 'You're right. Nothing revives the heart faster than a warm meal.'

'Except a hot fuck', Franky winked and licked her upper lip, while Allie was pretending that she was grossed out.

When Bea came out of the office, her face looked very pale and tear-stained, but she wasn't as nearly a mess that Allie witnessed the last time via video call. She looked very composed, all things considered, and Allie felt proud of her again. She hurried to offer her her embrace and she kept kissing the crown of her head until she heard Bea murmur, 'I think I did good in there'.

'I know you did', Allie whispered back and cleaned her cheeks with her palms. 'Why don't you go freshen up a bit? Franky and I made dinner.'

'Good. I'm hungry', Bea smiled through her tears and headed for the bathroom.

'Bea', Allie's voice stopped her, 'may I have a word with Bridget about you?'

There was no need for Allie to fret, because Bea looked at her unconcernedly and said, 'Go ahead. I trust you both'.

While Bea was washing up, Allie explained Bridget how she felt regarding Bea overdoing the remodeling of the garage and their first date. She explained she felt as if Bea was doing more than she should for her, because she felt guilty about how their sex life started and about Allie having to bear with someone who has such an emotional burden.

'Can you explain to her she has nothing to feel guilty about? Can you tell her everything was my choice too? However I try to convince her, she's just so stubbornly not letting go of that fixation on imaginary transgressions towards me.'

Bridget thanked Allie for telling her, for even though she sensed somewhat of Bea's overzealousness, she didn't know it was getting out of hand. She promised Allie to address the issue in one of the next sessions so Allie calmed down a bit.

During dinner Bea seemed lost in her own head, even though she was chowing down her potato puree and pork cutlets like nobody's business. When Franky and Bridget took dirty dishes to the kitchen, Allie tried to animate her with an anecdote, but Bea's eyes stared through her absentmindedly. Allie stopped talking and took Bea's hand,

'Come back to me', she pleaded and squeezed Bea's hand until the redhead finally registered her. Her brown eyes seemed tired and timid, but at least she was there again.

'Take me home, Alliecat', Bea whispered.

The blonde said their goodbyes for them, while Bea only gave a silent hug to both of her friends.

Street light really suck in this alley, Allie thought as she was eyeballing the single lamp in the fair distance. As they approached Bea's part of the dead-end street, it got darker and darker and she
considerately let go of Bea's hand and put more space between them. So she was surprised to have Bea seeking her out again in the darkness and clinging to her arm.

Allie made bed while Bea was upstairs in her house changing for the night. She knew what would make Bea feel better so she sat at the piano to finally try it out. It produced a pretty clear sound for an entry-level instrument and she nodded in satisfaction and began playing Bea's favourite, the upbeat march from the 'Nutcracker'. She didn't hear Bea entering the room until the redhead brought over a footstool and sat down next to her. Bea leant her head on Allie's shoulder and watched her long fingers dancing over the keys. At long last, she began to smile, the memories of their evening evaporating from her head into nothingness. She closed her eyes and inhaled the unique scent of Allie.

Allie felt Bea starting to relax against her side so, when she finished the piece, she switched to a tranquil piano version of 'The Garland Waltz' from 'The Sleeping Beauty'. She heard Bea letting out a short, joyful chuckle and she knew Bea understood what she wanted to convey. When she played the final notes, she was, nevertheless, surprised when Bea straddled her lap and sang to her, shyly:

_I know you_

_I walked with you once upon a dream_

_I know you_

_That look in your eyes is so familiar a gleam_

Bea knew her singing voice was even raspier than her talking voice, but even though she was embarrassed a bit, she was confident Allie wouldn't mind that she sounded like sandpaper on glass. And by the brilliant smile that has just adorned Allie's lips, she knew she was right. Allie saw meaning and beauty past the roughness of her vocal expression. She saw the blueness of Allie's irises starting to sparkle out, as if her eyes smiled together with her lips. Bea could literally feel her heart melting.

Allie could clearly see green spots around Bea's pupils twinkle. The way she looked at her betrayed so much love the clueless redhead was unaware of, but Allie knew without a doubt. She will just wait out patiently until one day it dawns on Bea. The same slow but perfect way of the cogs turning in Bea's head that led Bea to sitting in her lap like this.

'I know that look in your eyes too', Allie beamed, running her thumb along Bea's lower lip.

Bea bent slightly forward and caught her lips in a short kiss. Yet it was ardent enough to promise Allie that was only a beginning, if Allie wanted to.

'Is there a singlet under that pyjama jacket?' Allie asked mischievously, and when Bea confirmed, she cracked another smile, 'Good. Then I can do this'.

Slowly, teasingly, she managed to unbutton Bea's top, the whole time keeping their eyes locked. She pressed another short kiss onto Bea's lips, as she slid the jacket down her shoulders. Bea was wearing a black night camisole, made of very thin silk. Allie's pupils dilated at the sight. She cupped the sides of Bea's breasts and tenderly ran her thumbs over Bea's nipples. Her eyes were asking if that was okay and Bea's were unafraid. So she pulled her closer still, so close that her lips were now touching Bea's neck effortlessly. She was slowly kissing up her throat, while her fingers still tirelessly kneaded soft breasts. When she took her earlobe in her mouth, Bea's jaw dropped open and
a whimpering sound escaped her throat. Like it was too much sensation, she backed a little and grabbed Allie's head to steady herself. She looked into her eyes as if she were asking, *Can you believe my reaction?*

'It was a good thing, honey', Allie said aloud, her voice endlessly tender. Her fingertips skimmed gently across Bea's nipples again, as another mean of persuading her that her words were true. She tentatively kissed along Bea's jaw until Bea cracked and pulled her in for a kiss.

The kiss started out passionately, but in mere moments turned into a loving, unhurried exchange of tongue caresses. All the while Allie was pulling Bea closer and closer, like she wanted to suck her inside her chest.

Bea pulled Allie's Dolman sleeve sweater over her head and unclasped her bra. She transferred from her lap to the footstool again and just sat beside her for a few moments, watching her. As her eyes raked over Allie's naked torso, she could feel her heart starting to beat wildly, like it wanted to escape her chest up her throat and through her gaped mouth. She now looked at Allie as if she wanted to ask, *Can you believe this can happen - to me?*

This time Allie just smiled and cupped her cheek. It was as if Bea heard, *Why not to you, the best of all people?* For it was obvious that Allie sincerely couldn't imagine anyone better than Bea.

Bea reached with her shaking hand and drew shy patterns across Allie's collarbones. She was so beautiful Bea's eyes hurt. Slowly, insecurely, she got on her feet and pulled Allie up with her. She hugged her and closed her eyes, just holding her for several eternal minutes. When she finally peeled herself off and managed to focus her glazed eyes, the first thing that came to sight were Allie's perky breasts. Was this the reason of her sudden weakness, or her shaky legs, but Bea had to sit on the footstool again. She drew Allie nearer by her waist and somehow succeeded to unzip her jeans with her trembling fingers. Her stomach was in knots, like Allie wasn't the same person she only this morning made love to so confidently. She looked up to her as if she wanted to ask, *Can you believe I'm this nervous?*

'I'm toey too', Allie replied understandingly, effectively soothing her. 'In a good way.' She removed her jeans and the rest of her clothes and stood before Bea in anticipation. Bea wrapped her arms around Allie's backside, bringing her closer. She kissed her navel and rested her cheek against Allie's stomach. Her hands palmed Allie's buttocks and caressed them as she inhaled the scent that was dispersing from her mound. It was truly intoxicating, calming her and bringing her back home. It didn't matter where she was before, the only thing that mattered was where she was now, and with whom. She felt strength filling her limbs.

She lifted Allie off the floor like she was a feather and carried her over to the bed.

'I am so lucky', she said as she gently lay on top of Allie and pressed their cores together.

'I'm the lucky one', Allie gently protested, but Bea was having none of it. She shushed her with firm kisses, then trailed off across her neck. When she started nibbling on Allie's breasts, she felt Allie's hands on her own again. It took her off guard so Allie used her confusion to flip them over. The camisole fabric between them was so thin that it seemed almost nonexistent. That was the sole purpose Bea wore it to bed. She was testing waters, testing herself for the real thing. But Allie's lips on the swell of her breasts were as real as it gets, she pressed the sides of Bea's breasts together so that more flesh would bulge out of camisole. Allie's kisses were wet, open-mouthed, and wherever her tongue came in contact with Bea's breasts, Bea could feel a trail of fire under her skin. Bea
started moaning rhythmically and let herself enjoying Allie's kisses, even though she felt she might combust. She felt Allie's lower lip dragging slowly up her neck while her palms pressed into her breasts more passionately and her body shifting up to align with Bea's. She bit Bea's lip, startling her in a good way, while her knee found its way to press against Bea's core. As Allie's tongue caressed deep into her mouth, Bea felt her bottoms getting wet against Allie's thigh she was now straddling. One part of her wanted to tear her clothes right there and then, but the bigger part was still afraid of total surrender, and also, of penetration. So she refrained from taking the next step. Bridget too thought she wasn't ready. But what Allie was doing to her now was amazing enough. She never felt so much build-up. She didn't know how to channel it, except grab on any part of Allie's body she could get her hands on. Allie's thigh was grinding against Bea's centre in synchronisation with the movements of her hands kneading on her breasts. When breathing became an issue, Allie's mouth trailed off Bea's and continued their journey across Bea's cheeks. When she reached her eyes, Bea opened them under the relentless hot kisses on her lids. It was then when she completely relaxed and let Allie guide her pleasure. Allie's kneecap was now rubbing against her clit, her mouth dropped open as her juices started to flow and her body shook. She didn't even notice when Allie's mouth lifted off her eyes and attached to her ear, it was all so quick, and then she felt Allie's tongue inside her pinna. She screamed in the same moment Allie pressed her kneecap harder into her clit and all the blood rushed over her head and all the water ran from under her and she came, looking at Allie as if she wanted to ask, *Can you believe what's just happened to me?*

But Allie couldn't believe it too. She has never made a woman come before, and it all happened so quickly, so unintentionally. So perfectly. Her eyes watered as she held a shaking Bea in her arms. She was a mess of happiness and excitement. She was hoping that the bliss she could see in Bea's face now was all that was to follow and that she won't be punished for being carried away in a moment by Bea freaking out and taking another step back.

But as Bea calmed down and looked at her more composedly, there were no signs of regret or panic. Still, only bliss and affection.

'Told ya I'm the lucky one', Bea tried to joke in a hoarse voice, but she was still too much under the impression, too aware of the fluid dripping down her thigh, too aware of Allie's hand caressing her ribs over the silk fabric. She propped herself on her elbows so that she can reach Allie's lips and that is when Allie stopped worrying and allowed herself to be happy about what they just did. What she did. A wonder. With a wonder woman. To her.

She kissed Bea's lips ever so fervently, a huge grin on her face when doing so. She felt a bit smug and Bea was pleased to see her so. So when Allie asked for permission to feel it, Bea let her.

It was the first time Allie's arm was between them. She touched Bea's wet pyjamas only lightly, but she could feel Bea tense up immediately. So she withdrew her hand and smelled her fingers. Her eyes went wide from the surprising new scent, and she couldn't refrain from grinning like Cheshire cat. Her amazed expression made Bea laugh too, her fleeting angst forgotten.

'You doofus', Bea said tenderly, pulling the blonde by her neck into another kiss. She raised her body then to hover over Allie and parted her legs. Allie's core was glistening enough so she skipped another foreplay and went straight for it.

It was one of her favourite sensations - when she felt Allie's thighs shaking around her ears. It was her favourite taste: better than ice cream, more needed than water. She came to the point where she couldn't remember how she ever lived without Allie. She had no idea how she would live if Allie ever was to pack up and go. Luckily for her, as she looked into Allie's sated eyes afterwards, all she could see in them was a promise that she wasn't going anywhere.
When Allie opened her eyes on Sunday, it wasn't fully daylight yet and Bea's night lamp was still on. But Bea wasn't there. For a moment Allie got scared that last night was, after all, too much too soon for her girlfriend, but then she saw her shadow through the frosted glass, moving around in the study. Still sleepy, she dragged herself out of bed and towards the person who had a magnetic effect on her. She found Bea standing on a step stool, watering her orchids. She was already fully dressed for their Sunday jogging exercise and Allie's jaw dropped at the sight of her in leggings. No matter how many times she saw her in her sporting gear already, she couldn't prevent the way her body always reacted to it. But the difference was that now, that she was officially her girlfriend, for the first time she could do something about it. So she snuck upon her, winding one arm around her waist and grabbing her shapely arse with her free hand.

Being officially a girlfriend proved to be a lot of fun in the jogging trail too. Allie's interest in exercise has officially peaked since this morning. Every now and then she would interrupt their run with timeouts for kisses, hugs and frisky arse squeezes, which, to her surprise, left Bea totally unfazed. She didn't seem to mind to show a little affection in public, and Allie was careful not to overstep so by the end of the trail both of their faces were radiating that satisfaction that comes from just having spent time in a perfect sync with another human.

They headed straight to the supermarket in Allie's block. They needed to buy the ingredients for the lunch they ought to start cooking promptly. Allie had invited her whole family to lunch and they were expected at three p.m. Bea wasn't as worried as when she was about to meet Allie's mum, but she wanted to make a good impression. She met Birdsworths only once and fleetly so she knew today will be crucial for the lasting opinion they will form about her and their relationship. At least, from the encouraging texts Allie has been receiving from her younger cousins, Bea knew they weren't opposing their romantic liaison.

They hadn't been cooking together in a month, but as they worked harmoniously around each other in Allie's kitchen, one would think not a day had passed. However the afternoon went, even if it would turn out to be the best family time in the history of the world, Bea knew this moment will still remain the highlight of her day. Nothing could outshine the time they were spending together, even when they were only doing simple chores like cooking. For the umpteenth time Bea pondered upon what a blessing Allie's sunny personality is. She was almost always in a good mood and she genuinely wanted to make everyone around her feel good too. And she was never boring. With her complexity, her intelligence, the way she challenged Bea with her witty remarks, she kept Bea's interest going and always left her wanting for more, for Allie.

Bea slipped into one of Allie's more elegant pantsuits that Allie was (almost) certain her family hadn't seen before. Not that they cared too much anyway. They thoroughly enjoyed their newfound habit of sharing clothes and weren't bothered if someone noticed. Except they still had to be careful at work.

Both being dressed for the occasion, the meal being cooked and the table in the dining room being all set, they still had an hour to spare before the guests arrive. They were lying across Allie's bed, just staring at each other.

'Tomorrow we won't see each other until dinner time', Bea stated sadly. Allie was co-hosting a radio show from seven to seven and had to run some quick errand afterwards. The idea was to promote Rock Island Resort to the listeners, but she couldn't speak about it the whole day, couldn't she? How was she going to animate listeners was beyond Bea's comprehension. She couldn't understand how
Allie wasn't stressing out of her mind, but whenever she brought up the subject Allie only laughed it off and claimed she would go with the flow and improvise.

'Come over as soon as you finish your therapy, don't make me miss you any longer than I absolutely need to', Allie commanded in a sweet voice and Bea blinked and nodded in a solemn promise.

She and Bridget made their appointments every few days, but without a fixed schedule, depending on Bridget's on-call duties in the mental hospital as well as their private plans. Their session tomorrow was scheduled from seven to half past eight and prior to that Bea was gunna hit the gym. Allie was not going to be home before eight anyway.

'It's gunna be a long day', Bea sighed and stroked down Allie's cheek. Allie shifted even closer to her and rubbed their noses together. They could see every little dot in each other's irises and the staring, somehow, even after many minutes have passed, never seemed to be losing its appeal. It was the simplest of pastimes, but when done with the right person, it contained the power to purify the souls and sanctify everything around them.

Bea reached around Allie so that she can unzip her dress to the small of her back. She started circling her thumb over Allie's loins and Allie started to smile. For Bea it felt like she was lying down with an angel on Earth.

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Birdsworths came willing to get to love the woman who, according to Kaz, was making their Allie happier than she's ever been. The little worry that plagued Bea disappeared as soon as they barged in and every single one of them four gave her a warm hug.

Allie's aunt Liz was a particularly maternal type. She was known for treating all under thirty as her kids, and Bea was no exception. Right off the bat she took Bea under her mama bird wing, and with that she threw any of the remaining tension out the window. No, Lizzy Birdsworth's heart simply wouldn't tolerate any unfamiliarity or formalism when it comes to her family and it's been several weeks since she's started considering Bea Smith family. She's learned all about the relationship when she, her husband and children enjoyed a prolonged weekend at Falls Creek, in order to spend some time with Kaz while she's on vacation. Not that she didn't have her suspicions before.

During lunch, Sophie demonstrated her usual mixture of taking interest and self-interest by asking fashion advice out of Bea, while uncle Oliver and Artie seemed rather impressed with Bea's knowledge of engines and motor vehicles. Allie was quieter than usual, she was watching it all unfold before her eyes with utter satisfaction, and simply letting them get to know each other.

'Allie, you reckon Paul will still be willing to sell me his old car?' Artie blabbed out at one point, not registering how pale his cousin suddenly turned. 'I'm getting my unsupervised licence in a month, as soon as I turn 18, and with my last paycheck I finally have the sum we agreed upon', he added excitedly.

'I'm sure Paul's dad wouldn't mind freeing some space in his garage', Allie uttered at last, too confused to look up and check Bea's reaction.

During Allie's birthday party Liz had noticed something was off with the red-haired woman Allie seemed to be holding in such high esteem. She could see the sadness she was trying to hide all evening, but she couldn't place it with anything in particular, until she now, for one fleeting moment, saw the same hurt look resting upon Allie's embarrassed face. Of course, it hit Liz, that evening Paul
was all over Allie in front of everyone, to the point of bad taste. It must have been difficult for Bea to
watch, and Paul, she's realised just now, must have been marking his territory. She reckons between
Allie and Bea it must have been love at first sight and Paul should have been a log not to feel it, poor
sod. She could still remember Bea fleeing the scene like a hurt deer and felt a slight anger with her
unthinking son.

'The other day I ran into Linda at the butcher's shop', she started to chat seemingly with herself, eyes
firmly fixed onto her plate. 'Bloody inconvenient now that we live in the same neighbourhood with
Paul's parents, but what can you do? I think she must have misunderstood my civil how-do-you-do
for nostalgia, for soon enough she started whining about Allie placing an odd call now and then, but
never actually coming around to visit.'

Allie darted her eyes quickly between her aunt and Bea, not liking the look of Bea and afraid what
her aunt might say next.

'Now I know the woman has her heart in the right place and that she's not plotting to bring those two
back together, and that was the only thing she had going for herself right then. So I told her, as
pleasantly as I could, "Linda, you too need to break up with Allie. I know you love our baby girl, but
you need to let her go. She's happy with her choice and if she needs anything, she has her mum and
me to turn to"."

'I don't have a problem with Allie keeping up the friendship with Paul's mum', Bea cut in a little
hastily. 'I wouldn't ever tell her what to do or who to see or not.'

'Of course you wouldn't, love', Liz's gaze gave all the attention to the second stake on her plate and
none to her present company. 'But, as much as you like a person, sometimes is the only considerate
thing to sever the ties and side with your own family.'

For the first time since she mentioned Linda and made the whole room uncomfortable, Liz looked
up, only to pierce through her son.

'We Birdsworths, Proctors, Novaks stick up for our family, through thick and thin. Family is more
important than almost any thing on Earth, and certainly more important than a car.'

'Yes, ma'am', the boy bowed his head ashamedly and Bea felt really bad about it.

'Now when the time comes for you to get your adult licence, I'm sure our Bea here would be happy
to show you dealerships where you can get a decent car for your money's worth. Isn't that right,
Bea?'

And just like that, Liz managed to pluck the grain of despair her boy inadvertently seeded out of
Bea's soul and not let it grow into a green-eyed monster between two new lovers. She made her
point clear that Bea was a part of the family now and that there was no love lost for the ex-fiancé.

Bea grinned from ear to ear, 'I would love to help you shop for your first car, Artie. Make sure you
don't get ripped off. And if you want to go for a spin on my bike, just ring me, alright?'

The kid's face lit up like the sun, forgetting all of his prior arrangement with Paul and his mother
putting him on the spot.

Allie, who's been feeling like several weights that had been pressing on her for a while have been
just lifted off her shoulders, started protesting in a mocking way, 'Hey, that's my seat on the bike
you're offering around'.

Artie swatted her arm, 'Relax, knucklehead, I'm just gunna borrow it for a spin, not take it home with
Allie laughed together with him. Her aunty has just made her realise she didn't owe Linda or Paul or anyone anything. She didn't have to feel bad about when she's gunna call or does she visit often enough. She owed her loyalty only to her current partner, simple as that.

As if he read her thoughts, her uncle finally threw his two cents in, 'Paul is a decent bloke. And now he has to suck it up and solder on, like any decent person should. He's not stupid, he knows he couldn't make you smile one tenth this one here does. So don't you worry about him. He'll find some girl to be happy with the way you are with yours. That's the way the cookie crumbles'.

'Speaking of cookies', Allie smiled a relieved smile after her uncle's words settled in her and made her feel hope for Paul, 'hope you all have room for dessert'.

By the time Allie was asked to open up her piano, Bea felt that much a part of the family that she dared to argue against it, stating Allie was tired enough already.

'C'mon, love', Liz cajoled, 'just four songs and that's it. Each one of us gets to choose one song, that won't wear her out.'

'Alright', Bea negotiated, 'four songs and that's it. She has to talk her tongue off for twelve hours straight tomorrow'.

And even though, neither this time when she had Bea in her corner to defend her, she didn't manage to escape singing, Allie couldn't be happier as she watched her whole family seated closely next to each other as a grateful audience. If only her mother could be there.

When the clock struck eight, uncle Oliver yawned and said, 'Alright, time to leave two lovebirds to their business'. And in three long steps he was already at the door, waving his wife and children over to hurry up.

'Dad!' Sophie protested quietly as she grabbed her coat. 'Don't make it sound like they're at it all the time. It's not polite.'

But instead of being shushed, her father retorted quite loudly, 'Well, they better be while they're young! Before I knew it, you two rugrats were hanging around my neck. Spoiled ya just a bit and twenty years later, ya still don't wanna move out!'

Allie was still at the gate seeing them out, when Bea finished putting dirty dishes into the dishwasher. She couldn't stop smiling. It felt good being adopted into a family and the only awkward part of the afternoon brought her liberation. She realised Allie and her needed to have as plain and simple conversation about Paul as aunt Liz made them have today. She made them look under the carpet they didn't know they had rolled out and wipe off the potentially poisonous dust under it. What's more, she gave Bea her place in their family.

As she pressed the start button, Bea felt a hand winding itself around her waist. She felt Allie's mouth sucking her earlobe in.

'Have I ever told you that I think my uncle is a strangely wise man?'
Monday, the fourth of July, was the day Bea hadn't pulled the earbuds out of her ears for twelve hours straight. She woke up just before seven, discovering that Allie has already left, but not before she had made her breakfast and left it at her bedside. She took a quick shower and hurried to find the radio station on her phone. The radio host was just introducing Allie when she tuned in. She kept listening while driving to work, she kept listening while working. And she can honestly say she never worked faster or with more enthusiasm. The day turned out not half as bad as she feared. Even though she couldn't see Allie, she could hear her all day, and it proved to be the case Allie was right not to worry. She was a natural, she went along with every topic in her usual chilled and witty manner, and at the stroke of each hour she gave a mini-presentation about the island resort. She sounded unbelievably sexy and funny, and Bea couldn't help but think Allie might just have found her back-up career if marketing, math or singing all don't pan out. The audience response to her was great as well, based on the number of people who kept tuning in live asking to speak to Allie. One guy even asked her out and Bea was mildly shocked to hear Allie clearly stating she was already taken. Like one part of her still couldn't catch up with Allie being hers for real. But the next moment blood rushed into her cheeks from the excitement Allie's words awoke and she let out a happy chuckle into the empty office.

She was on the treadmill when the time in the programme scheme came for Allie to write down the names of the callers who wanted an early booking for Rock Island Resort. Allie has written thirty names in a matter of an hour and Bea couldn't help but imagine how pleased Mr Johnson will certainly be. This day just might be one of the most important at the beginning of Allie's career.

She only took her earbuds out when she went for a quick shower and headed over to Bridget, but by that time Allie's show was almost over. She wondered briefly what errand Allie had to run this late, but she was to be home before Bea was finished with her session anyway so it didn't really matter what trifle it was.

Talking with Bridget about her past proved to be less difficult than the other night. Exactly like Bridget was predicting: with each time Bea talked about it she was more able to put things in perspective - while what happened scarred her, it didn't have to define her whole life.

Bea left Bridget's office with a feeling of a newly found confidence. She "wasted" no more than two minutes on Franky and hurried over to her car, bearing in mind that she promised Allie to come straight after therapy. But it wasn't really about the promise. It was just that she hadn't seen her girl the whole day and she couldn't wait to wrap herself around her.

When she approached her car, it was like a cold shower pouring on her hopes and plans. For two and a half months she's been meaning to call, to check upon her, to say thank you. But she kept postponing, distracted by a certain blonde, lost first in her own confusion, then in her happiness. And there she was now, leant on her car, a hurdle on her way of getting to Allie. But it was so wrong, so unjust to think of her as a hurdle, when she was the one Bea owed everything. She kept Allie safe, if she didn't fetch Bea and Bea arrived only a moment later… Ugh, Bea didn't even want to think about it.

'Mel', she greeted warmly when she approached the nervous figure. She appeared even smaller than usual and when she looked at Bea, she could barely hide the flash of hurt in her eyes. To her surprise Bea kissed her on the cheek and hugged her, briefly but sincerely. Mel froze. She understood in an instant that this transformed woman wasn't the Bea she knew. She may have seemed happier, more normal, but all Mel could hear through the pounding in her ears was that this wasn't her Bea anymore, that she has truly lost her.

'I w-wanted to tell y-you', Mel stammered, 'I just came to… some things have happened. Maybe you ought to know.'
And to see you, she whined inwardly, fully aware that was out of the window, she'll never see the Bea she knew again.

She opened her mouth to blab it all out, all at once, to let the horrible burden fall from her chest, but then Bea stopped her.

'Not here', she rasped out in a tone of voice so familiar Mel almost crumbled, 'allow me to treat you to dinner'.

While Mel was following her Jeep on her bike, Bea used the opportunity to call Allie and let her know what's happening. And even though she's been missing her all day and was a bit disappointed that she couldn't see her right away, Allie was understanding and supported Bea's decision to make a decent conversation out of Mel's unexpected appearance. She asked Bea to thank Mel on her behalf too.

Bea was really hungry by the time they were seated so she suggested they eat in peace and do small talk until dessert. Mel agreed, but appeared more silent than usual and somehow sad. When their red velvet trifles arrived, the gloomy brunette poured her heart out.

The day Bea left 'Burnt Angels' was the day she left them too, Mel stated.

'For a long while the only reason I remained in the gang I grew to like less and less was our little circle of four, especially you, Bea. But that day you severed ties with us and Tina showed a side of her I didn't know she possessed. An ugly side. She repulsed me. We fought that evening about her setting Allie up and then I just walked away. I tried to persuade Kim to side with me, but you know her', Mel shrugged, 'she's addicted to Tina. She does everything as Tina says'.

Mel took few teaspoons of her dessert, all the while staring at Bea.

'They're together now', she continued as if it didn't concern her that her former lovers all shut her out, one way or another. 'I ran into Kim the other day, after more than two months of no news about the old crew whatsoever. We grabbed a coffee together. She wears a rock the size of a quail egg... tasteless... typical Tina, must exaggerate everything. Apparently their parents are already best mates. I wanted nothing to do with Doreen and Nash either after they backed up Juice that day. Kim says they've moved to Perth now. Apparently Nash found a better job there.' She abruptly changed the subject, or so it seemed at least, 'I reckon you're with Allie now'.

She didn't dare looking at Bea as she awaited the answer. She didn't know why she even asked, for it was so obvious that day Bea left them. Maybe she just needed to hear it with her own ears.

'We're dating', Bea confirmed without hesitation. 'Exclusively.'

Mel jerked her head up and pierced the redhead with her eyes.

'Bea Smith dating exclusively', her smile was bitter-sweet. 'Thought I'd never see the day.'

Bea smiled at her cluelessly. She had no idea Mel had any feelings for her past friendship and fleeting lust.

'I'm happy', Bea confessed in simple words. 'I can't imagine not being with her.'

And with that smile and those words Mel found the truth she needed to move on. That was the foundation she will use to get over Bea.

'Kim also told me Tina lost her job. Something about her hacking into HR account, can you
imagine? But she bounced right back, she's like a cat that one, always lands on her feet', Mel said with a hint of nostalgia in her voice. 'She's working for "Sports Illustrated" now.'

'I had no doubt she would regroup in no time', Bea said. 'But at least we don't have to see her face around the office anymore.'

'So you had something to do with her being fired?' Mel seemed shocked.

'You bet I did', Bea fired up. 'After the incident I kept thinking how could she have known where Allie lives. I'm sort of friends with the Big Boss, Ms Hagurson, so I called her and raised my suspicions. She had IT guys do an internal investigation and it turned out HR account was accessed on multiple occasions from Tina's IP address. She got the password from her former girlfriend and apparently used it to alter her vacation days and add bonuses to her paycheck. And also to get Allie's address. So you could say in a way I got her sacked. No one messes with my girl and gets away with it. She's a great journalist and I knew she would have no problems finding another job, but this will remain a stain on her reputation and she bloody deserves it.'

Mel watched Bea's fired up face and didn't know how to comment. She couldn't deny Tina had it coming, but still felt frightened by the fire in Bea's eyes that lit every time she felt the need to defend Allie.

'Anyhow', Mel decided it would be best if she changed the subject, 'it turned out we had an undercover cop in our crew'.

'Get out of it! Who?' Bea wondered.

'Knuckles'.

'No way! Rita?!

Rita Connors wasn't with them for long, only half a year, but Bea loved her attitude and her integrity.

'Knuckles is a detective in Narcotics. Juice was a drug lord and her Boys were dealing for her all over Melbourne. Can you believe that?'

'I suspected some of our crew being users', Bea replied, 'but I had no idea they were dealing'.

'Me neither. Anyhow, Rita earned Lucy's trust through the biker gang so she let her into her drug business. She gathered enough evidence and apparently the other Saturday police busted our biker race and arrested every single one of our crew. Most of them were let go a couple of days later. Tina and Kim spent three days in jail until their hearing and then they were let go, for they had never any connections to drugs. But Kim says those three days in jail were the worst in her life, she didn't even dare sleeping. I'm so glad you and me got out of the gang when we did. Juice, on the other hand, is facing twenty years at least; not much brighter future for her minions either.'

'Good', Bea spat out. 'I'd give her a couple of more years for bullying Allie. Allie and I, we wanted to thank you for what you did that day. You truly saved her. I keep thinking, if I got there any later, I'd found her severely beaten, or even raped.'

'I'd do it for anyone', Mel briefly covered Bea's hand. 'That just wasn't right. It was criminal. I still haven't gotten over it how our crew got corrupted after Juice and her Boys joined in. We had such a great thing going, we should have never let her in.'

'Sure, it was good while it lasted', Bea husked out a little too harshly, too determinately, 'but I'm not interested in looking back. You shouldn't either. You have a meaningful job that you're passionate
about and a family who loves you'.

*I only don't have you*, Mel succumbed to another wave of sadness, but tried to shake it off as fast as she could. Everyone has moved on, so will she.

Bea must have caught her lamentable mood, because she leant over the table and squeezed her hand. 'Hey, Mel, don't get like that. We can still meet to cruise around the town. I have a brand new bike to show off.'

But Mel withdrew her hand.

'You really don't get it, do you?' she blinked. 'The day I saved Allie was the day I was jealous of her like hell. And all I can think of now is: Why her? Why was none of us ever good enough for you? Why not me?'

Bea's mouth gaped at Mel's passionate confession. She really had no clue before. I guess there's no such thing in the world as no strings after all.

'So you'd understand', Mel continued, 'why I would like to stay away from you two for a while. Perhaps later, when I get over it, okay? When I maybe find me a girl of my own? That seems to be the thing nowadays.'

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It was almost midnight when Bea let herself into Allie's home. The house was dead silent, and only the dimmed light in the hallway and in Allie's room let Bea know she was expected. She snuck into the bedroom, seeing Allie was fast asleep already. She quietly opened her drawer and pulled out her favourite maroon pyjamas. She lay next to the blonde gently as a feather, but as soon as she touched the pillow she saw Allie turning and winding her arms around her.

'Sorry, I didn't mean to wake you', she whispered and kissed Allie's cheek.

'You didn't', the blonde mumbled sleepily. 'I'll fall asleep again as quickly as a wink. I'm shattered.'

'You had quite a day, Alliecat', Bea stroked her cheek. 'And you were so great I couldn't stop listening.'

Allie grinned before she yawned loudly.

'One thing before I conk out, the spare key I left you this morning.'

'Now?' Bea raised her eyebrows.

'Mhm', the blonde said unfazed.

Bea fumbled out of covers and headed downstairs. She couldn't quite define it, but she was hurt. Aside that she was hoping Allie gave her that key permanently, she couldn't understand why she had to return it right away, in the middle of the night. As she pulled it out of the front door lock, for a second she entertained the thought of going through that door and leaving for the night. But that would be childish, she concluded. And besides, she still didn't find the courage to let Allie into her home so what right does she have to complain?

She lay next to Allie, wordlessly placing the key into her open palm. Allie took it, then opened the
drawer of her night stand. She sat up and for a moment Bea couldn't see what she's doing. As Allie lay back down, Bea could feel her searching for her hands under covers.

'The errand I had to do earlier', the blonde whispered softly, 'I had to pick up a thing I ordered a while ago'. And Bea felt her transferring something into her hand.

She pulled out her hand to take a look. The key that she's just returned to Allie was now connected to a keychain. It was a deep red garnet stone in the shape of a heart, with the engraved word 'Bea'.

'Now you can lock up every night when you decide to take dinner with an ex', she teased, her eyes laughing at Bea's stupefied expression.

But Bea couldn't laugh. Allie had made her so sad when she had asked her to go downstairs and fetch the key and then she stunned her with this gift. She felt like she was pulled out of the deep end into the light again and for the first time in the last ten minutes she could properly breathe.

But she didn't know how to form a coherent sentence out of her unexpected happiness. Instead she shifted her weight onto her sneaky girlfriend and just kept kissing her senselessly.
Nine o'clock on Thursday Bea and Allie went to the meeting room to greet the manager, the cook and the event organiser of the ‘South Star’ hotel downtown, where their next cocktail party should be held. Namely, Mr Johnson chose the hotel's banquet hall for the big event his company was hosting in a couple of weeks time. They were celebrating thirty years since he founded 'South Star Hotels’, but he also wanted to incorporate the promotion for the new Rock Island Resort into the event. Five hundred guests were expected: two hundred of them being most loyal and most important of the South Star employees, and the rest of the guests consisting out of business partners, press, prominent people in Melbourne and representatives of Victoria's regional tourism organisations. In the couple of months which passed since he hired 'Hagurson Public Relations’, he has grown to appreciate Bea's and Allie's work so much that he wanted them to have the final say on their thirty years anniversary organisation. Hence the meeting today. Two women went through already made plans, approving or suggesting otherwise, guys at the round table taking notes. At one point, as Allie went to their side of the table to have a look at their papers, Bea could almost hear their gasps as they took in Allie's long legs. They quickly and respectfully averted their eyes so she couldn't really blame them for staring at her girlfriend. The thing was, that morning, at Allie’s, after Allie finally untangled herself out of the redhead’s embrace, she walked into her closet to realise that she didn’t have a single piece of suit pants or office skirt left that wasn't either dirty or creased. Both before and after her trip to Falls Creek, Allie spent so much time with Bea that she completely forgot to take care of little earthly chores, like cleaning her house, washing her laundry, taking finer suits to dry cleaning, ironing. So that morning they found themselves helplessly staring at Allie's wardrobe: thanks to them losing sense of time, they had only twenty minutes left until the beginning of this meeting so there was no time for ironing, or showering for that matter. Bea put on a clean, red shirt with a black tie and resorted to wearing her own black dress pants she wore yesterday. Allie combined a black shirt with the only skirt that could sort of pass for an office skirt. Alas, being actually her clubbing skirt, it was way too short, not even reaching her mid thigh. It looks more like a schoolgirl uniform, Bea thought watching Allie bend slightly over one guy's shoulder to look at his paperwork then returning back to their side of the table. It was a pleated skirt, with printed black and green squares, and for the first time looking at it closely since Allie put it on, she felt herself joining the other sighs in the room and wanting nothing more than for time to speed up until she's the one who will be privileged to take it off.

They wrapped up the meeting at noon. The cook and the manager returned to their hotel, while the event organiser needed to stay for the meeting with Mr Johnson at half past one. Mr Johnson needed to consent to the final plan, and he also wanted to hear the speech Allie will be holding at the event to present Rock Island Resort to the guests. The two women invited the remaining man to join them for lunch, which he gladly accepted. Bea gave him the address of a restaurant two blocks away so ten minutes later he was parking his car next to Bea's Jeep on a parking lot behind the restaurant.

During lunch, Allie realised that Bea was unusually quiet. She noticed how she kept stealing glances at her when she thought their guest won't pick up on it, how she leaned back in her chair, watching her with that dreamy look on her face that she had that morning lying on Allie's pillow. Bea spent more time shyly smiling at Allie than actually chewing her food and when they stood up to leave, her plate was still half full. Their guest parked out first, but instead of turning the key in the ignition and following his car, Bea turned towards Allie, the same dreamy smile on her face.

'You look very hot today, babe’, Allie smiled back at her.

'Me?’ Bea didn't quite believe her, considering she barely time to wash her face that morning.
‘Mhm’, Allie confirmed, pulling her closer by her tie and placing a peck on her lips. ‘My black tie looks smoking hot on you.’

Bea blushed, her pulse quickening, while she uttered, ‘It is you who is hot.’

Allie laughed a bit, caressing her both lips with her protruding lower one.

‘If you mean my short skirt, I have already noticed you checking out my legs.’

‘I wasn't the only one’, Bea replied.

‘Were you jealous?’ Allie asked curiously.

‘Not really’, Bea regained the same dreamy smile from before, ‘I knew you weren't interested in any of them, I know you only want me.’

‘Damn right’, Allie kissed her again, then buckled up in her seat. ‘And as soon as we finish work today, I will show you just how much.’

Bea got the same shy expression as she whispered, ‘I think I can't wait that long, Alliecat.’

‘What do you mean?’ Allie whispered back.

‘This parking space is paid for another fifteen minutes’, Bea blurted out. Her eyes screened the parking lot, where only a couple of people could be seen at the other end of it, and no one seemed to be coming their way. Having made sure it was safe, she hastily bent towards Allie's lap, pulling the front of her skirt up and tearing a hole in her pantyhose between her legs. Then she quickly pulled her skirt down and returned to her seat. It all happened in a jiffy, leaving an astonished Allie to wonder what the hell.

‘Let me guess’, she half-cursed, ‘you will buy me another pair of those too, along with all the panties you already owe me’.

‘I will buy you ten of each’, Bea said lustfully, her pupils so dilated that Allie couldn't be mad any longer.

‘Why did you even do it?’ she wondered. ‘Did you only want… Oh!’ she stopped when she felt Bea’s hand wiggling itself between carseat and her backside.

‘Only if you're up for it’, Bea asked. Allie’s eyes skimmed fast over the almost empty parking lot, where everyone seemed to be minding their own business, then slowly nodded her head. She slightly lifted herself so that she can sit on Bea's hand. Even if someone passed directly by, they wouldn't catch anything, Bea's side and rear windows being tinted and her hand covered by Allie's skirt. To a passer-by it would seem they were only sitting in the car and chatting, Allie concluded, finally allowing herself to relax into Bea's touch. Her skilled fingers found their way through the hole she'd pierced, sliding Allie's underwear to the side, and rubbed on her clit in slow movements.

‘Does your hand hurt?’ Allie couldn't help but worry.

‘My hand is in paradise, thanks’, Bea winked and with that Allie smiled and let herself enjoy the sensation.

They kept their eyes locked the entire time while Bea worked her way, Allie allowing herself to let out quiet moans, out of earshot in the closed vehicle. Sitting upright, faking a serious conversation, Bea actually conveyed to Allie how good her wetness felt, how warm her flesh was, wanting to
intensify Allie's arousal. And Allie was aroused. The public setting, the novelty, Bea's dirty talk and skilled fingers. But most of all: the look of those dark eyes - the lust, the affection, the warmth and the way her pupils still smiled at her. Her breaths soon became short panting noises, interrupted by muffled moans she just couldn't hold in. She couldn't believe Bea could have such an effect on her only four short hours after she made her see the stars. She felt Bea's fingers pressing harder into her clit, she closed her eyes and let go…

A minute later, she opened them again into the kiss Bea was giving to her parted lips. 'You are magnificent', Bea murmured as if drunk against her mouth, right before she plunged her tongue into it. As Allie turned sideways to return the kiss, she was forced to retrieve her arm from behind Allie so she kept it on Allie's headrest, latching onto the blonde.

'We should get going', Allie said gently couple of minutes later, taking out a kleenex to wipe Bea's hand, then placing a kiss into her palm.

Bea started the car, but felt in no hurry. It was only one o'clock and they still had half an hour until the meeting.

'He will hate the speech', Allie sighed.

'Perhaps a little bit, but then again we were already prepared to face the consequences when we agreed to write it the way we did', Bea shrugged, unusually chilled for the overachiever she was.

Last evening they were too comfy snuggled in bed following some pre-dinner sexual activities to bring themselves to get up and part into different rooms so that Allie could concentrate on writing the speech, so they ended up with Allie dictating the speech to Bea who typed it in her phone, while being stretched out on Allie's back. She sent it to Allie's office email without even bothering to reread it. They ordered Chinese instead of cooking as usual, to recover time they lost on writing that speech, and promised they would proofread the piece after they've eaten. And after dinner… Well, after dinner…

Allie didn't even feel remorse. Since she's started dating Bea, she's learnt how to value her free time more and hasn't easily agreed anymore to stay overtime or take work home. Every minute after five o'clock which was stolen off her free time was stolen off her Bea time and that was something she just wouldn't allow. So when they got that call from Mr Johnson, short before five yesterday, in which he asked her to write a speech for his banquet until tomorrow, she felt how unfair it was. She wasn't in a position to turn it down, but she certainly didn't plan to waste a second more on it than absolutely necessary.

'After all, what can happen’, she said to Bea as they parked into their building's garage, 'except for him asking me to write it again'.

'I would hate that’, Bea replied, 'that would ruin our weekend'.

'Your weekend is already ruined, babe’, Allie winked at her.

'How do you mean?' Bea was confused.

'It's really your fault that I don't have anything to wear, you being so distracting every single day, so over the weekend you will help me wash and iron for as long as it takes.'

Bea chuckled, wishing she could kiss the blonde right there and then, but they had agreed not to go public with their relationship while still working at the same office or HR might end up sending them an unwanted assistant to keep them chaste during work hours.
Apart from two things he noticed Allie forgot to mention, Mr Johnson didn't object to Allie's speech and the meeting was finished sooner than expected, with banquet plans fully approved and Allie promising to incorporate the information she omitted. After saying goodbye to both of the men, the pair headed to the toilet. Their eyes met in the mirror as they were washing their hands and them being completely alone, Allie sighed, 'Another hour and a half'.

'I know, baby', Bea returned the sigh, 'the whole arvo all I could think about was that little hole in your pantyhose'. Her hand caressed Allie's thigh, the same hunger reflected in both pairs of eyes. 'It's driving me crazy just knowing that it is there.'

'Just sitting there, waiting on you', Allie winked seductively, making Bea groan and glide her hand higher. Approaching footsteps made her groan again that she had to instantly remove her hand.

Entering their office, she found out the temptation was too strong for them to be left alone. 'We can't cross that line', she said in response to Allie's hungry expression. Bea's desktop computer and her monitors weren't exactly mobile so she suggested Allie took her laptop to the meeting room and rewrote her speech there until they both cooled off. Biting her lip, Allie agreed to it, knowing that was the only way for her to contain herself from making an unheard of scandal.

She didn't dare to return to the office until the clock struck five, no matter that the speech was finished and polished twenty minutes before. Once again in there, she couldn't discern any signs of abatement in Bea's arousal. Sharing a knowing look, they locked the office quickly and left the building. They were silent, like partners in crime, until they drove to the junction where turning left led to Allie's and right to Bea's home.

'My place tonight, I assume', Bea rasped out in a thick voice, 'considering I still have plenty of clean clothes'.

'Good point', Allie agreed, 'but let's make a quick stop first. Drive straightforward.'

Bea followed Allie's directions for ten minutes until the shabby looking neighbourhood has started to worry her.

'What are we doing here, Allie? We will end up getting robbed.'

'We probably won't', Allie said, 'people in good cars are protected by local gangs around here. Take a turn left.'

Bea obeyed, yet asking, 'How come?'

Allie shrugged her shoulders, 'Like everything else - interest.'

Reaching the end of the road, which stopped just before the river bank, Bea looked at Allie questioningly.

'Drive under the bridge, Bea', Allie said in a hoarse voice. 'You showing such an interest in outdoor sex today, I think we should do it properly.'

Bea felt her mouth going dry. They certainly couldn't? She could see other cars parked in there as
well - there was no privacy. As she turned off the engine on the verge of the river, seeking a spot as far as possible from the other cars, she turned to Allie to explain why she won't and wouldn't ever, but she soon stopped talking and looked around themselves. All cars had their high beam headlights on so that one looking into their direction would be blinded by them, giving each car privacy they needed, at least judging by the back and forth rocking of most of them. A group of women was standing thirty metres away from the bridge, and Bea realised they were prostitutes luring customers in passing cars. She then understood what Allie meant by saying the gangs protected their profits by protecting people in good cars. They could get it on on this spot and no one would notice, no one would even know one of them wasn't a hooker who got picked up in front of the bridge.

'You really want to?' she asked the blonde beside her.

'I really do', Allie replied, 'but not if it's too coarse for you'.

Bea looked around once again, then looked at the awaiting blonde. She spent the whole day lusting after her and now all she had to do was to think outside the box and reach out.

She turned the headlamps on and slowly tilted her car seat back. She reached for her handbag, getting their pink dildo out of it. They haven't used it at all since before Allie's vacation, but she still carried it around, in case Allie wanted it. Tonight she was the one wanting it though.

'Come 'ere', she said to her girlfriend after she'd fastened the harness around herself.

Allie couldn't believe Bea was gunna go through with it. She straddled her just above her knees and placed Bea's hands on her thighs. Her fingers played with Bea's undercut, the short hair turning her quickly on as always. She pulled her by her tie and kissed her hard, feeling Bea's nails digging deep into her flesh.

'What can I do for you tonight?' she tried a bit of a role playing, them being where they were.

'Unbutton your shirt', Bea ordered, 'and kiss me again'.

'Kissing will cost you extra', Allie retorted.

Bea's gaze followed Allie's quick fingers, while they worked on her buttons. 'Whatever you want', she stuttered, attaching her lips to the swell of Allie's breasts then trailing up her neck until they reached her jaw. Her hands kneaded on Allie's breasts as her mouth sucked on her plump lips. They both being turned on to the point of no return, she glided her hands up Allie's thighs again until she reached her waist. Pulling down her pantyhose a little, she found the seam of her panties above her hip. 'Twenty pairs', she muttered against her lips as amused Allie rolled her eyes, then tore them at the seam on both hips. Allie didn't have the time to properly wonder where she's going with it, when Bea reached in the front of her pantyhose and pulled out what was left of her underwear.

'I could've just taken them both off', Allie smiled down at her.

'I don't want you to take the pantyhose off', Bea choked out, pulling her nearer, impatient for her to get on her dildo.

'Oh! I see', Allie grinned at her, 'after all, you've been thinking about it the whole day long.'

'I most certainly was', Bea breathed out, while helping Allie climb on her cock. Allie propped herself upright by her hands on Bea's shoulders to give Bea an easy access to her neck. She moaned in pleasure while the redhead sucked gently on her pulse, not caring if anyone could hear or not in such a place. In that sense, this place was liberating, and that was exactly what she needed: to throw away all the conventions and fears and give herself fully to the woman who bought her heart forever. Bea
pulled down the cups on her bra so that she can gain access to her nipples, her teeth grazing around them, making her squeal from growing desire. Bea's mouth were relentless across her chest, they were all over her exposed skin, her palms covering her stomach and back under her shirt.

'Do you want me to beg?' Allie whined, still feeling no movement from Bea where she needed it the most.

'I am begging you, gorgeous', Bea choked out before she took a slow lick up between her breasts and across her neck. She could feel Allie's whole body trembling on her. Raising her hands, she held her steady and finally started to thrust into her. Her trembling subsiding, giving way to the pleasuring friction Bea was now providing her with, Allie was soon able to hold her body upright by the headrest so Bea's hands were free again to roam as they please. They found their way under her skirt, squeezing her thighs, while her lips attached themselves to her nipple again. Her hips went into frenzy, making Allie scream aloud. The raw sexuality in their surrounding, Allie's outfit, Allie's complete surrender, the sounds she made, her gorgeous body, all of that combined with her all day suppressed desire was bringing Bea fast to the point where she could come herself any second, just from the sheer want. Sensing Allie was near, she wished nothing more than for them to come together. Shoving her right hand into her pants, she moved her mouth from Allie's breasts to her lips, begging for entrance. As their tongues glided against each other, she worked her hand in the same rhythm as she worked her hips, both screaming into each other's mouth as their bodies stiffened, and then they fell into a shaking embrace.

'Allie', Bea burst out pleading couple of minutes later, kissing under her earlobe. The blonde looked her in the eye.

'What is it, Bea?' she asked gently, but all her lover could do was repeat her name as a chant while placing soft kisses all over her face.

'I want to take you home', she finally managed to blurt out, 'I want you under me, all of you, naked, body and soul, you hear? And no restraints, alright? All of you, moaning, screaming, loud as you did here.'

Allie looked down in her eyes, her heart swelling with love. Bea was buttoning up Allie's shirt, her fingers trembling but determined to get the job done. Then she fixed her hair. After Allie returned to her seat, she unhooked the harness, packing the dildo back in her bag, then straightened her car seat, buckled up and turned on the low beam lights instead of high beam. She drove back the road they came from, taking a turn towards her home when she reached the particular junction.

In the privacy of her ex-garage lounge, Bea undressed Allie slowly, she herself previously going up in the house and changing into silk pyjama bottoms and a laced camisole. She admired every bit of Allie's body, as if she sees it for the first time. When she lay on top of her, she looked for a long time into her eyes before she started grinding against her core. Bea didn't hurt her, Bea didn't make her sore. Her movements against her pelvis were gentle, slowly building up their pleasure. Bea was going commando under her pyjamas and the thin silk fabric, soaked through and through from both sides, was practically no obstacle at all for Allie to feel Bea's bulging clit rubbing into hers. Throughout their lovemaking they never broke their gaze, that giving them the feeling they were intertwining their souls. When they came together, Allie shed happy tears. Half an hour ago she didn't even know sex like this existed, and now it has brought her bliss beyond comprehension. She caressed Bea's cheekbones and played with her long locks that were falling like a curtain upon her face. Eventually Bea lay down next to her, their arms draped around each other. It was going on nine o'clock so they should really get up and have a shower and some dinner, but they just couldn't bring
themselves out of bed. It felt so good to just lie there watching each other, nose to nose, sharing light kisses, fingers drawing patterns on the other's back.

'Allie', Bea broke the comfortable silence a while later, 'how come you know of the existence of such a place at all?'

Allie sighed.

'First time I drove to Regan's apartment - the one she rented after she moved out of her parents’ and is still renting by the way - I followed GPS to find her and it suggested me the route over that bridge as a shortcut, not mentioning, of course, that it was such a crappy quarter. I noticed those girls at the entrance to the bridge and I understood right away what they were doing there. I guess I always notice prostitutes because I know if there wasn't for Kaz risking her life that night to protect me, I would have ended up being one of them.'

She shivered in Bea's arms, Bea placing a kiss into the crown of her head, holding her tighter.

'After that evening something drove me to that place, whenever I went to Regan's alone, I drove over that bridge. I always drive slowly by, so that I can get a good look at the cars parked under it. It became a sort of a trauma for me, sometimes that place haunts my dreams, I dream myself abandoned under that bridge and Marie forcing me to go into a john's car.'

She spasmodically held onto Bea's shoulder blades so Bea had to soothe her by stroking her hair and kissing her eyelids.

'When I'm with you', Allie whispered, 'I don't fear anything so I figured if I took you there, I could turn my nightmare into a fantasy. I hope next time I dream about that place, it won't be a dream of Marie again, but of you holding me securely in your embrace, and that terrible world of hookers and johns will fade away, like it did there this arvo.'

Bea tucked a stray lock behind Allie's ear.

'You're awfully smart', she said, kissing her temple. After few minutes of contemplation she added, 'Maybe I could ask Bridget to suggest me some tactics for me to achieve the same - y'know, turn my nightmares into safe place fantasies'.

Allie thought about it for a while. 'That's a good idea, Bea - to create a good memory in a place where a specific traumatic event happened - but as I see it, you've been doing it all along.'

'How come?' Bea wondered.

Allie stroked her cheek with her thumb. 'Your whole relationship with me is about you gradually letting me into your dark places, into your traumatic memories, and us creating a safe place by making new memories.'

Bea smiled, 'It's like you've been shedding light inside of me, making the darkness go away.'

Allie lovingly rubbed her nose against hers, 'And I always will.'

Bea kissed her so wholeheartedly that it made Allie's toes curl.

'I only wish', she snuggled into Bea's chest, 'that I could do something for those poor women too. No one wants to live that way.'

Bea sighed, tightening her grip around her.
'Maybe one day you will be able to.' She laid a kiss into the blonde mane again, thanking God Allie escaped such a faith. She lay there thinking about Kaz and the courage and strength it took her to pull the little girl Allie was out of predator's hands.

'Tonight', she said in a firm voice, 'after we finish dinner and get ready for bed, you will turn the lights off.'

Allie propped herself up on her elbow to examine Bea's face.

'Are you sure?' she asked trepidatiously.

Bea nuzzled her face into Allie's palm.

'Couple of days ago', she rasped out, 'I woke up in the middle of the night. My head was buried deep under the doona, somewhere around your waist. When I opened my eyes, all I could see was darkness. What surprised me was that I didn't frighten, I didn't go into attack mode, even before I fully regained my consciousness, I knew it in my heart it was you lying next to me. So I only snuggled closer into your body, not even bothering to pop out my head in search of a light. I think you have already made the bed a safe place for me. I want to be brave tonight and try sleeping together without lights on.'

When she looked up, she saw Allie's eyes were full of tears. She could see the pride of her plastered all over Allie's face and she couldn't help but feel a bit proud of herself too.

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The next day at their breakfast diner, Bea took her time to examine Allie's face. She looked sleepy and had dark circles under her eyes.

'Did you get any sleep last night?' she asked in shock.

'I have', Allie smiled, 'after four'.

The thing was, even though Bea slept like a baby on her chest, she couldn't quite chase away the fear Bea would wake up at one point and panic. She wanted to be there for her if it happened so she fought off her sleepiness for as long as she could.

'You shouldn't have done it', Bea scolded her gently while cupping her hand. 'Thank you', she added, 'for caring so much about me.'

Allie squeezed her hand and smiled a smile so sweet like it was smithed in Heaven.

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Their weekend was so fun Bea could hardly believe it. Even the most trivial or boring things, like all day's housework, were an enjoyment when done together with Allie. She spent her free time on Saturday washing, ironing and folding Allie's clothes and still found herself happily humming to a tune while doing it. Allie was spring-cleaning all day, only stopping occasionally to place a quick
kiss on Bea's lips. Bea found her dirty face just adorable and couldn't restrain herself of getting her wicked way with her on the floor covered with discarded dust clothes.

Sunday noon, after they went running, Bea took Allie on her bike to a nice restaurant on the beach, just outside of town. They decided to take a stroll down the beach after they left the restaurant, but it was freezing cold, being tenth of July. So they hurried back to Allie’s, turning on the heat and cuddling under the blanket. That evening Allie wanted to watch replay of Wimbledon women's finals, and Bea readily agreed to watch it with her, failing to mention she's been really looking forward to watch a replay of semi-finals of UEFA Euro 2016, Germany vs France nonetheless. She found out she was happy if she was making Allie happy so that's what she fully intended to do that Sunday.

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