down in the dirt

by civillove

Summary

Combined prompts: 1) Beth and Rio eating a meal together doesn’t matter what meal or how or why. 2) Beth and Rio spending the night together due to some unforeseen circumstance. Extra points for some sexy times ;) + 3) I’d love to see a fic in your series where Beth asks Rio if he’s sleeping with anyone else!!

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“You mean until you kill someone else.”

Rio’s jaw clenches, her words floating in the air around them and now that she’s said it out loud, it feels more real. He takes another step towards her until he’s in her space, staring her down, body towering over hers. She stands her ground despite her stomach flipping, tipping her chin just a little so she’s looking into his eyes.

Beth can’t tell how it works; for a short while it’s either she forgets exactly who he is, or she sees parts of him that he never shows to anyone else.

“Oh now all of a sudden you got a problem with blood on my hands?” He asks, his voice a rough whisper, settling into her skin and digging between her veins.

She struggles to speak, “I have a problem with blood on anyone’s hands, yes.”

“Even yours?” He roughly grabs her wrist and despite the fact that she tries to pull away, he won’t let her.

Notes

I wrote 6000 words of this before I watched the new episode but man oh man do I have so many feelings!

I just like to remind people in case there are any new readers (first of all, hi, thanks for clicking) that this deviates from 2x09 and follows my series. It’s getting to the point where these fics can’t stand alone.
She meets him in a taqueria of all places, one she’s never been to before tucked between two buildings downtown. The place is small, authentic, definitely has someone’s family living and breathing in the walls and into every dish that comes out of the kitchen. She loves places like this, even if Mexican isn’t her favorite style of food, but she enjoys feeling close to lineages and love tied together simply from food and interaction. She wonders if he comes here a lot.

Beth presses herself past small tables, spotting him when she enters the restaurant in the back corner, already eating. The place is packed for a Thursday night, mostly people at the bar, as she makes her way through the mazelike arrangement of tables before she finally stops in front of him.

He’s dressed simply tonight, dark jeans and a white t-shirt with no jacket despite the slight crisp in the air. It’s also a little creased to the point where it looks like he might have slept in it and that causes a deep ache she instantly tries to shake off. The shade softens his skin and his usually tight shoulders but makes the tattoo of the bird on his neck stand out. Rio doesn’t look up but his body seems to sense hers, like magnets, because he angles his hips a little to face her while taking another bite out of his food.

Beth’s eyebrows arch, “Should I leave you two alone?”

Rio makes a noise of pleasure that does something to her insides before he grabs a napkin, wiping his mouth and hands as he leans back into his chair. “Don’t insult the carnitas, mami.” He pushes on the chair across from him to motion for her to sit down.

She puts her purse on the back of it before taking a seat, her eyes glancing over the food in front of him with gentle interest, fingers playing with the corner of a menu. Beth licks her lips and when she looks back up at him, Rio’s eyes are on her, trailing over her skin like he so often does. She feels heat kiss its way down the back of her neck and tries to blame it on the tightly packed restaurant but as she shifts in her seat, she knows that’s not why.

Sometimes she forgets about how intense he looks at her, his gaze reading things that she rarely lets others see. It’s strange because when Dean does it, really takes a look at her like he wants to admire her, all she feels is judgement. He so often wants to take her apart, to remove the pieces he dislikes and put her back together again—a perfect, dutiful housewife, a complacent mother…

Rio takes makes her come apart only in the very best ways; with his hands, other times with his mouth, sometimes with just one look.

He reaches across the table suddenly, their knees knocking together as he gently tips her chin. He’s analyzing the healing bruise on her cheekbone, thumb brushing directly underneath it in thought before he pulls away.

“Face looks good.”

The intimacy of his touch creates a squirming sensation in her belly so she compensates by teasing him, “You mean more than usual?”

He smirks, the softest pull of the corners of his mouth as he lifts glass of water for a sip. He leans back into the seat but their legs still touch. She’s not sure if he’s doing that on purpose or not but the heat of his skin through the fabric of his jeans is extremely distracting for a few moments before he
picks at a few jalapenos on his plate. She watches the movements, long fingers that seem so innocently placed right now despite what she knows he’s capable of.

“You gonna order somethin’?” He asks before taking a bite out of his carnitas.

Beth clears her throat, sitting up a little straighter in her chair. “Uh…no.”

Rio takes his time chewing, his eyebrows drawing together in what looks like disbelief. “You can’t just sit there.”

Her lips quirk into a small smile at how offended he seems to be getting over the fact that she’s not going to get any food here. “Don’t we have business to discuss?”

“Yeah, first thing we’re gonna discuss is you not orderin’ anythin’. He leans forward in his chair again, this time pushing his plate towards her. “You gotta try this.”

A soft laugh escapes her lips as she shakes her head, putting her hand up like she needs to try and stop him. “No, it’s…it’s just not my type.”

Rio scoffs, “Like that’s stopped you before.” And he’s clearly not talking about carnitas, his gaze upon her expectantly as he licks his lower lip.

She feels that same heat travel from the back of her neck down her chest and she kicks him under the table, making him laugh. He’s not pulling back from her however, still holding onto the carnitas mid-air because he’s intent on her trying it.

“I’m just sayin’ tryin’ something new has been workin’ for you lately.” Beth’s never seen him quite like this before, a little lighter, more relaxed. He likes food, she realizes, remembering when he was excited over crispy potatoes in some sort of breakfast wrap he had at that café. “Come on.”

And while she doesn’t quite want to give into the temptation, she rolls her eyes to the ceiling and leans up to take a bite out of the carnitas as he holds it to her lips. He grins, far too satisfied with himself, and finishes up the food with two final bites. Beth leans back into the chair, chewing, and while it’s really good the jalapenos cause her to cough after.

Rio hands her his water, a smirk dancing on his lips as she soothes her throat and she’s suddenly struck with the realization that to anyone around them—they look like normal people, almost as if they’re on a date.

For some reason there’s a dull ache in her chest, considering that, though she doesn’t want to linger on why.

Her fingers tap against the glass as Rio throws his napkin down onto his plate, motioning for the waitress to come over. Beth shakes her head, “I still don’t want anything—”

But he’s putting his hand up to cut her sentence off before ordering something completely in Spanish to the waitress, who nods as she writes it down. She then smiles at him, almost too obvious and glances at her before disappearing towards the kitchen. Two things are running through her mind so fast that she can barely keep them straight: the fact that she probably should have known that Rio spoke fluent Spanish and how it’s twisting something so low in her torso that she has to shift against her seat, and that she dislikes their waitress (which is ridiculous).

Rio’s eyes are soft and dark, head tilted a little as he watches her and she hopes to god this isn’t one of those moments where he can read her mind. To distract him, or maybe herself, she squeaks out:
“I didn’t know you spoke Spanish.”

“There’s a lot you don’t know about me.” And that, she knows, is true. It might be one of the only honest things about him. The statement is enough to put a damper on her body’s natural reaction towards him because despite how close they may get; she knows deep down that she’ll never know him completely.

That there will always be something he’s hiding.

“Do you speak any other languages?”

He leans his elbows on the table, letting out a soft breath from his lips. He’s thinking about something, maybe considering how much he wants to tell her. Beth wants to say that they can’t keep up this dance forever: this give and take of where it feels like there’s no walls between them only to build them from the ground up to keep one another out. She can’t deny that the movements of the dance are fun sometimes, dangerous, exciting—but at one point something is going to happen where they get too tired to keep their footing in check.

“Three, total. I’m a little rough with Russian.” She guesses that makes sense, sometimes they have to do business with a variety of people. Something must shift on her face, a note of surprise probably, because he smirks and adds, “Did you think I only spoke fluent ‘suburban housewife’?”

She scrunches her nose, “Well you are rather good at it.”

“If you think that’s impressive you should really see me at bake sales.”

Beth laughs and Rio smiles a little at the sound, the atmosphere softening their conversation to the point where it feels dangerous. She’s afraid to get too comfortable like this, for her relationship with him to feel too domestic—because she knows how much she’ll like it and how it’ll never be able to stay like that. She’s not even sure what they are other than partners and while she can hear Dean’s statement in her mind, that Rio cares about her—what does that even mean anyways? How long will that last?

Their tentative connection is like a flame; heated, mesmerizing and burns to the touch but quickly fizzled out given the slightest gust of air.

Their waitress appears at the table again, this time dropping off a plate in front of Beth. Rio thanks her as she leaves and she finds herself staring at the dish with hesitant eyes. She’s had Mexican before, of course, but her flavor profiles are rather sensitive when it comes to spices. She wants to enjoy them but hasn’t really branched out enough to do that—she usually ends up eating Italian or salads or some sort of frozen dinner when she’s feeling especially out of touch with cooking.

Yet here Rio is, pushing her out of her comfort zone again.

“What is this?”

“Taquito.” And she knows just about as much information before she asked. Rio rolls his eyes, pushing the plate towards her, “It’s not gonna bite you, darlin’, you’ll like it.”

Beth chews on her lower lip as she picks up one of the taquitos. She can feel Rio’s gaze on her, expectant and open and for a moment she wants to ask him if he invited her here for something important other than to eat. She lets out a soft breath and bites into the soft rolled taco; hot spices instantly hitting her tongue that’s mixed with cheese and chicken.

It’s good and Rio’s right, of course he’s right.
“It’s alright.”

He snorts and steals one right off her plate, swiping one in sour cream before he takes a bite out of it. “Just alright? Nah, nice try. I know when you’re lyin’ right to my face.”

She finishes the one in her hand before picking up another, “You can’t tell when I’m lying to you.”

A soft laugh tumbles out of Rio’s chest and despite how lighthearted it sounds, there’s a sense of seriousness swirling around his vowels. “You don’t think so?” She feels something dip into her belly, tries to blame it on the strong spices, but knows it’s his gaze that’s doing it. She’s not completely sure if he can tell or not but she does know he’s really good at reading people.

He runs his hand over the lower half of his face, fingers scratching at the scruff there.

“Sometimes I can, your mouth quirks right here.” And he reaches over, presses against the corner of her mouth and swipes before he pulls back and licks the pad of his thumb. “You had a little sour cream.”

She hates the ridiculous flush that accompanies such a small action and tries to settle her skin by taking a few sips of water. She finishes off a fourth taquito before finally pushing the plate away, picking up her napkin to clean her hands.

“So are we actually going to talk about business or can we get churros?” She hates the hope inflating her words; that they’re here just to enjoy the food and one another’s company but she knows that’s too easy and more importantly that’s not who they are.

“Not a fan of churros.” He licks his lips. “Though I can tell you some ideas for using that caramel dip later, if you like.”

She feels a heated tug between her legs and Rio’s eyes trail down her chest, settle there, and burrow between her ribcage. That heat swirling along the inside of her thighs threatens to overtake her but it’s disappointingly interrupted when the waitress brings the check.

Rio takes out his wallet, puts a few bills on the table and clears his throat, leaning his forearms on the edge to address her. A shadow passes over his face, the amusement gone from his eyes and before he even says anything she knows that he’s switched gears to talk about something serious.

The real reason why he’s invited her there…and she hates the cold cinderblock of disappointment that falls into her stomach and crushes any heat she felt a moment before.

“I gotta lay low for a few days.” The statement confuses her but she waits for him to expand, counting to ten so she doesn’t ask unnecessary questions. Beth’s surprised he’s even telling her that he plans on dropping off the grid.

“Because of what happened with Warez?”

He nods, looking down at his hands on the table for a moment. A swell of emotions crashes into her body like waves; she feels guilty, not exactly for what Rio did for her but because of the consequence that is seeming to go with it.

“I got a bounty on my head from a punk ass rival gang.” He rolls his eyes, seems bored and Beth’s mouth opens a little in disbelief because everything that came out of his mouth sounds bad, yet Rio looks unbothered, at worst inconvenienced.

“A bounty.” It’s not a question.
A ghost of a smile appears on his mouth. “I told you this shit is medieval.”

Rio stands suddenly, putting his wallet into his back pocket and fixes his shirt, moving to walk past her but pausing to drag his hand along her shoulders. He squeezes gently until she looks up at him.

“I’ll call you.” And he’s gone, out the front of the restaurant for maybe two minutes before panic starts to settle in her chest and flutter like butterflies.

Beth stands from the table and grabs her purse, making her way quickly through the restaurant and into the parking lot. She scans the cars and sees him towards the right, digging his keys out and unlocking the driver’s door. She’s suddenly overwhelmed with a bunch of things that she wants to tell him; that she doesn't like the idea of not hearing from him, of not knowing if he's alright. Of waiting around for his call when they’re supposed to be partners. Can’t she carry on any part of the business without him? Or better yet, can’t he just be honest with her about where he’s going and how long this is going to take?

“You can’t just disappear.”

She can see the muscles in his back tighten as he pauses, turning to look at her. It never goes well when she tries to make demands. He didn’t expect her to follow him, she can tell by the way he’s glancing at the restaurant before settling his gaze on her. He plays with his keys between his fingers as he takes a step towards her.

They’ve been here before so many times that she feels like she lives in this conversation, these few tense moments where she presses his buttons and he struggles to remain patient with her.

“What part are you havin’ trouble with? The word ‘bounty’ somehow confusin’ to you?”

Beth wants to know what he’s not telling her, “How long?”

“Until it’s over.” There’s a finality to his voice, daring her to say something else.

And she does, “You mean until you kill someone else.”

Rio’s jaw clenches, her words floating in the air around them and now that she’s said it out loud, it feels more real. He takes another step towards her until he’s in her space, staring her down, body towering over hers. She stands her ground despite her stomach flipping, tipping her chin just a little so she’s looking into his eyes.

Beth can’t tell how it works; for a short while it’s either she forgets exactly who he is, or she sees parts of him that he never shows to anyone else.

“Oh now all of a sudden you got a problem with blood on my hands?” He asks, his voice a rough whisper, settling into her skin and digging between her veins.

She struggles to speak, “I have a problem with blood on anyone’s hands, yes.”

“Even yours?” He roughly grabs her wrist and despite the fact that she tries to pull away, he won’t let her. His thumb forces her hand open, pressing against her lifeline.

Why does he always have to bring that up? So that she’ll never forget a terrible thing she’s done? To throw it into her face the minute things get rough between them? To remind her that she’s been down in the dirt with him and she’s finally starting to show for it? Hands aren’t clean anymore.

His fingers are tight around her skin, bruising almost, but he doesn’t falter as his eyes bore into her
“Do you regret it?”

She lets out a quick breath because *how could she?* How could she really? Did she want a man to die despite the circumstances? She did what she had to and she doesn’t regret anything—she saved Rio’s life and he *knows* that, which is exactly why he’s pushing her.

Her eyes look at his hand still holding onto her wrist, forcing her into this conversation and grounding her. “You’re hurting me.”

“Answer my question.”

“No.” She snaps, her breathing slightly uneven.

Rio nods slowly, his grip loosening against her skin before he finally lets her go. She draws her wrist into her chest like an injured bird, her fingers smoothing against irritated flesh. “Well I don’t regret what I did to Warez. Not after…” He trails off and looks away from her, muscles in his jaw working as he watches cars in the parking lot.

It’s not fair, not in the slightest—she never asked him to take care of Warez for her, never asked for the bloody ring hitting the wood of her picnic table, echoing against her eardrums.

It takes him a moment to collect himself, the anger dissipating even though irritation is still flowing off him in waves. “I did what I had to, it don’t concern you.”

“Yes, it does,” She says after a moment, letting her arms fall to her sides. “We’re partners. What am I supposed to do?” *Without you* hangs on the inside of her lower lip and even though she doesn’t say it, it’s like Rio can hear it anyways because he shakes his head.

“Bake some gluten free cupcakes, knit another blanket, make Dean a sandwich. I could give a shit what you do.”

She knows this is what he does, he *always* tries to hurt her to push her away, to make her stop asking questions and making demands of him, of their partnership but it doesn’t make his words hurt any less.

Beth pushes him, hard, right in the shoulder. It’s not enough to knock him off balance but he does fall back a step, grabbing onto her arms to right himself and so that she can’t push him away. She tries, smacks his chest and arms and even manages to nick some of his jawline until his one hand wraps around both her wrists while the other settles on the back of her neck.

She’s breathing heavy, her chest pressing against his own, their bodies lined up almost too perfectly. And despite how angry she is, she can feel herself start to melt against him, his thumb working it’s way down the side of her neck and his hips slotting against her.

His lower lip is jutted out, just a little, and it takes everything in her not to kiss him.

“Don’t speak to me like that,” She says, voice calmer but still wrapped in steel. “Like I’m—”

Like she’s a thoughtless suburban robot, is what she wants to say, or like how Dean speaks to her but nothing comes out. Rio just nods, letting out a slow breath before he lets go of her hands and curls her hair around her ear. He then takes a step back from her, letting air in between them, a gentle shiver coursing down her spine as the heat of his body leaves her own.
“I got to do this, and I ain’t askin’ for your permission.”

Beth licks her lips, looking away from him, drawing a deep breath into her lungs. It takes her a moment to realize that she’s not going to win this argument and that, despite not wanting to, she has to let him go.

“Can you at least take me home?” She asks after a moment. “Dean’s on a camping trip with the kids and took the van. I had Annie drop me off.”

He watches her a moment, turning towards his car before a smile tugs its way onto his mouth. “That depends, you gonna hit me again?”

She rolls her eyes but she finds herself smiling too, rounding the back so she can get into the passenger seat. “Not unless you really deserve it.”

A soft laugh leaves Rio’s lips, getting into the driver’s seat and starting the car. “Better keep my distance then. Remind me that we gotta teach you how to throw a proper punch.” He then pulls out of the lot and turns in the direction of her home.

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It doesn’t take long to reach her neighborhood, cookie cutter houses passing her in the dark with windows that feel like they’re glaring at her, like she doesn’t belong here anymore. Sometimes she worries she doesn’t.

Beth lets out a long breath, leaning further back into the leather of the seat, her fingers pinching the bridge of her nose as she thinks about her empty house. She opens her eyes when she feels Rio’s gaze on her, a silent question waiting there before she answers with a shake of her head. She’s fine, just a headache from too many things swimming through her brain at once: the prospect of true silence since Dean’s away with the kids and Rio will be laying low, she thinks about if Marcus will be safe if his dad isn’t there, she’s worried about Jane not using enough sunscreen and wondering if they packed bug-spray, if bounties like the one on Rio’s head happens often, and what Dean said to her in the kitchen the other night. About how he saw them together in the yard.

She glances at Rio, eyes tracing over the smooth lines of his face as he focuses on the road in front of him, one hand on the wheel. Her eyes zero in on tattoos over flexed muscles, how she wants to drag her fingers along them, memorize them with her lips. She’s overwhelmed with wanting to tell him that Dean knows, that he’ll probably try and use it against her again at some point and yet…

And yet Rio keeps so much from her that she wants to keep this small piece of panic all to herself—she doesn’t have to tell him.

They’re almost to her house but she can’t seem to stop the words from tumbling out of her mouth, “Do you have your jacket with you?”

He glances at her and draws his lower lip into his mouth before reaching behind her seat, settling his black jean jacket across her lap. She feels stupid, wanting a piece of him, like wearing his jacket while he’s gone will somehow comfort her at the prospect that he won’t end up dead. Beth also knows the slippery slope she’s on, taking his clothes, how dangerous and yet whole she feels as she leans up in the seat and slides the jacket around her shoulders.

Her arms sink into place, the scent of his cologne and skin enveloping her as she settles into the fabric. He’s watching her out of the corner of her eye, she can tell when he flips the turn signal on, but he doesn’t say anything like she thought he might.
“You don’t own any blue-wash jackets, huh.” It’s not a question and Rio’s lips quirk into a smile.

“Nah.”

They’re on her street and her hand falls to the handle to open up the passenger door but—he drives past her house. Beth opens her mouth to say something but when she turns to look at Rio, his body language is rigid, eyes trained on another car in the rearview mirror.

“What’s wrong?”

Rio makes another turn and grits his teeth when the car behind them follows suit. “We got a tail.” There’s frustration popping along his syllables, like he’s annoyed with himself that he didn’t see it sooner. She turns in her seat to look behind them and Rio’s hand comes down on her thigh, insistent. “Don’t. Face the front and shuffle down in the seat.”

She does as she’s told, scooting down until it’s almost uncomfortable and when Rio makes the next turn he stomps his foot on the gas. Beth doesn’t know where they’re going and she knows better than to ask, the tops of houses zipping by the window as tires screech and the engine revs.

The next few minutes are somehow a blur and incredibly slow all at once, like someone is showing her the scene selection on a movie menu; she hears a quick succession of pops and Rio swearing and suddenly his gun is on his lap and he’s rolling the window down.

She must sit up out of instinct because he’s not gentle as he grabs the back of her neck and forces her head down until her forehead meets her knees. Beth puts her hands over her head, her eyes squeezing shut as gunshots sound a lot closer than before. She somehow smells metal and she thinks her mind is making up smoke, the car jerking into a turn that knocks her body into the door. Her mind is whirring—hears bullets hit the car, crack the windows, yet Rio’s driving remains smooth for a few minutes.

He then slams on the breaks, undoing his seatbelt, his hand falling to her lower back. “Come on, I gotta ditch the car.”

She sits up, her body feels as if it’s on autopilot, moving too slow and too robotic as she opens the door to get out. Beth tries to gauge her surroundings but everything feels like it’s spinning, rushed colors and too bright lights and Rio comes up behind her, firm hand on her hip as he guides her to the sidewalk. They’re in a parking lot and it’s a mistake to look back at the car because her mouth nearly falls to the pavement as she sees the cracked windows, the chipped paint, the bullet holes—

“Rio…”

“Now’s not the time to play twenty questions, just trust me.”

A scene plays in her mind, one time when he asked her if she trusted him and God, no had come out of her mouth. Soft amusement played on his lips that’s good before walking out of a bar. Trust him? Now? After all this?

What choice does she really have if she didn’t?

She tugs on the fabric of the jacket around her as he puts his gun into the back of his jeans, pulling down his white t-shirt as they approach a bus stop…a bus stop? There’s a bus pulling up and he encourages her to get on as the doors squeak open and she bites her tongue on saying a million things about what they’re doing, where they’re going, is this even the right bus.

Beth stumbles her way on, Rio paying the bus driver and she has to grab ahold of the metal poles to
keep herself balanced because she doesn’t realize how badly she’s shaking from leftover adrenaline until she sits in a pair of seats. She huddles into the window space, trying to avoid all the eyes that feel like they’re watching her. It’s just paranoia, she knows that, no one could care less about her except for an old man staring at her chest, pointedly licking his lips in her direction.

Rio takes the seat next to her, “Eyes on somethin’ else, man.” He bites out and the guy straightens his back before looking away. Actually he gets up from his seat and picks another one closer to the bus driver.

He lets out a slow breath, leaning back, his hands holding onto the small metal bar of the seat in front of them. He’s playing something in his head, Beth can tell by his eyes having a soft distant look to them before he looks over at her.

“You good?”

She chokes out a laugh because…she has no idea. Physically, she’s fine, but her hands are still shaking something terrible and she can’t believe that all this happened in such a short amount of time. Part of her thinks she fell asleep in Rio’s car on the way to her house and this is some sort of nightmare.

The warmth of his body presses into her own in the small seat and she doesn’t realize she’s jackhammering her leg until his hand gently falls to her knee, giving it a squeeze.

“Take a deep breath in through your nose and let it out your mouth.”

Beth does as she’s told and that seems to help, repeating it a few times before she closes her eyes and leans back against the seat. Her fingers play with the bottom of his jean jacket before she feels calm enough to look out the window at crumbling, older buildings pass them by.

“Where are we going?”

He takes a few to give her a reply, giving the bus a once-over, clocking the people around them. When the guy from before looks over his shoulder at them Rio leans back and puts a pointed arm around Beth, resting along the back of her seat. He lets out a slow breath, turning his head to look out the window to gauge where they are and when to get off the bus.

“Just ridin’ for a few, I want to make sure no one’s following us.”

Beth finds herself leaning into his side, the pressure and warmth of his body comforting in a way she doesn’t want to explain. The shaking has subsided and she attempts to lay the variables out in front of her before she asks any more questions.

“Do you think that’s possible?”

A short bark of laughter leaves his lips but she can tell that he doesn’t think any of this is funny, “Well, I didn’t expect someone to track me from the restaurant, so.”

“But we have somewhere to go, right?”

Rio nods, chewing on his lower lip as he shifts in the seat. She can tell that he never intended on taking her there, that he probably regrets not putting her into an Uber at the restaurant and driving in her neighborhood. At least he never stopped at her house and that her kids are far away from all this drama.

“Not sure if you’ve put this together yet but you can’t go home tonight.”
She blinks because no, for some reason she hadn’t thought of that as he takes a burner phone out of his pocket and hits a few numbers. He puts the phone up to his ear and talks hurriedly and hushed to someone she can only assume is one of his boys—that he was ambushed, that they need to keep him updated on taking care of the situation, that he won’t be able to handle it on his own anymore with her in tow. Beth can’t go home, which means…

She feels color drain from her face.

Which means wherever they’re going, she’s going to have to spend the night with him.

Rio ends the call and pockets the phone again, letting out a short patient breath. When she doesn’t say anything for a few moments, he tilts his head to get a good look at her face, a soft ‘hmm’ leaving his lips.

“What, no arguments about this? Don’t have to make it back home for another girl’s night?”

She finds herself glaring at him because she is capable of going with the flow when she has to.

“Just so you can interrupt it?” She fires back, enjoying the smirk pulling at the edges of his mouth because touché.

Beth takes a breath into her lungs, letting it sit there for a moment before deciding what she’s going to say about this. She doesn’t have a choice; it’s not safe for her to go back home or to try and leave him while this bounty is on his head.

She’s already had to deal with firsthand what happens when unsavory people have her alone.

So Beth goes with the next thing that pops into her head, “I trust you.”

And Rio smiles, a soft and short laugh leaving his lips. “Yeah, that’s probably a bad idea.”

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When they finally get off the bus, Beth’s arms and legs are stiff from sitting in a position for too long, the cold night air almost comforting as it blows into her hair and puffs it out like a halo around her shoulders. She takes a deep breath into her lungs and walks the rest of the way with Rio who’s concentrating hard on their surroundings.

She doesn’t know where they are and she’s not sure she wants to by the time they stop in front of a dark red building with decaying bricks and dead grass around it. Some sort of rundown apartment complex that looks like it’s about to tumble and he doesn’t waste any time to cross the small parking lot in front of it and open the door for her.

The man at the small desk behind plexiglass doesn’t look up at their entrance, which just tells her that it’s a good place to be anonymous. They take the stairs up three floors and she can’t help but scrunch her nose at the drywall falling from the ceiling and the stained carpet as Rio pauses in front of door 3041, the three turned upside down, to dig keys out of his pocket.

“This is where we’re staying?” And she doesn’t mean for it to sound like that but her clear discomfort is all over her face anyways.

Rio looks over his shoulder and his face is a mixture of exasperation and amusement, key sliding into the lock, “Oh yeah I forgot to tell you my country club membership expired.”

Yeah, okay, she deserved that response. She wraps her arms around herself and watches as Rio
unlocks the door and opens it with a bump of his hip. Surprisingly, the inside isn’t as decrepit as the entire building. It’s small with gray walls, a mini kitchen in darkened lime green, a bed near one solitary window and a door on the far left that probably leads to a bathroom. It looks clean just for her eyes glazing over it, and well, she figures it can’t be any worse than having sex in a bar bathroom where her shoes were sticking to the floor.

She briefly wonders what Rio’s real place looks like, if it feels lived in or it resembles some sort of furniture catalog; immaculate but sterile—not home.

Beth slides his jacket off her arms, putting it onto the back of a kitchen chair as Rio moves towards the window to draw the blinds. Her eyes blanket over the room, thinking about how often he’s had to run here, if he’s ever brought anyone else, how long they’re going to have to stay in this small space before she starts losing her mind.

Her fingers play with the bottom of her shirt, something to do, as Rio takes his burner phone out of his pocket.

“How long will we have to stay here?”

He doesn’t look up to answer her because this is the same conversation they’ve had before. He puts the cell on the kitchen table and moves to open one of the cabinets above the sink, pulling out two glasses and a bottle of whiskey. “As long as it takes. My boys will let me know when it’s done.”

He pours her a finger full and slides it across the table until it sits right in front of her.

“They’re efficient but you might as well get comfortable.”

Beth picks up the glass and holds it for a moment, thinks about the weight between her fingertips before taking a long sip. The liquid burns her throat, making her cough, but the heat that settles in her belly is oddly comforting.

“Have you had to stay here before?”

Rio licks his lips, taking a sip from his glass as well before toeing off his shoes and kicking them towards the bed. “Nah, I’m usually not as…sloppy.”

She considers him a moment but isn’t quite sure what she means. The statement plays in her head a few times on repeat as she mimics his actions and takes off her shoes, moving to set them upright and orderly under the kitchen table. Does sloppy mean he almost got caught or…?

“You mean it was different with Warez?”

He turns his glass on the kitchen table, running his thumb over the rim. His eyes travel along her face, to the bruise that’s healing and almost gone, gaze so intense it feels like he’s touching her skin. Rio then meets her eyes, dark brown boring into her own. Something shifts on his face, the indifference that’s usually there slips away, he takes his mask off—what he’s about to say is something he wants Beth to see.

He wants her to see him as he is.

“I usually don’t take my time killin’ people because it’s just about business. This was different, I was angry.”

She knows she should probably be afraid or unnerved or sickened, but she’s not, instead she’s almost transfixed because she sees him for what feels like the first time, honestly. Is that what he wants? Her
expression to change? For her to judge him? People are capable of terrible things and she can’t honestly say that she wouldn’t do something drastic for someone she cared about, for him. You killed a man.

When her demeanor doesn’t change, he continues with a shrug,

“Both down in the dirt now, aren’t we darlin’.”

She can’t deny that, filth staining her skin and stuck under her fingernails—she’s not sure she’ll ever get clean. But at least she’s not alone in that. Beth squeezes her glass of whiskey, taking another sip even though this time it tastes sour in her mouth and pushes it away.

Both of them feel too big for this apartment, different types of tension expanding into each other even though neither of them are touching, or close. She runs a hand through her hair and glances past him, notices a photograph of him and Marcus on the night table and suddenly her heart aches at the thought.

Isn’t he ever afraid of stopping? Of losing something so precious? Or has he been doing this long enough that he’s fallen into a pattern where he knows what he has to do despite everything else?

She can’t help it: “Marcus is with someone safe, right?”

That same hesitance is there at the mention of his son, his eyes considering her as he takes a slow breath into his lungs. She realizes he has to bite down on everything telling him not to share, to keep that part of his life private and she hopes one day it won’t be so hard, that it’ll be something he talks about easier with her.

“He’s safe; pissed I’m missin’ a soccer game.” A fond smile tugs at the ends of her mouth as she thinks about him, pouting, throwing a soccer ball at Rio’s legs instead of hugging him goodbye. “He asks about you when it storms.”

Beth turns the glass of whiskey on the table, a warm spot blossoming in her chest at the thought. “He’s brave.” She says after a moment, trying to give Rio some sort of compliment that feels weird against her sternum.

“Braver than me.” He smirks, finishing the rest of his whiskey in one gulp.

“Kids usually are.” Beth agrees, thinking about her own. She reaches for his glass and takes both of them to the sink, rinsing them out so that her hands have something to do.

She doesn’t know what it is but there feels like a blanket of tension wrapped around them, tight, just enough room for them to move but only for now—getting too taut to eventually breathe properly. How is she supposed to spend the whole night like this? Or worse, what if it’s longer than one night? She’s lost in her thoughts and doesn’t feel him behind her, one hand falling to her hip as he reaches past for a tea-towel.

She must flinch, visibly, because he steps to the side and removes his hand. Beth pulls back from him, swallowing, shaking her head as she focuses her vision on Rio, that it’s him who came up behind her—someone familiar, warm, and solid. His eyes are traveling over her face, reading her without her saying anything before a soft nod follows.

“Warez.” He guesses but it doesn’t sound like a question.

Beth feels an embarrassed flush travel up from her chest and settle on her cheeks. “I’m sorry, I…ever since the parking lot,” She rubs the back of her neck and lets out a soft sigh. “Anything out of my
line of vision coming up behind me—"

Rio puts his hand up to stop her, handing her the tea towel to dry her hands. “Nah you’re good. You don’t gotta explain.”

And yet for some reason she feels like she has to, nervous energy bubbling behind her sternum at how close he still is. They’ve always been in eachother’s personal space, their proximity how they communicate with one another, this shouldn’t bother her and yet her skin is crawling and the bruise fading on her face feels like its burning.

“You wanna learn somethin’?” He takes an experimental step forward and when she doesn’t mimic a step back, he reaches for her hand.

Beth watches him, his fingers long and hand warm against her own skin. His touch is pressured, thumb running along the inside of her palm, littered with expectations and muddled intentions. She raises her eyebrows, her stomach fluttering as she tries to connect the dots of his thinking.

“What did you have in mind?”

Rio smiles, amusement tugging the ends of his mouth as he purposely looks her up and down. “A lot of things, but I’m talkin’ about throwin’ a proper punch.”

She squeezes his fingers at the idea, she’s never been a physically violent person…she’s always telling her kids that being able to have a proper conversation matters so much more than throwing fists. But maybe Rio has a point in knowing how to hit someone, just in case, so that if something like Warez happens again she doesn’t have to depend on a gun in her purse that she might not always have access to.

“I don’t know if—”

“Oh come on, don’t act like you haven’t wanted to hit me at some point.”

Beth lets out a soft laugh, letting him guide her with his hands on her waist out of the kitchen. He positions her near the window and takes a step back from her so he can take the gun out of the back of his pants, freeing up his movements.

“Loosen up.”

His hands fall to her shoulders, massaging her collarbone, allowing him to take her apart just a little. Her fingers play with the bottom of his white t-shirt, rubbing the fabric between her fingertips like it might distract them from doing this.

“Easy for you to say.”

“Easy for me to do,” He agrees and then takes another step closer, his hips nearly pressing into her own as his one hand leaves her shoulder and brushes along the side of her face, “Want some help?”

She smiles up at him, can’t help it, “That’s not going to help.”

“Nah?” But he sounds amused and too much like he knows what he’s doing because her body uncoils against him. He leans his head down, his lips brushing along her own, “You sure?”

She wants to kiss him, her whole entire body aching to just lean in, to forget about this shitty apartment and the bounty on his head, about Warez and the reason they’re here in the first place, her drama with Dean and tension in her everyday life—all of it.
Beth’s hand falls to his chest, gently pushing him away. “Okay, I’m loose.”

Rio takes her hand again and forms it into a fist, his other hand squeezing her hip, “Left foot a little forward, right a little back,” He waits until she does it and angles her body, pushing her fist back. “You want to keep tension here,” His hand settles on her stomach, his palm warm and wide.

How is she supposed to concentrate when he smells so good? When his body is pressed against her own, fingers on her skin as he positions her.

“And I just lean back?” She sounds a little skeptical she’s going to be able to hit something like this; her body feels so awkward, not used to this.

He nods, pulling back to demonstrate for her. His body lines up perfectly, muscles flexing as his fist flies only to come into gentle contact with the wall behind her. He then watches her get into position again, only adjusting her hip ever so slightly before he takes a step back.

“Right here.” Holds up his hand, palm facing out and wait, he wants her to aim for that?

“You want me to hit you.” It’s not a question.

He smirks, “I want you to hit my hand, and yes, mean it.”

Mean it? She hesitates, her fist falling just a little as she starts to second guess herself. What if she doesn’t pack enough force or worse, she does, and she misses his hand and hits him in the face?

“I don’t know if I can do this.”

“You can,” He says firmly, the hand he has open reaching forward to brush his thumb over her cheekbone where the healing bruise is covered with makeup, “Picture Warez if that helps.”

She can feel him trying to reach her buttons, hovering over them like he might press. Beth lets out a soft sigh and when he puts his hand up again, she throws herself forward, knuckles connecting with his skin. It’s messy and she feels unbalanced but his expression tells her that she’s at least on the right track.

“Good, ma,” He licks his lips and puts up his palm once more. “Again.”

Beth positions herself, noting where he had to move her hip the last time and focuses before throwing another in his direction. She hits his palm square on and he grabs her fist, twirling her into his chest so her back hits his front.

She squirms and he squeezes around her arms, “Easy,” He whispers, his breath brushing along her collarbone and she’s suddenly packed too tight against him, visions of Warez against her back, cold concrete against her face, palms and forearms stinging with small cuts from the gravel.

Before Beth even realizes what she’s doing, she brings her elbow up and clocks it with his mouth, Rio taking a step back instantly and swearing. Her heart is hammering in her ears as she turns around, her eyes going wide as he bends at the waist a moment, his hand going to his lower lip that’s split open. There’s blood.

“Oh god, Rio. I’m—”

He puts his hand up to stop her, shaking his head as he straightens his back. He licks his lower lip, blood staining his teeth a little but he’s smiling. He’s not angry; instead he’s looking at her with keen interest, his hand rubbing along the scruff on his jawline.
“That’s actually where I was goin’ with that, you beat me to it.”

Rio backs up to spit into the kitchen sink, running water in it before he approaches her again. This time both his hands are up in front of his chest in a calming manner, just in case so he doesn’t spook her.

“Turn around again.” She hesitates and he watches the expression on her face before, “I won’t hold onto you for long, just wanna show you a higher angle for your elbow.”

She isn’t sure if that’s what she wants to hear or not but she does turn, closes her eyes as he wraps his arms around her, his body pressing into her own. He picks her elbow up and angles it back like she might hit him again and tilts it just a little bit.

“If you aim high enough, you can get someone’s cheekbone or the eye socket, which is better. But anythin’ works as you’ve demonstrated.”

He lets her go and when Beth turns she goes to touch his jaw, gently turning his chin so she can see the damage she’s done. There’s a drip of blood on the white collar of his t-shirt, somehow so bright and contrasted against the material.

“Sorry.”

Rio pushes her hand away with the back of his hand, shaking his head. “You don’t gotta be, I can take it.” He winks before slipping into the bathroom to take a look at his face and leans forward over the sink so he’s closer to the mirror.

Beth watches him for a moment as he pulls back, takes a washcloth and dabs at his lip before slipping his shirt over his head. Seeing him, soft tan skin littered with tattoos and beauty marks and scars all before her. Her stomach fills with heat, sinks lower between her legs and even though she tries she can’t look away. Her legs move on their own until she’s in front of him, her hand cupping his cheek and taking the washcloth from his hands.

Rio pauses, considering her a moment before leaning back against the sink, Beth tipping his chin so she can see the cut. She then puts the washcloth aside, her thumb running along his lower lip. He shifts, hands resting low on her waist, thumbs pressing against the bone. Her gaze skitters across his skin, tracing him with her eyes, hesitating on scars that tell stories she’ll probably never know.

When she’s caught in these moments with him, part of her wants to destroy them, another to sink deep and burrow. She never realizes how much she wants to lose herself to his touch; to the depth of his eyes.

But she has to ask because it eats her up inside when she least expects it, when she insists that it doesn’t bother her. “Is this…with anyone else?”

She doesn’t have a right to ask him that and she’s surprised he’s even entertaining her by responding. Her thumb is still against his mouth when he speaks, “Does it matter?”

“It matters to me.”

He sighs and presses the softest of kisses against the skin, “No. Not like this. Not for a while.”

And that seems to be all the motivation she needs to press herself up onto her toes and join their mouths together. The kiss is slow, intimate, making heat pop along her blood vessels as he wraps his arms around her. She knows this is reckless, something they probably shouldn’t make time for, they’re literally hiding out so Rio’s men can figure out a bounty.
And yet, whether she likes to admit it to herself or not, this is all part of the work with him that pulls her in—all-encompassing and entrancing like a black hole. Beth loves being good at something, how good it feels to be great at something, she loves the rush despite the consequences and she loves losing herself in him.

So she does.

As slow as it starts is how quickly it progresses, Rio’s not hesitant or gentle about lifting her up into his arms. He carries her into the bedroom and lays her down onto the bed, sinking between her knees as he kisses her, waist rolling into her own. A soft moan escapes her lips as she feels the hard outline of his cock against her inner thigh, against moistened heat; the feeling almost taking her breath away. Her fingers scrape through his short hair as Rio makes quick work of taking her shirt off.

She leans up and undoes the clasp of her bra and he takes his time to litter her pale skin with kisses, nipples hardening at the sensation. She pulls him up after a moment, has missed his mouth and slides her hand between their bodies so she can stroke the outline of his cock through his jeans.

A guttural noise leaves his throat, something delicious that wraps around her nerve endings like velvet. The heat in her chest is threatening to boil over between her legs. It feels desperate and wild, a sudden need to have him so much closer as he tugs down his jeans, her own quickly following. Her underwear are still on and she’s satisfied with herself that she pulled on a pair of blue lace, something not high-waisted and overly mom-ish or unattractive. Not that Rio seems to notice those things—her matching pajama sets, conservative sweaters or dresses, shorts with a cow print on them or boring underwear that make her feel less than sexy.

He never seems to care about that, instead he peels back the layers that everyone else sees and exposes raw nerve endings that really feel like her.

Rio kisses along her shoulder blades and finds a sweet spot on her neck as he tugs her underwear aside, not even bothering to take them off as he slides inside her. She gasps, her arms wrapping around his back to anchor herself to him and he arches her leg to wrap around his waist so he can thrust deeper.

Beth’s back curves so that her hips roll down and it takes them a few moments to find a pace because Rio’s breathing is quick, mesmerizing and she feels herself falling into it. Her hand snakes around the back of his neck, drawing him closer like that’s even possible, and presses their foreheads together.

They’re breathing the same air, bodies joined, his lips brushing against her own. They’re caught in this moment, Beth’s legs trembling as he holds her, pressing a kiss to her upper lip, something odd and intimate in way they haven’t been before. And something—breaks in her chest, gives way like an avalanche, she’s not sure what it is or where it’s come from or if she’ll ever need it again.

But she lets it go and Rio hooks a finger under her chin to kiss her before their pace begins again.

It doesn’t take them long, his grip insistent on the outside of her thigh, fingers bruising as she thrusts down into him. He quickens his pace the closer he gets and Beth feels that white-hot sensation that filled up her entire chest sink lower and finally boil over. She cums hard, fingernails digging into his shoulders, clenching him and pushing him over his edge.

She finds herself moaning his name, like a mantra, over and over in the softest of whispers; Rio kissing her jawline before hiding his face in her shoulder. They stay there for a few moments, connected, their breathing returning to normal before he slides out of her. He collapses beside her, on his back, scrubbing a hand over his face before cleaning himself up. Beth excuses herself to the bathroom, using another washcloth to wash her face and clean between her legs. There are red marks
on the outside of her thigh, on her neck, and she traces one of them with her fingertips before leaving.

She expects him to be completely dressed, out of bed, because this is how it usually goes. They’re quick to start over after sex, quick to separate and he’s usually gone within a few minutes of continuing their conversation. They both don’t mind it that way, it works with their partnership…

And yet there he is, pillows stacked against the bed and he still doesn’t have a shirt on, leaning against the headboard with his legs under the covers. Beth pauses, her mouth opening a little in surprise as she sees a small bowl of strawberries on his lap.

“Despite the look of this place, they’re fresh.”

A soft laugh tumbles out of her mouth as she grabs her shirt, forgoing the bra and slipping it over her head. She crawls into bed beside him, leaning against the pillows before plucking one out of the bowl.

“I just didn’t expect…” She trails off.

Rio licks his lips after taking a bite out of one, juice kissing the corners of his mouth. “What, for me to be here?” He smirks a little, “M’not going anywhere mami, especially with a bounty on my head.”

She feels a little foolish for assuming and concentrates on the strawberries instead, watching him bite out of another one, her mind traveling back to him in that restaurant and how he enjoyed ordering food—how he’d enjoyed *her* trying new things. She licks her lips, pulling the blankets up over her hips.

“You really like food.”

He gives her a look at that generalization before shifting in bed, the horrible mattress creaking underneath them. It’s not really big enough for both of them but with their legs pressed together no one is about to tumble off.

“I think a lot of people feel the same way about carnitas.”

She laughs softly, “No it’s different, I can see it in your eyes.” She reaches up and brushes her thumb along his scruff—just because she can, because in this room she feels like she can do that. Outside of this place, it’s different, *they’re* different. “You said you know how to cook, right?”

Rio licks his lower lip and sets the strawberries aside on the nightstand. “My abuela taught me everything I know.” She sees a layer pulled back like a curtain drawn.

“What’s your favorite thing to make?”

He pauses for a moment and just like that, like that same curtain closing, something changes on his face. She’s struck a nerve, opened up his skin and poked inside with something sharp. She can literally see his walls going back up even as he gives her a soft smile.

“Soup.” He teases, “From a can.”

Beth rolls her eyes, bumping her shoulder against his own in the small space but doesn’t try to pry again.

“Have you heard anything from your guys?”
Rio shakes his head, “Like I said, might as well get comfortable for the night.”

She feels like this has been three days wrapped into one night, exhaustion pulling on her nerve endings as she finally realizes how late it is. Before he can say it, because she can sense he’s going to,

“Please don’t say I look tired.”

A soft laugh vibrates his chest. “Just sayin’ if you want to close your eyes, I’ll wake you if anything changes.”

Beth settles down against the bed and wants to ask if he’s ever tired, not just in general but on a bone deep level, if ever sleeps well or finds that he can’t. He never seems exhausted and she wonders if it’s because that’s what happens after doing a job for so long or if he’s really good at hiding it.

Regardless of the answer, she never gets a chance to ask anything, because she’s asleep within minutes of her head hitting the pillow.

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Soft pressure on her side wakes her up, a hand wrapping around her hip. Beth jerks a little, turning to lie on her back, blinking into the dark.

“Hey, just me.” Rio whispers but he’s not in bed anymore. He’s standing on the other side of her, dressed again in his jeans and a black t-shirt, hand still on her giving a gentle squeeze. She swallows, feels a little disoriented as she runs hand over her face and wonders what time it is—there’s light trying to press itself through the curtains of the window.

“What’s going on?” She asks, voice streaked with sleep.

Rio licks his lips and kneels on the floor next to the bed, his arm caging her body so he’s drawn close to her, hand moving to settle in the ends of her hair. “You talk in your sleep, think you were havin’ a nightmare.”

Beth swallows, her hand moving to trace the scruff of his jaw, trying to piece together what she remembers. He’s right, she was dreaming something unpleasant—something about dirt and a mudslide, swallowing them whole, trying to swim back up only to taste blood. She shudders, Rio’s fingers brushing along the side of her neck.

“It’s nothing, I don’t even remember all of it.”

He watches her a moment, eyes tracing her own as if he’s trying to sift through her gaze and determine whether she’s lying or not. He then leans forward, pressing the softest of kisses against her mouth, the cut from her elbowing him scratching against her lower lip and sending a shiver down her spine.

He tastes like strawberries.

As he pulls back he stands in one fluid motion, moving to pocket the burner phone still on the kitchen table. “My boys called; the bounty has been taken care of. I’ll take you home.”

And just like that; another business transaction has been dealt with.

Beth sits up and nods, curling her hair around her ear and manages to pull herself out of bed towards the bathroom with her clothes. She stares at herself in the mirror, turning the water on to rinse her
face, hoping the cold water will wake her up. She sees Rio’s shirt on the ground, that spot of blood
still staining the collar of the white fabric.

Regardless of what he uses: soap, baking soda, hydrogen peroxide, lemon juice…it’ll never be the
same again.

Beth glances back up at herself, water dripping off her face and into the sink. She can relate.

Down in the dirt, indeed.

End Notes

wow, I can NOT believe that I wrote all this. Thanks to everyone who is giving this series a
chance and leaving me comments + feedback (those really drive me forward with writing and
warms my soul). I’m currently not taking prompts because I have so many goodies still in my
inbox BUT if you ever want to just talk brio or good girls, please stop by and say hello!
Blainesebastian.tumblr.com/ask

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