Beneath the Surface

by The5thDimension

Summary

As newly elected Student Council President, Alexa dreams of making this school year the greatest in its long history. When resident troublemaker Becky Lynch is forced into her life, she fears her dreams won't become a reality. Amidst lingering thoughts of wanting to do good and wanting to feel free, Alexa realizes that there's more to Becky than what she might think. There's more to people beneath the surface.

Notes

So, this is probably my first attempt at a multi-chapter thing in forever. Maybe since like 2015? I'm normally worried about these, since I'm terrible with consistency, but I had so much fun writing this that I couldn't let it stop here. Before I knew it, it became a thing. I'll probably update it every week or so? Depending on life things.

ANYWAY, this isn't exactly an original idea, but I hope you like the way I went about it! Thanks for reading!
Being president of the Student Council was such a thankless job. Alexa spent so many sleepless nights planning and organizing - sometimes working until dawn - for a school full of students who didn't grasp the inner workings of what went on behind the scenes. Did they realize how close they were to not having a Homecoming this year, and how much money came out of Alexa's own pocket to make it happen? Of course not. They were too busy yammering on about the hottest new gossip, whatever that was this week. Something about Dana's new nose. Or wait, was that last week? When did Mia slap Liv again? Well, whatever. Alexa didn't have time to pay attention to juvenile gossip.

When elections for Student Council happened, right before the start of summer break, it was only natural that Alexa would run for its top position. It was a rough campaign, having a grand total of zero artistic bones in her body and little tolerance for some of her classmates, but she was ecstatic upon being declared the winner. Barely beating out her competition - somehow winning the vote despite her wide array of nerdy interests and hobbies - the newly elected president was determined to make this year one to remember, changing the face of the school for many years to come. The students would be much happier, the future was set in stone. There was only one, gargantuan problem.

It was a lot of work.

Alexa had a tendency to stay in her own bubble, living her life as drama-free as was humanly possible in a high school. So naturally, it came as a complete shock when she learned just how incompetent the last president was, leaving a lasting legacy of apathy and pitiful excuses in their wake. The school year had barely begun, and she was already swamped with dozens of tedious tasks to take care of. Homecoming was the first - a truly hectic 'welcome back' for the entire Student Council. That was only five weeks ago, yet she didn't have a single moment since to rest her weary eyes - there was still so much to do. Settling the lunch menu debacle, enforcing the 'No leaving school before 3 PM!' rule, and there were already rumbles in the halls of a winter dance.

"Do you own a calendar? It's the middle of October!" she'd yelled when approached about it for the fifth time in a single hour. These new freshmen were so ungrateful.

Then there was the matter of sorting all of these student documents in alphabetical order, fitting them in much-too-small envelopes, and carrying them off to the principal's office like glorified mailmen. Truth be told, this felt too important of a job to entrust with a group of students, but Alexa didn't become president to complain. She wouldn't have a repeat of last year, not if she had anything to say about it.

Which was why she was licking envelopes in the Student Council room on a Thursday afternoon.

School had been let out an hour ago, if the clock hanging on the wall was actually accurate for once, and she was sure that her entire mouth was as dry as a desert. Her tongue continuously circled her lips, desperate to fill the chapped, barren wasteland with moisture.

"Are you sure you don't need me to stay?" Nikki asked, though her body was three-fourths of the way out the door. "I could fold more papers, or-"

"Seriously, it's fine," Alexa responded, shortly followed by a heavy sigh. "There's no reason we
should both suffer."

She wanted to beg her friend to stay, but she couldn't do that. As her Vice President, Nikki worked just as tirelessly as she did, offering to stay after the other members were sent home. It was Nikki's positive attitude that kept her afloat when she felt like she was sinking, drowning amidst tidal waves of stress. The least Alexa could do was release the young Scottish girl from this prison and offer her a small taste of freedom.

"Okay!"

Nikki didn't try to argue any further, and Alexa didn't blame her. Instead, with a burst of energy that spawned from nowhere, she practically bounced over to Alexa's side, wrapping her arms around her best friend and squeezing, not unlike an anaconda with its prey. "I love you, Alexa! I'll text you later!" And just as happily as she bounced over, Nikki bounced her way out of the room, leaving the president alone with her pile of disgusting envelopes.

Another twenty minutes passed at a snail's pace - a snail stuck in a pit of glue - and Alexa could feel her sanity slipping away. How many more files were left anyway? Surely not many. She double-checked the list, excited to see the progress she had made.

"A, B… E… Evans?! That's it?!"

She felt like her entire mouth was going numb, and she was only at the fifth letter. She wanted to crawl under a rock and hide forever, or at least get a few hours of sleep underneath it's dark interior. Her eyelids giving her little choice, Alexa folded her arms across the table, laying her cheek gently atop them. Before long, she could feel herself drifting off, giving into her body's desire for rest. She would only be a few minutes, she told herself as the beautiful darkness overcame her. She needed this - no, she deserved this, for working herself to the bone. Just a few-

"Wakey wakey!"

At the sound of someone's voice, Alexa quickly sat upright, cursing the universe for disturbing her three seconds of sleep. It took a moment for her vision to adjust to the waking world, but when it did, she was none too pleased with who, or rather who, she saw.

"Becky?"

Standing over her was the last person she would ever expect to see in the Student Council room. Seeing Becky Lynch actually attending school was a sight to behold in and of itself. She wasn't even following the dress code, substituting their mandatory blazers for a gaudy leather jacket. What era was she from?

"That's my name, don't wear it out."

God, Alexa was already starting to become increasingly agitated. From the way she dressed, to the way she talked as if nothing phased her, to the way she walked as if she owned the place. Well, she didn't own the place. Alexa owned the place!

The students. The students owned the place, she mentally corrected.

"Why are you here?"

"Can't a lass just stop by and see her favorite president?"

"No," Alexa deadpanned. She was clearly not in the mood for one of Becky's stupid stunts.
Becky smirked - that awful, awful Becky smirk that made Alexa's stomach churn - and casually plucked one of the many papers off of the table. "Evans? Oh, Lacey. Any dirt on her in here?"

Alexa could only watch in horror as Becky perused an incredibly confidential student file that she wasn't meant to be reading. "Give me that!" Alexa demanded, reaching out to snatch it from the taller girl's grubby mitts. Unfortunately, she was too slow, and from her seated position, Becky was able to effortlessly hold the paper high above her head.

"Relax, ya dope. Lacey's about as interesting as a piece of toast anyway." With that, Becky flung the paper back at Alexa, bopping the latter in the nose with it, much to her frustration.

"I am going to ask you one more time," Alexa said, her jaw tensing so tightly that she was sure it would give out. "Why. Are. You. Here?"

The Irish girl paid Alexa no heed, instead choosing to look anywhere instead of her person.

"Hello? Earth to idiot." The now-extremely-vexed president waved a hand to catch Becky's attention.

"Sorry, didn't hear you. Could you say that again?"

If Alexa was a foot taller - and perhaps another thirty pounds of muscle heavier - her palm would be slapping the smirk right off of that dumb, moronic face. She didn't know faces could be moronic until Becky Lynch was introduced into her life.

She had known Becky since their first days of high school. She was always such a slacker, and skipped so many classes throughout the years that Alexa was surprised they allowed her back for her final year. Their interactions involved a myriad of height jokes, a number of sarcastic jabs, and some unflattering faces made behind the other's back. Nothing malicious, but nothing overtly friendly either. She knew nothing about Becky's life though, not that she needed to. Becky's reputation preceded her - she didn't know anything about her personal life, but she knew of it. Every cliché rumor that one could think of was attached to Becky, like she was some kind of horrible magnet for trouble.

"Did you hear that Becky fought a guy twice her size and won? It was on the news and everything!"

"I heard Becky stole a cop car and they had to chase her down on the highway! It was on the news and everything!"

"Becky once robbed a bank and held the entire place hostage! It was on the news and everything!"

Ridiculous - none of them would ever watch the news!

Alexa never gave any credence to the gossip that floated around this school, and Becky was no bully, but when said gossip was ongoing over the course of three years, it was hard not to be exposed to some of it. Not that she honestly thought any of it was true. Heck, for all she knew, Becky spread those rumors herself to convince the other students that she was a 'badass,' or something just as stupid.

And sometimes it was maddening, being near Becky. She wanted to do good and tackle her responsibilities head-on, but some part of Alexa - a small part, a big part, she wasn't sure herself - wanted to live like Becky. To be carefree, to throw caution to the wind, to take a vacation from life because she felt like it and nothing more. But she couldn't. She was too much of a goody two shoes, too preoccupied with worrying about the future instead of living in the present.
So when Becky, the embodiment of the things that she secretly wanted out of her own life, woke her up from the world's shortest nap, it was impossible to hide her irritation.

"Do you live to make everyone's life as miserable as possible, or are you just a moron?" All bets were off when someone interrupted her precious beauty sleep.

"Little of column A, little of column B." Before Alexa could literally throw her hands around Becky's throat and throttle her, the redhead quickly spoke again. "Relax, Short Fuse. I'm supposed to be helping you."

At this, Alexa could only chuckle. She would ignore that short joke. For now. "Help me? Yeah right."

"Hey, I'm not exactly thrilled about this either." Becky walked over to the corner of the room and grabbed a chair, before clumsily dragging it over. The screeching of metal across the floor made Alexa ear's want to fall off. The blonde was apprehensive as Becky took a seat opposite her, a little worried that the troublemaker would reach over the table and stab her with a pen, hidden within the depths of her leather pockets.

So maybe some of the rumors freaked her out a teeny, tiny bit.

"I got sent here as punishment."

"What? What do you mean?" Alexa asked, failing spectacularly at hiding the panic in her voice.

"Ask the principal. Said I had to learn the value of 'hard work' and 'dedication,' and all that other crap. It was either this or get expelled."

"Expelled? Oh, how terrible. What would this school ever do without you?" Alexa held a hand over her heart, her lower lip trembling in an epic display of acting expertise.

"Yeah, yeah," Becky replied, shrugging off the blatant sarcasm. She rested her head against her palm, not making a single move to help whatsoever. "You can't even key a car without getting in trouble around here."

"You keyed someone's car?"

"Sure did!" Becky replied, brimming with cheer as if it was an accomplishment to be proud of. "Vanessa won't be forgetting that she's a bimbo anytime soon. Ah, the look on her face. I tell ya, there ain't many things sweeter."

It didn't surprise Alexa in the slightest that Becky would key someone's car, but it did speak volumes about the type of person Becky was, that she was so ready and willing to share her acts of vandalism. Not only that - she was practically bragging about it! This probably didn't touch the top fifty of the school rules that she had broken, undoubtedly approaching a record. Considering Becky's history, being sent to work for the Student Council was a slap on the wrist, as far as Alexa was concerned.

"You're the worst."

"She started it! Knocked my lunch right out of my hands for no reason! Serves her right."

Alexa wasn't entirely sure if she fully believed Becky - Vanessa was a member of the Student Council, after all. It wouldn't have been the biggest shock in the world, though. Not every member of the council shared in her ideals and vision for the future of the school.
Suddenly, like a car that had recently been keyed by a future inmate, a grim thought came speeding around the corner and sent her flying.

"Um. Exactly how long does this punishment last?"

Becky's smirk returned with a vengeance, a wicked twitch of the lips that wouldn't stay dead. It came back like a zombie, ready to feast upon a poor, unsuspecting girl. "I skipped a lot of English classes, so I'm kind of slow with words and all," she joked, a bad sign for Alexa. "But I think the word he used was 'in-def-i-nite-ly.'"

Alexa wasn't sure if a woman was trapped in burning building nearby, or if that high-pitched screaming was coming from inside of her own head.

"I can tell by your blank stare that you're just as excited as I am!"

She didn't know how to respond to Becky's fake cheerfulness - didn't know how to talk anymore. Everything that she worked so hard for was now in jeopardy of crumbling beneath her feet. This was supposed to be her year, but now she was stuck with this. With her. If there truly was an otherworldly force out there, they must have the most sadistic sense of humor imaginable. Either that or Alexa was an assassin in a past life, paying for her forgotten sins in this new timeline.

The worst timeline.

"You alright there, lass?"

"Just. Just give me a second." She put a hand to her head, attempting to alleviate the headache that was beginning to form. It was impossible - the real headache was sitting right in front of her in a tacky leather jacket. "I can't believe this is happening."

Becky chuckled. "Believe it, sister. I'm part of the Student Council now!"

"Let's make one thing clear here," Alexa nearly shouted, shoving her finger so forcefully in Becky's direction that it could have pierced a sheet of metal. "You're not 'part of the Student Council,' got it? You're just here until they find some other poor sucker to take care of you."

"Your imitation of me needs practice."

"Be quiet. If you're going to take up space, stop talking and make yourself useful." Lifting half of the pile of work that sat on the table - the pile of work that was still much bigger than the completed pile - Alexa unceremoniously dropped it in front of the Irish girl. "You take one of these." The blonde grabbed one of the student files, wagging it around in the air, to confirm that Becky was paying attention. "You make sure that it's in alphabetical order. You fold it - neatly! - and put it into the envelope." Picking up a nearby white envelope, Alexa demonstrated the entire process, her movements stiff and forceful due to excess rage still coursing through her body. When she was finished, she slammed it down atop the 'finished' pile. "So easy, even a caveman can do it."

Becky rolled her eyes at the emphasis on 'caveman,' and it was clear that she wasn't taking Alexa seriously in the slightest.

"Well?"

The delinquent refused to move, or acknowledge Alexa's existence at all.

"I swear, if y-"
"Do you ever stop talking?"

"Me?" Alexa could not believe what she was hearing. "All you've done in the past fifteen minutes is annoy the living hell out of me. But I talk too much? You ar-"

"Keep it down. I get enough lectures in class."

Alexa's very short fuse was becoming shorter. She fought every natural inclination to scream, deciding that it wasn't worth the effort. She didn't have the spare energy to waste. Not on someone like Becky.

"If you think about it," the woman in question continued. Much to Alexa's shock, she was actually beginning to do some work, carelessly grabbing at student files without much thought. "That's probably why everyone else left."

And right when Alexa was going to commend Becky for doing something productive, the insults came flying back in - a pesky mosquito that she just couldn't swat.

"FYI, they didn't leave. I sent them home."

"That wasn't very smart of you, was it?" Becky replied between licking envelopes. She was doing everything completely wrong, and those envelopes were never going to stay closed, but Alexa didn't care at this point. At least the caveman was doing something. She would just have to grin and bear the slew of insults. "What, you think being president makes you some kind of superwoman?"

"Get real. They were tired."

"You were practically in bed when I walked in."

"What's your point?"

"That maybe you're taking this a little too seriously. You're going to make yourself sick."

Alexa didn't have any snarky remarks for that. She was taking this seriously, because it was serious to her. Sure, being president of the entire student body was rough, and it did have its downsides, but Alexa genuinely wanted to make the school a better place. It was her last year - her final chance to leave some kind of mark on the place that she spent so much time at. That mark needed to be a positive one.

Of course, she didn't mention any of that to Becky. It was people like her - troublemakers - that were making her job harder. Alexa knew that she could be uptight, and sometimes a little rude, but she wasn't keying people's cars because she'd been slighted in some obscure way. No, someone like Becky could never understand her desires.

"What's the matter? Cat got your tongue?" Becky joked, yet again.

"I don't have the mental energy for you, okay? Keep working."

Her head now buried in her work, Alexa couldn't see the bewildered stare she received from the girl in front of her. Relief washed over her like a warm shower when no cheeky remark left Becky's lips. Instead, they sat in somewhat-awkward silence as they busied themselves.

She could hear Becky lazily slapping envelopes into the pile of finished files. Deciding that it was safe to take the tiniest of peeks, Alexa glanced upwards from her own work to look across the table. Becky was clearly bored out of her mind, and Alexa wasn't entirely sure if she would survive this
boredom either. She was feeling it herself - the unrelenting boredom that accompanies doing mundane tasks. She checked what was left of the pile and instantly regret it. There was still about half of the work left to be done.

Reaching for a few more papers from the bunch - taking care to avoid touching Becky's hand like the plague - Alexa quickly skimmed them over, mumbling to herself as she did.

"Lewis. Linn. Logan. Lynch."

Lynch? Becky Lynch?

Before she fully realized that she was holding Becky's student file between her fingertips, it was promptly snatched from her grasp.

"Hey!"

"I'll be holding onto that, thank you very much."

Alexa couldn't believe the gall of this girl. How could she just snatch it like that? Did she have no sense of manners or decency at all?!

A devilish plot suddenly crossed Alexa's mind. A smirk - perhaps a little too Becky-ish for her liking - played across her face. It was her turn to have a little fun.

"Don't want me reading your file, huh?" Alexa asked, barely holding back a sinister laugh.

Becky narrowed her eyes as she stared Alexa down. "What're you getting at?"

"Oh, nothing. Just that there must be something extra awful in there that you don't want anybody seeing, you know?"

"Knock it off, blondie."

"I wonder what it could be," Alexa put a hand to her chin, pretending to be deep in thought. There was a sharp intake of breath, so sharp that it startled Becky. "You really did steal a cop car, didn't you?!"

"Wha- You're deranged."

Becky seemed to be caught off-guard by Alexa's interest in her past.

Perfect.

"Ooh! I got it!" Alexa stated, all too gleefully, as she ran down her mental list of ludicrous crimes. "You robbed a bank, right? How big was the diamond?"

"About as big as the bruise I'm gonna leave on your arm if you don't stop talking."

"No, that's too plain for someone as big and tough as you!" Alexa teased, disregarding Becky's threats entirely. "You ran a crime syndicate! That's gotta be it. Shaking people down for money, catching people in alleyways. That sounds like you. How about it. Am I close?"

Alexa nearly let out a shriek as Becky rose out of her chair, slamming her palms against the table. She realized just how much bigger the redhead menace was - the size of her well-toned arms was enough to make Alexa gulp in terror as she towered over her. She could swear that Becky's nostrils were emitting smoke. She struck a nerve. It was her intention, but she wasn't prepared for this
reaction.

"Go ahead, keep making fun," Becky practically dared. "You have no idea what I've had to go through."

Neither woman moved an inch, and Alexa was growing more uncomfortable with each passing moment. Hours passed in seconds, and breathing was becoming uncomfortable. Finally, after an eternity of angry glaring, Becky relented, taking her seat once more. It was only when Alexa was sure that the tension had calmed some that she felt it was safe to speak.

"You're being way too dramatic."

"Yeah," Becky scoffed. "You would think that, wouldn't you?"

Alexa was confused. What did she mean by that? She asked as much, and received another scoff in reply.

"Come on. Look at you. Living your fancy, preppy life. Coasting on by as mommy and daddy pay your troubles away. Being happy about some dumb job that means nothing."

Becky laughed again, preventing the blonde from cutting her off. "'President.' You couldn't be the president of a bunch of preschoolers. Hell, you're about as tall as one. Why don't you give it a shot?"

At this point, Alexa had gone from annoyed to furious. It was one thing to poke fun at her height, but to act as if she knew anything about her - like her whole life was sunshine and rainbows. Like she worked for nothing and got handed everything. This position meant everything to Alexa. It was the first time that all of her hard work felt like it amounted to something. She wasn't going to let some future criminal take that away from her!

"Mommy and daddy? I worked for everything I ever got!" Alexa was unable to keep from shouting. She tried, she really did, but Becky's poking and prodding led her into pushing the wrong buttons. "I sacrificed so much for this. You could never understand what it's like! Being alone, having my parents constantly asking me if I'm okay, missing birthdays and weddings and everything else! You don't know me!"

"And you think you know me? You don't know anything about me!" Becky shouted in response.

"I know that for the past three years, you've been a complete nightmare that everyone around you has had to put up with," Alexa countered. "So yeah, I don't 'know' you. No one does. Who the hell would want to?!!"

She was proud of herself - proud for being able to stand her ground against Becky Lynch. She didn't know where this surge of bravery came from, but she wasn't going to let Becky push her around. She was proud, she felt proud.

That was, until, she noticed how crushed Becky looked.

Becky, the girl with a smirk glued on her face, and an omnipresent playful attitude looked crushed. She looked vulnerable, something that Alexa Bliss had never seen before. Holding her arm like a wounded animal, like she was trying to keep a shattered wall from falling to pieces, like she was trying to keep herself from falling to pieces. Alexa didn't know how or why her words had the effect that they did, but whatever it was, it hurt Becky, somehow.

And Alexa was disgusted with herself.
How could she, even for the briefest of moments, have felt proud? There was nothing to be proud of. Hurting people wasn't something to feel good about. It wasn't like Alexa to stoop so low, just to get under someone's skin. That wasn't the type of person she was. That wasn't the type of example that she wanted to set.

Giving Becky another minute to compose herself, Alexa took a deep breath, preparing to say what she knew she had to.

"Sorry."

Time stood still. Alexa's hands felt around her own throat, wondering where that sound came from. She realized that the apology didn't come from her own mouth. It came from Becky's.

"What?"

"I said sorry. Geez, are you deaf?" Becky's insult didn't have the same tone as before. She sounded defeated. "I shouldn't have said what I did. It was too much."

A thick silence filled the air - so thick that Alexa was sure she was going to choke on it. She didn't know what to say. She didn't know what she could say to remedy this… whatever it was. She couldn't believe that things had escalated this much, but something about Becky had a tendency to make her emotions run haywire. How a single person could make such a jumbled mess of her feelings was beyond her understanding.

"I'm the one that should apologize. I crossed a line."

"I deserved it."

"No one deserves that."

Becky, once she heard Alexa, gained a little more life, her smirk rising from its grave once more. It was the only time that Alexa was happy to see it.

Happy? Why was she happy? Her feelings really were a mess.

"Are we cool then?"

"We're cool. Well, one of us is. As for you," Alexa gave Becky a once-over, eyeing her up and down. "You need to work on it. Leather? Really?"

"Don't go dissing my jacket!"

This silence, unlike the last, was comfortable - Alexa could feel the tension making its way out, the atmosphere slowly changing for the better as the uneasiness lifted from the room like a heavy smog.

"It feels like we're having some kind of a 'moment' here. Like a… weird sitcom."

"How can you call me deranged and then say something like that with a straight face?"

Becky smiled at her. Not a smirk - no, this was an actual smile. Alexa had to admit, that charming smile suited her far more than a smirk ever did. She was a fan.

"Maybe we really don't know each other," Becky said, out of the blue. "I guess not everything is so black and white. There's some, like, gray spots in there. In the middle. Erm, between the two. You get what I mean."
"You're not very good at being profound."

"I-I'm trying my best here. I'm not used to this stuff."

"I appreciate it anyway."

The two exchanged another smile, before silently continuing their work. Alexa wasn't sure what this smile was - one of forgiveness, of mutual respect? - but even though she didn't know much about Becky, she could definitely understand her a little better now. She had judged Becky harshly based on the everyday gossip that floated down the river of rumors, wrongfully assuming she was some callous jerk, but there was always more to it than that. There was always more beneath the surface. As president of the Student Council, and - more importantly - as a human being, she needed to give people a chance. Becky, despite how crude and irritating she could be, needed to be afforded that chance too.

She wondered if Becky would offer the same chance for her.

Lost in a sea of thoughts, Alexa didn't realize how rapidly the work seemed to be getting done now. With a noticeable change in attitude, Becky was moving twice as fast as before. Better late than never, she mused.

It was amazing how fast a menial task could go by when the afternoon's banter was all but exhausted. After another few minutes, Becky practically leapt from her seat, stretching her aching limbs once she was certain everything was finished.

"It's over! Sweet Jesus, it's over!"

Alexa wanted to celebrate too, but her mouth muscles were too tired to function. She gave Becky a nod, thanking the universe that she could go home.

"Well," Becky began. "I'd say my first day of Student Council was a success, wouldn't you?"

First day.

The words hit Alexa like a brick.

"S-so you weren't joking about this being an indefinite punishment."

"On the bright side, at least now we'll get to know each other better, huh?"

The line between seriousness and joking was nothing but a blur. Whether or not Becky was being sincere, Alexa didn't care. She was too tired to care.

"I'll be up bright and early for the next meeting. Try not to miss me too much."

The meeting. Oh god. Oh no. Oh god. How was Alexa going to explain this to the rest of the Student Council? What could she say? She wanted to pull her hair out.

"The meeting. Right," Alexa said, stuck in a state of permanent disbelief.

"See you then… Madam President."

With one last toothy grin, she walked away, out of the room, leaving a physically and emotionally drained president to slowly come to terms with her new reality - the reality that Becky Lynch really was part of the Student Council.
Things might not always be so black and white, but there was no room for a gray area in this battle of extremes.

This was going to be an unmitigated disaster.

Chapter End Notes

I also really love Crossbliss, just so you know.

If you want to see me talk about how women's wrestling is the best from time to time, feel free to follow me on Tumblr @starchild-5.
Hey, so did you know that Ricochet's real name is Trevor? I didn't until I was today years old. It may or may not be relevant to this chapter. Also, some Game of Thrones spoilers from four years ago. Not everyone will get these references, but that's okay. I am a man of dated references.

It had been an interesting few days. Seeing Becky during their few shared classes didn't instantly make Alexa scowl like it used to. Small exchanges and passing 'hellos' were a common enough occurrence between the two. The snark didn't change - they wouldn't be who they were without some snark - but it wasn't the same. Alexa couldn't say how, but it wasn't. She didn't know what they were. Acquaintances? Colleagues? English and Physics pals? Whatever it was, she was just glad that they were on semi-good terms before today's meeting started.

And it was only natural that Nikki would be the first to ask about the Becky situation. Mostly because she was the only one that bothered to arrive earlier than the scheduled meeting time. It was a question that Alexa had expected to be bombarded with multiple times this morning. She expected it, and yet still didn't know how to answer it, exactly.

"It's some sort of extended detention thing," she said.

"McMahon?"

"Yep."

"Oh. She doesn't bite, does she? I heard she might bite."

Alexa's palm met her forehead at record speeds, nearly breaking the sound barrier. Leave it to Nikki to fall victim to the rumors. Not that Alexa had much room to talk after the envelope debacle, but Nikki was especially susceptible to that sort of thing. She was so innocent, and it made Alexa want to protect her with all of her might.

"No, she doesn't bite. But between you and me, she can be a little feisty."

"Ooh, feisty! Sounds fun!"

Nikki, having one of her extreme bouts of Nikki-ness, was much too excited about this potentially catastrophic and extremely volatile situation. It wasn't surprising. Nothing about her best friend really surprised her anymore.

"If anything," she continued. "You'll have to help me wrangle her in."

Feeling something tapping her in the shoulder, Alexa turned around.

"Hello. I'm standing right here."

Becky grumbled in annoyance as Alexa turned around again, facing away from her to address Nikki.
"She'll be fine."

Alexa had to admit, Becky showing up this early was a shock. She was amazed that Becky showed up at all, let alone before the other members. She was either very dedicated to reforming her dastardly ways, or she was a very bored person. Of course, it was obviously the latter. Regardless of the intent behind it, Becky was here, proving to the stressed-out president that this all wasn't, in fact, a cookie-induced coma as she had been hoping.

"Quick question," Becky said.

"No questions," Alexa retorted, shooting it down immediately.

"If you're Madam President-"

"I said no questions. And stop calling me that!"

"If you're Madam President," Becky went on, ignoring Alexa's protests. "What does that make me? What's my amazing title going to be?"

Right. Becky didn't really have any sort of place in the Student Council, did she? There was the Treasurer, a few separate roles for planning events, class representatives, a few lesser representatives for sports teams that she couldn't remember, and, of course, the Vice President. They were all taken and accounted for. She had no idea what Becky would be doing. She wasn't fully convinced that this wasn't a feverish daydream. Although typically, those involved a lot more dragons and three-headed cows.

Alexa had a vivid imagination.

"Uh, how's 'Number 4' sound?"

The redhead raised her brow in confusion, trying to think of a way in which that made sense. "Number 4?"

"Yeah. Your future spot in a police lineup."

Alexa let out an audible 'ouch!' as she felt her arm meet the wrong end of Becky's fist.

"You asked for it."

The petite girl didn't fight it, rubbing leftover soreness away from her shoulder. "I seriously can't think of anything."

"Come on. I'll die of boredom if I have to sit here listening to you stuffy types talk about mystery meat for an hour."

"That was last week's meeting."

"Exciting. What about a class rep? Or… or VP? 'Madam Vice Pres' has a nice ring to it." Becky repeated the name multiple times to get a feel for it on her tongue.

"I'd like to introduce you to Nikki Cross - Vice President," Alexa stated, motioning towards Nikki.

"You're kidding. She acts like a kid."

"First rule: you can be rude to me, but never to her," Alexa said, no traces of anything but seriousness to be found in her voice. For her troubles, she received another confused look from
Becky. "I know Nikki might seem weird, but she's…"

Pausing to get a good look at Nikki, Alexa and Becky were both witness to the hyperactive girl swaying back and forth in her chair, humming a little tune as she did. The smile never left her face, and while normally Alexa would fight anyone to protect that smile, it was not helping her case right now. "Okay, she's a bit out there."

"Understatement of the century."

"But! She's loyal. She's dedicated. She's the most positive person I know, and she's my best friend." Though Nikki couldn't see it, Alexa was smiling, bits and pieces of the good times they shared together flooding her memories. It almost brought a tear to her eye.

"Are you crying?"

"Shut up," Alexa said, shoving a giggling Becky.

It was nice to see Becky this way. Happier, more upbeat. It was less of the horrible Becky that she invented in her mind, and more of the Becky that she was slowly getting to know. She had always been such an enigma - a puzzle that didn't seem to come with the correct pieces in the box. Seeing this more lighthearted side of her - shades of what she saw after their argument the other day - was different. Good different.

"Anyway, you can't be VP."

"My job is super important though!"

"Your 'job'?” Alexa asked incredulously. "What job is that? Blabbing my ear off?"

Becky shook her head, as if disappointed that Alexa didn't understand some deep, philosophical intricacy of her position.

"I'm basically your personal assistant. Like a Secretary, but ten times better."

"Is that what you are? Could've fooled me."

"Hey, I licked the damn envelopes, didn't I? I did my job."

"Some job. Half of them came unglued as soon as you left!"

"You saying my tongue isn't wet enough for you?"

"Well maybe if it was wetter we could've-"

Alexa paused. She could feel Nikki's wide-eyed stare boring holes into the back of her head, marveling at her back-and-forth with Becky. Great. Now Nikki probably thinks she's a freak. She shook her head, ridding herself of the silly thoughts that wanted to claw their way into the deepest recesses of her mind. Something about arguing with Becky really brought out the worst of her thoughts.

"Keep going!" Nikki said, clapping her hands together. "It was really getting good."

"So!" Alexa shouted, trying to bring some order back. "Anything else come to mind? And no VP."

"Let's see." Anytime Becky said something like that, Alexa knew it was bad news. For her, and the rest of the Student Council. Possibly the world, too, if Becky couldn't be properly contained. "You're
basically queen here, yeah?"

"Did you even pass History? Queen. President. Monarchy. Democracy. Not the same."

"Who cares?" Becky waved her hand, effectively waving away Alexa's comment as well. "They're both at the top of the ladder."

"Fine, whatever," Alexa said, flippantly. She wanted Becky to stop talking more than she wanted to be asleep, and she desperately wanted to be cuddling with her pillow right now.

"If you're queen, that makes me... Royal Knight? Everyone calling me 'Sir Becky' would be pretty sick." Becky was a little too excited, much to Alexa's dismay.


"You're right. That's not cool enough."

Was Becky listening to a word she was saying?

"You've seen *Game of Thrones*.

It came out as more of a statement than a question. Alexa didn't want to admit that not only had she seen the show, but she'd also read every single novel thus far, multiple times over. She couldn't help it - she loved fantasy settings! It would be pointless to deny that she had ever seen the most popular show to air in an entire decade. She also didn't need the, 'You've gotta watch *Game of Thrones*!' spiel.

"Yeah," she replied, begrudgingly. The lesser of two evils.

"Nice. Since I'm like Irish Tyrion, what with my amazingness and all." The eyeroll from Alexa was automatic. "I guess that makes me Hand of the Queen."

"Becky. Do not."

"Is that not to your liking? My apologies, Your Grace," Becky stated, kneeling down before Alexa. The spectacle caused Nikki to cackle uncontrollably, while Alexa looked down on her in embarrassed frustration.

"G-get up, you idiot!" Alexa shouted. She looked around to make sure that no one - aside from her Vice President - noticed anything. Frantically, she tugged on Becky's arm, pulling the laughing girl to her feet. "You just live to embarrass people."

"Is there anything else worth living for?" Becky brought her head down low, bowing before her queen. "Your Grace."

"Oh my god. If I give you Hand of Whatever, will you stop calling me that?"

"Sure thing, Madam President."

Alexa was two seconds away from telling Nikki to close her eyes, so that she wouldn't have to witness a live beating.

"I'm already stressed enough as it is."

"How can you be this stressed this early in the morning?"
Though no words were verbally spoken, Alexa's cold-as-ice stare, cold enough to extinguish the flames of the sun's surface, told the entire story.

"Oh, I get it. Gotta explain me away to the others like I'm your dirty little secret."

Just like that, the mood changed. Alexa could feel a torrent of heat dot the skin of her cheeks, and she didn't have to look at Nikki to know that her Cheshire Cat-like grin had doubled in size, if such a feat were possible. Becky, however, seemed fine. As usual.

"Do you have any idea what the words you say mean half the time?" Alexa questioned.

"Did I say something weird?"

She wanted to tell Becky to quit playing dumb, but it became apparent that she wasn't playing. She was just clueless.

"Never mind," Alexa said, wanting nothing more than to leave it at that and change the topic. "Yes. I am stressed because I have to explain you away like a 'dirty little secret.'" She swiftly turned to Nikki, shushing her before she could speak.

"Cheer up. Things will be fine." Much to Alexa's chagrin, Becky threw an arm around her shoulders, an arm which the blonde forcefully pushed away.

"You don't know that," she said, dusting off invisible Becky residue from her shoulder.

"Course I do. As Hand of the Queen, it's my duty to slap their heads off if they try anything funny. I'll make sure they won't Jon Snow ya. You know, 'For the Council.'"

Becky thrust her arm forward, pantomiming the stabbing death of the Student Council president with a sword made of one-hundred percent pure air. Alexa wasn't sure whether Becky was trying to cheer her up, or make things worse, but she remained unamused either way.

"They're not going to stab-"

"What the hell is Becky doing here?!

As if the gods were frowning down upon her, the other members of the Student Council began filing into the room. Mandy was the first of the group to discern that there was an extra occupant, but the others soon followed. It was like a domino effect of crestfallen faces and murmured complaints, starting with Mandy and ending with Bayley.

"Uh. Well, you see."

"'Sup?"

Alexa's insides were screaming, but her mouth wanted to join them. She was a volcano ready to erupt, and Becky's laid-back attitude was only stoking her flames.

"Alexa?"

"Is this a prank?"

"How did she get in?"

"She keyed my car!"
"Hear me, hear me!" Becky's voice rose above all the others. Standing by Alexa's side at the front of the room, she commanded the attention of the disgruntled Student Council. "Anyone that has any business with the Queen of the Council…"

"You are so dead."

Becky barreled on through, letting Alexa's whispered words fall on deaf ears. "Has to go through the Queen's Hand first. And if you have a problem with that, then feel free to speak up, if you've got the guts. I'm talking to you, Vanessa, you bimbo."

An air of quietness befell the room, excluding the sound of a low, murderous growl coming from Vanessa's throat. Alexa simply looked to the ceiling, asking the gods why they would do this to her. Not that they were listening - they were probably laughing at the spectacle that they surely willed into existence. She swore that she would never forgive them.

"Did she say 'Queen's Hand'? Like Gam-"

"Like Game of Thrones!" Nikki chimed in.

Nikki wasn't much help.

"Are you for real with this?" This time it was Sonya, the second half of the planning committee, along with Mandy, that stepped forward. "Is she seriously part of the Council now? Are you out of your mind?"

She gave Alexa no time to answer the first question before firing off the second, more insulting one. Alexa didn't know what irked her more, the fact that Sonya was yelling in her face, or the fact that anyone thought that she invited Becky of her own volition.

"Look!" It was time for Alexa to put her foot down and remind them who ran the show around here! "I didn't ask for Becky to be here, alright?! It's all part of some weird... karmic punishment."

"For keying Vanessa's car," Becky added, a hint of pride in her voice.

"It cost me two. Hundred. Dollars! To get my car fixed."

"My bleeding heart aches for ya, lass."

Becky was as unapologetic as ever, and Alexa had to slap her in the arm to get her to stop her antagonizing of the angry class rep.

"I know you can't stand Becky right now, and for good reason." A 'hey!' was heard from Alexa's side, but it was promptly drowned out. "But the sooner we start the meeting, the sooner we can get out of each other's hair. Okay?"

It was less of a confident leader taking charge and more of a desperate plea to get everyone to calm down. Nonetheless, Alexa breathed a sigh of relief when everyone began to take their seats. While everyone sat in their designated spots, Alexa stood at the front of the room - Nikki sitting to her left, and Becky to her right. Huh. She really was starting to feel like a queen.

'Bad Alexa. Bad,' she scolded, mentally.

With order relatively restored, she saw it fit to begin.

"So, any new business for today?"
Becky was - as Alexa could've guessed in her sleep - largely disinterested in the whole ordeal as soon as it began, but the subtle hints of curiosity adorning her face were unmistakable. Before Alexa could chastise the newest member for propping her feet up on the desk in front of her, Mandy's arm launched skyward like a rocket.

"Our only order of business today is the Halloween Dance, which Sonya and I will obviously be setting up ourselves!"

There was something about the way that Mandy was just so totally excited about this that made Alexa want to gag. It's not that she hated Mandy and Sonya. She very wildly extremely massively extraordinarily disliked them, but never hate. 'Hate' was a strong word.

A strong, accurate word.

"The best part is that, thanks to Mandy's excellent planning for Homecoming."

"Oh stop, it was both of us!"

This was just unbearable. They didn't make mention of Alexa's contributions whatsoever! And poor Nikki, who spent hours every day cleaning up their messes and making dozens of phone calls, didn't get so much as a thank you, fake or otherwise. Alexa doubted her friend cared - the Scot was in full, 'happy to be here with my best friend' mode, her legs swinging idly from her chair as the proceedings went on. But it was the principle of the matter!

"Okay okay," Sonya continued. "Thanks to both of us, we have roughly a thousand dollars to spare for the dance."

"We charge five bucks for tickets, and we'll double it, easily."

A thousand dollars? The thought of their leftover Student Council budget being poured into another dance, so soon after the first one, filled the president with dread. They could be using this money for something better than a dance. Still, it wasn't like she could fight it. Mandy and Sonya were too powerful of a duo. They would have the others siding with them through sheer force of will.

"So stupid."

Everyone in the room tried to place where the voice had come from. Alexa wanted to believe more than anything that it hadn't come from the person sitting to her right. She wanted to live in a state of ignorance and denial, to live peacefully in a made-up fantasy world where the meeting went on, uninterrupted, where she would go home and have a long, long nap afterwards.

If only she were so lucky.

"Excuse me!" Marching past Sonya, Mandy stormed to the front of the room, the force behind each step practically shaking the earth. "I couldn't hear you from back there. What was that you said?"

She glared daggers in Becky's direction, attempting to intimidate her as she had done to so many others in the past. Alexa knew what Mandy didn't - that Becky wasn't someone she could intimidate.

"I said your ideas are stupid."

Now it was Sonya's turn to step in, the brazen young woman stepping in front of Mandy, as if to shield her from Becky's words. Were it any other duo, Alexa might have found the action cute. It was only one conniving bully defending another - nothing cute about it.
"Did you just call Mandy stupid?" Sonya asked - a powder keg ready to explode.

"No. But now that you mention it, Mandy is kind of stupid," Becky said - a match, looking to set ablaze anything in her path.

"What," Mandy said, tagging herself back in. "You think you can come up with something better?"

"A four-year-old could come up with something better."

The quiet murmurs of the other council members worked quickly to fill the void of silence left by Becky's remarks. Everyone wanted to weigh in on the situation. Well, everyone except Trevor, who was shrinking into his chair to avoid becoming collateral damage in this war of words. There was also Nikki, who was fidgeting nervously. And was Vanessa laughing?!

The first instinct of any Student Council president would be to defuse the situation, using their gift of speech and innate leadership skills to set the example for everyone else to follow. Instead, Alexa went with her second instinct - the instinct that told her to stay out of this and let the hotheads duke it out. One of those hotheads was bound to become cooler.

"Hello? President Loser? Are you going to let her talk to us like that?"

So much for staying out of it. Suddenly dragged into a debate that she wanted nothing to do with, Alexa didn't know what to do. It would be well within her right to tell Becky off, for insulting Mandy, and for causing so much chaos this early in the morning. No one would blame her, and most would encourage it.

She couldn't do that though. People needed to be afforded a chance. It's what she resolved herself to do - to give people a chance. If anyone needed a chance to show their true colors, it was Becky.

"As president of the Student Council," she said, a room full of students looking up at her expectantly. "It's my job to make sure that every member gets their fair say. Every member. That includes Becky. So, the floor is yours."

It was her decision to make, but Alexa didn't dare try to read the room. She could picture Vanessa's face, contorted into one of fierce anger, and she doubted that Mandy and Sonya's faces would be much different.

Becky, meanwhile, was taken aback, her mouth agape, her face unmoving. They exchanged a brief glance, and for the smallest of moments - a fraction of a second that would be lost in an ocean of time - Alexa swore she felt something. Trust, understanding, compassion. Something. Maybe it was some sort of breakthrough, or maybe she was mistaken and it was nothing.

Maybe it was everything, and neither of them knew it yet.

"Thank you, Madam President. Although, I would greatly appreciate it if you could call me by my official title."

Becky stood up from her seat, bowing slightly before Alexa. The words 'Don't push it' couldn't have been mouthed any faster.

"Listen to me." Becky circled around to the front of the room, making sure to stick her tongue out at Mandy for good measure. "The people are tired of dances."

Since when was Becky a spokesperson for 'the people?' Another question on Alexa's mind that would likely forever go unanswered.
"We had a Christmas dance. A New Year's dance. A Valentine's Day dance. A freakin' St. Patrick's Day dance - Oh, by the way, for you two bozos," Becky made sure to point directly at the two-person planning committee. "It's 'Paddy' not 'Patty.' Google is your friend."

"Let's wrap it up here, Becky," Alexa stated, impatiently waiting for Becky to make her point before heads started rolling.

"My point is that we don't need another lame dance that half of the school is going to skip out on. It's Halloween, for Christ's sake. We could plan some sort of… I dunno, some sort of Fair."

"Fair. Like a... 'Fright Fest,' or 'Halloween Havoc?'" Alexa added, the word 'Fair' having piqued her interest.

"Yes! Exactly! It would be easier to bring a group of friends. Less stress to look decent, a safe environment. We could have booths for people to win prizes, one of those apple-bobbing competitions. Just show up in a costume and go nuts."

So there were some good ideas hidden underneath that messy mop of brightly-colored hair. The idea of a Halloween Fair was, in Alexa's humble opinion, much better than the ninth boring dance in as many months. The Fair even addressed their most frequent complaints from the student body, and the principal, regarding these events. For someone who skipped more classes than there were stars in the night sky, the Irish girl was strangely attuned to the needs of the students.

"I guess you wouldn't be coming then. Considering you're a friendless joke," Sonya said, pure venom spewing from her lips.

Alexa waited for a comeback that never came. Becky's demeanor was completely different, hurt, the words cutting through her previously determined spirit like a knife. Alexa remembered something similar happening before - a mention of Becky having no friends, of no one wanting to know her - with the redhead shutting down much like she was now.

As disappointed as Alexa was in herself for hurting Becky, she felt that disappointment cross over into anger when someone else hurt her. Before she could give Sonya a huge piece of her mind, a voice from the back of the room, shrunken from within their seat, stopped her.

"Uh, I've gotta be honest here - I'm totally cool with the Fair."

"Trevor!"

"The dances are lame," he explained to a chorus of shocked voices. "Everyone hanging around the punch bowl while only ten people actually dance? We're all tired of it. But chilling with a group of friends on Halloween - in a safe spot so people won't go off doing something dumb? I'm just saying, Becky's idea is awesome."

"But it's Becky," came another voice from the crowd.

"I don't care if it's someone's grandma. A good idea is a good idea."

Like a toy that regained its lost spark, Becky came alive. Not only her - Nikki, and Alexa herself. Slowly, most of them seemed to be coming around to the Halloween Fair, much to the ire of the so-called planning committee. While everyone was busy discussing this year's Halloween event with renewed vigor, Alexa loudly cleared her throat, gaining their attention.

"Well, Trevor put Becky's idea into motion. All those in favor of a Fair?"
There was a lull in the commotion, no one knowing what to do next. Trevor's hand was raised, waiting for someone else to join him. Just when Alexa was sure his arm would give out from being up there for so long, Bayley raised her hand next. That was all it took for the others to fall in line. Sami was hesitant, but rose his hand after some convincing from Johnny. Vanessa slowly raised her hand soon after, her love of a good night out far outweighing her disdain for Becky.

"That settles it. Looks like the Fair is on!" Alexa stated, so, so gleefully. How could she not be gleeful, knowing that, for possibly the first time in their entire lives, Mandy and Sonya wouldn't be getting their way? It was the little things that made this all worth it. Much to the surprise of absolutely no one, they were furious.

"This can't be real. How are you going to let trash like her run things like this? She's not even part of the Student Council!" Mandy yelled. She yelled until she went hoarse, her own body telling her that it was time to give up.

"I am now." The aura of smugness exuding from Becky would surely engulf the entire school. It was impossible for Mandy and Sonya to escape its gravitational pull.

Sonya turned to Alexa, fuming. Her fists were curled tightly, her nails threatening to break through the skin of her palms. The last thing Alexa needed right now was an angry, muscular woman making fists in any fashion. Well, if Becky's punch from earlier was any indication, at least she didn't bruise easily.

Wait.

She checked her arm.

Yes she did.

"That's it then? Becky gets her way?"

"Sorry, majority rules. You know how it is," Alexa said. The orbit of smug was pulling her in too.

With one last pair of scornful looks, the planning committee took their leave, their combined pride wounded. Sonya shoved the door open hard - and shut it closed it just as well - the sound reverberating throughout the bustling hall.

It didn't seem like anyone knew how to react to the pair's sudden leave, least of all Alexa. Everyone's eyes were glued to the door, as if knowing that they escaped a terrible fate by the skin of their teeth. The president was half-expecting Mandy or Sonya to come barging back in, refusing to give up their precious dance without one final fight.

It wasn't to be, however, and Alexa was eternally grateful for that.

"Um… Meeting adjourned?"

It was an unusual end to the meeting, but everything about the meeting was unusual. It was eventful for the wrong reasons, though Alexa couldn't say that she wasn't happy with how everything turned out. She didn't say it aloud, but Becky was actually fitting in well with the Student Council.

Her ego was going to have its own zip code if she heard that.

So preoccupied with thinking about Becky's role here, she failed to notice that everyone else had left. Nikki too, gone with the rest of them. She did feel bad. Knowing her best friend, she likely gave her a wave that Alexa paid no attention to. She'd have to make it up to her later.
Yes, everyone had left the room. Minus Becky, because of course she didn't.

"See? Didn't I tell you things would be fine? You were stressing out over nothing."

Alexa didn't bother with a reply. She lumbered over to one of the unoccupied desks, threw herself into the seat, and slammed her head into it.

Halloween couldn't get here fast enough.

Chapter End Notes

You know nothing, Alexa Bliss.

Tumblr @starchild-5
Lunch.

It was Alexa's favorite meal of the day. An hour of uninterrupted relaxation, where she could put work aside and share a meal with her friends. Or friend. Aside from the odd fight or two that broke out - never involving herself, obviously - things were relatively peaceful. It was a time where she could recharge, melting her stress away with a hot meal and a cold drink.

Oh, how she wished she could live in that universe.

In this universe, the busybody Student Council president skipped lunch more times than she ate it. It was three weeks into October, and the work would not stop coming in. It was a never ending conveyor belt of bad news, and the destination was her doorstep. The school's doorstep, but with how much time she spent here, it might as well have been her doorstep. The only thing missing was a pillow, and a refrigerator, if she were fortunate enough to be blessed with such luxuries.

Continued absences, student health concerns, a locker thief, that god damn lunch menu that not a single staff member knew how to fix. 'Just add more stupid pizza days and remove the mystery meat!' Alexa shouted at no one. Things were never that easy, the world deciding that everything should be as complicated as it possibly could be. Becky's contributions at the last meeting proved that much.

The meeting. Alexa was constantly trying to wrap her head around everything that happened during the meeting a few days ago. She couldn't stop thinking about it - the lasting image of that morning being the scowling faces of Mandy and Sonya. She liked reliving it. The two were shaping up to be a real thorn in her side, using intimidation tactics to get their way, meeting after meeting, and it looked likely to continue through the rest of the year. Becky, in just a single, short session, was able to throw a wrench in that plan. It likely wasn't her intention going in, but she doubt the redhead minded. Knowing Becky, she was probably happy to knock them down a few pegs. Alexa couldn't say she felt differently.

It wasn't far-fetched to say that she was interested in Becky.

Her face lit up, two months too early for a Christmas tree. She knew she was alone in the council room, but couldn't stop from scanning the area anyway, in case there were any loitering witnesses around. Maybe 'interested' wasn't really the right word, but she didn't know how else to say it. Intrigued? That was it. She was intrigued by Becky. That tiny correction did nothing to quell the fire in her cheeks, but she knew what she meant, even if her body didn't.

There was something to Becky, something more, that Alexa wanted to learn about. She couldn't help but chuckle. A short while ago, she couldn't stand to look at her. Now, getting the chance to learn more about Becky was good - it was exciting. The way that Becky stood up to the planning committee, the way that she asserted herself, the way that she pushed for her idea in the face of adversity. It was those traits that made Alexa envious of her, and her lifestyle, to begin with. She was the president, but she couldn't do what Becky did. It made her feel a bit dejected, but it also made her feel somewhat optimistic about Becky's position in the council, however temporary or permanent that might be.
She was getting ahead of herself. It used to be impossible for her to hear the other girl's name without frowning. Things were just different now. The insults were... well, the insults were still there, but they carried less weight than before. When she didn't view Becky as some sort of prisoner-in-training, it was easier to notice her better qualities. Her need to joke that was shrouded by her sly attitude, her pretty clever way of thinking that never received enough of a spotlight when she was skipping class. The way her face beamed like a ray of light when she was happy.

Would she punch her in the arm for saying that?

Then there was Becky's reaction to the comments Sonya had made. It was all interesting to Alexa. She was a curious person. And bored. Very bored. That was all it was.

Alexa sighed. She didn't have the spare minutes to be digging into her feelings like this. Her attention needed to be focused on her work. She pulled a pen from her pocket, ready to write the most strongly-worded letter to ever have existed. It was finally - finally! - time to fix this disgusting lunch menu.

"You know, someone should fix the lunch menu. It's disgusting."

Startled by the intrusion of another person in the room, Alexa nearly fell out of her chair. She really needed to start locking the door.

"You need to learn how to knock," she told Becky.

"I thought about it. Figured it would be more fun this way."

"What you consider fun and what normal people consider fun are totally different things."

"I've always enjoyed being a little different."

It was the kind of friendship that just 'happened,' unplanned. The banter seemed to happen naturally, as it usually did. Little snippets of conversations between classes - bumping into each other in the halls, barely catching each other when the last bell rang, Becky tapping Alexa in the back during class just to share one of her lame nicknames. They were giving each other a chance, albeit in short bursts, but Alexa much preferred this new dynamic to their old one. The one where Becky would call her the 'smallest ticking time bomb' and deftly walk away, narrowly avoiding the ensuing explosion.

Alexa was probably reading too much into this. The lack of sleep must have played a part in it, overloading her emotions and sending her overthinking nature into overdrive.

"So."

"So?"

Alexa dragged a palm over her face, exasperated with how clueless this girl could be sometimes. "Did you... ya know, want something?"

"A million dollars and a private jet, actually," Becky said, face brimming with self-satisfaction. Alexa realized almost instantly that no one in this school was more amused by Becky's sense of humor than Becky herself.

"Might be a tiny bit out of my budget there."

"I could dip into some Council funds."
Alexa shook her head, a sarcastic chuckle escaping her lips. "Keep dreaming."

Becky's mouth opened, the surely witty response making the trek from the bottom of her throat to the tip of her tongue, but the words never left. Instead, much like she did during their first evening together, the Whatever-of-the-Queen - Alexa hated thinking about it - pulled up a chair, dragging it slowly enough to so that every painful screech could sit and linger in Alexa's eardrums.

Before taking a seat, Becky tossed a brown paper bag to the blonde, who stared at it in a mix of bewilderment and abject horror. Horror, because the bag was a wrinkled mess that had presumably been fished out of the nearest dumpster.

"What's this?"

Becky leaned back in her chair, propping her feet up onto the table that Alexa was working on, her studded boots scuffing its top as soon as they made contact.

Alexa did a double-take. Boots? She was used to the jacket, but boots too? And what were those jeans? Were they even jeans? Fashionable or not, she would need to have a talk with this rule breaker - not a single piece of her wardrobe resembled anything close to their school regulated uniforms!

"You're never in the caf. Should've guessed that you were hiding out in this boring ol' room."

"I'm not 'hiding out.' I just," Alexa scratched the back of her head. "I have work to do."

"So I've been told." Alexa was going to ask, but Becky beat her to the punch. "Nikki. Man, that girl is something else. I get so worn out talking to her."

She didn't have to tell Alexa twice. When Nikki was in a good mood, she was a spark plug never stopped sparking. Alexa would pay good money to see any interaction between the boundless ball of energy and Becky.

"Were you looking for me?" Alexa asked, curiously.

"I might've been."

And speaking of worn out, talking to Becky was such a lesson in patience. The Irish girl wasn't necessarily one to beat around the bush, but she definitely wasn't one to give answers straight out either. She enjoyed playing her games too much for that - building up suspense, being intentionally vague or obtuse for a quick laugh. It was why conversations with her could be so exhausting. Yet, for some reason, Alexa kind of liked playing the game.

"It was a 'yes or no' question."

"And I gave you a third answer. Look at me, thinking outside the box."

She liked playing the game sometimes.

"Well if you don't need me, then goodbye," Alexa stated. Without another word, she went back to her work. Either Becky would give up and be direct, or she would leave her to finish her work in peace. It was essentially a win-win situation.

"Alright, alright. Nikki told me yesterday that you've been missing out on lunch, so I brought you that."
Becky gestured to the paper bag, its ragged appearance sticking out like a sore thumb on a table littered with Manila folders and important documents.

"You got me lunch?"

"Technically I made it, but-"

"You made me lunch?"

"It's not a big deal! It's just a sandwich."

Rather than continue to go down this line of questioning, Alexa decided to check the bag for herself. It seemed normal enough, if a bit childish - nobody ate bagged lunches anymore. Becky really was from a different era.

With minor trepidation, Alexa reached into the bag. It was as Becky said. It was a typical, run-of-the-mill sandwich. There was no pomp and circumstance, no fanfare. It was a sandwich. A regular sandwich.

A little too regular.

After pulling its plastic wrappings off, Alexa lifted the top slice of bread, inspecting the meal's contents. There was no joke written on a note and tucked firmly in the middle, nor was there any condiment mishap. She didn't think Becky was into those pranks, but one could never be too careful. Especially with food. Especially with gifted food.

"It doesn't seem to be poisoned…"

"Oh, please," Becky said.

"I'm just kidding! I know you'd never poison me. In a public place."

"Hilarious. Are you going to eat the thing, or not?"

Teasing Becky was a lot more fun than it should've been. Taking the sandwich in her hands, it didn't escape Alexa's notice that this was her favorite kind.

"Huh. Ham and Swiss. Good guess."

"It wasn't a guess. I asked Nikki what you like."

"That was oddly considerate of you."

"Don't expect this treatment all the time!" Becky was quick to add. "I only did it because."

Becky stopped dead in her tracks. It didn't seem like she was purposely trying to keep the impatient blonde in suspense, but she did so all the same. It was like her mouth hit a brick wall, the words unable to break through to the other side.

"Because?"

Without needing to be scolded or told 'Get your dirty shoes off the table,' as Alexa had contemplated saying for minutes now, Becky removed her legs from the table. She kept her head down, her eyes moving to-and-fro, unable to remain still. This was either going to be something serious or another one of those insults, Alexa presumed. The insults that required way too much brainpower for what they ended up being.
"I never thanked you for the other day," Becky said. Alexa could hear it in the tone of her voice that she was serious. Much more serious than she had ever heard Becky be.

Alexa wasn't as sharp as she used to be, what with her position eating at her brain cells by the hour, so it took her a second to put two and two together. "The meeting?" She questioned. "I didn't do anything. That was all you."

"No, it wasn't. You could've easily shut me down once I started laying into those two weirdos."

"I've been dying for someone to tell them off for a month."

"I take it they're that pleasant at every meeting?"

"Oh yeah, so pleasant. Like a spring breeze," Alexa said. She could feel her stomach gurgling, crying out in hunger. She took a bite of the sandwich, the sandwich that Becky made exclusively for her. It wasn't a meal that required much effort to put together, but she appreciated it nonetheless. Eating lunch, having food settle in her stomach between the hours of twelve and one. It had become a foreign sensation to her. "So this is your way of saying thanks? Well, my stomach and I both approve."

"I knew you would. This Student Council thing is going to end up killing you."

Becky began sifting through folders, peering at the papers inside. She marveled at their length, some two pages long, some three, some written back and front.

"Picking a date for grad photos? Who cares?" she mumbled.

"People that are actually graduating."

"Hey, I might skip, but I do good enough to pass."

"Well enough."

"What?"

"Never mind."

Alexa decided that her jaw muscles were being sorely misused by talking - they should be busy chewing. She resumed eating her lunch, careful not to eat too fast. It was tempting to shovel the only good lunch she'd eaten in weeks straight down into her throat, but she didn't trust Becky to know the Heimlich maneuver if things took a turn for the worst.

Becky pushed the folders away, crinkling her nose in disgust, her face having aged fifteen years merely by looking at them. "Why do you do this, anyway? Doesn't seem like fun."

The bluntness of the question caught Alexa off guard. It wasn't fun. It was the least amount of fun Alexa has had in her three, going on four, years of high school. Rather than go through a lengthy explanation, Alexa decided to eat more of her lunch, offering Becky a shrug.

"There's got to be some reason," Becky said, dissatisfied with the response. "Only a masochist would do something like this."

"You don't know the difference between well and good, but you know what 'masochist' means?"

"The internet is dark and full of terrors."
Alexa laughed, so heartily that she did choke, coughing up spit that had worked its way down the wrong pipe. "Don't make me - agh! - laugh while I'm eating, dummy!"

"I'm being serious here, Alexa. You've got permanent raccoon eyes. You haven't slept. You haven't been eating properly. I mean, what gives? Is this really worth it?"

Alexa didn't know if it was genuine concern or unwavering curiosity, but Becky wasn't going to budge on this. She was right - Alexa hadn't been taking care of herself like she should. Every day was more work than the last, and without a way to stop time, she had to make time. The sleepless nights were catching up with her, and it showed on her face. She wouldn't be too shocked if Nikki asked Becky to check up on her. That seemed to make the most sense. Regardless, she knew she wouldn't be leaving this room without an explanation.

"I had to sacrifice a lot for this."

"You mentioned something like that before. Doesn't make too much sense to me."

"Haven't you ever wanted something so bad that you'd give up anything for it?"

"Yeah, but Student Council? You're going to be out of here in eight months anyway."

Alexa shook her head. "It's not like that. It's about making this a better place. Giving less fortunate students opportunities, giving them a safe haven from family drama, giving them somewhere to breathe. School is more than just a place to learn. For a lot of people, it's escape. If I can give them that, then isn't that worth making some sacrifices?"

Sweat formed near Alexa's brow, collecting in a small pool as she waited for Becky to say something. She was nervous, worried that the other girl would laugh her out of the building, or call her goals unrealistic. She knew that it was a mountain to climb - a mountain that touched the heavens, its peak obscured by pink, fluffy clouds - but it was worth making the journey. She wanted to do good, to be good. She wasn't, not all the time, but this? This was something good that she could do. She had to - she didn't understand why, but she just had to.

Becky hadn't said anything, but her expression definitely softened. Her eyes less inquisitive, more compassionate. She didn't know what it was exactly that struck a chord within Becky, but she was happy that it did.

"As noble as that is, you can't do any of that if you collapse."

"I'll find time to sleep. Eventually," Alexa said. She sounded unsure, because she was unsure. 'Eventually' wasn't a real time, just a placeholder to avoid giving an actual time.

The redhead didn't seem to like that, but it was the truth. Alexa's sleeping habits were far too sporadic. Becky sat forward in her chair, finger tapping against her own chin.

This wasn't good, Alexa thought to herself. Becky was thinking - a precursor to catastrophe. It was the lightning before the thunder, the flash before the boom.

"Let's ditch."

And there was the boom.

Her words were like a blizzard against Alexa's skin, keeping her frozen in place. She shot an inquisitive look at Becky, wondering if she had heard her correctly, or if the lack of sleep was starting to mess with her hearing now too.
"Ditch?! You mean… skip class?"

"No, I mean let's go jump in a ditch and throw a fiesta. Of course I mean skip class."

"Oh, I get it. You are insane! I wasn't sure, but you've convinced me."

"You need a break. An actual break. I'll give you a ride home, and you can get some sleep. What do you say, Queenie?"

Alexa groaned, a noise that she was becoming accustomed to making. "How many dumb nicknames are you going to give me?"

"Only one or two. Madam President."

Immature nicknames aside, this showing of consideration was starting to unnerve Alexa, the blonde wondering if Becky had been discreetly replaced with an alien doppelganger during the night. If aliens had somehow managed to copy someone like Becky this well, then they deserved to rule the world.

"Becky. I'm the Student Council president. And you're - ugh, what was that stupid thing you said?"

"Hand of the Queen," Becky responded with an ever-cocky smirk.

"Yeah. That. We can't skip. Besides," Alexa motioned to the work on the table. "I have work to do."

With no warning and no hesitation, Becky shoved the group of folders from the table onto the floor. "Work's done."

Alexa wanted to be more irritated and force Becky to clean up the mess she made. She couldn't, because part of her wanted to leave right now. She couldn't shirk her responsibilities though. She wouldn't - not after everything that happened with their last president. She had to be better than that.

It would be nice to sleep, to feel energized and ready to face the day with a positive attitude. And it would be nice to lie in her bed without interruption. And it would be really nice to not have fifty alarms on her phone, set to ring at fifteen minute intervals.

It would be nice, but that wasn't who she was. She was the goody-goody, the last one to ever leave school earlier than what was allowed.

No, she wasn't going to skip class.

"Fine. Just let me eat my sandwich first."

She didn't know where that came from, her mouth refusing to listen to her brain.

Becky smiled.

Yes, she was going to skip class.

"This can't be yours."

Unlike every other student that drove, Becky chose not to park in the school's designated parking lot. Thinking back to Vanessa's ruined car door, it made some sense. Becky wasn't the only one that could damage a vehicle, though it was pretty ironic that she, of all people, insisted on parking
somewhere else. Alexa wanted to complain - they practically had to make a mad dash across the vast lot to avoid being seen by a faculty member - but Becky was being nice, so it was only fair that she try to be nice in return. It would be worth it once they were inside Becky's car, relaxing on cushioned seats, ready to hit the road.

Except it wasn't a car at all.

"Oh, it's mine, alright."

"I was expecting, I don't know, a car? A hearse? Not a motorcycle!"

Alexa couldn't believe what she was seeing. There it was - a two-wheeled black demon with orange streaks painted across the sides, giving it a fiery flair that screamed 'Becky Lynch.' But it couldn't really be Becky's.

"So, what do you think?" Becky asked.

"I-I refuse to believe that this is seriously yours. There's no way."

Wordlessly, Becky dug into her jacket pocket, her hand emerging from its momentary venture with a key clasped between her thumb and forefinger. She sauntered over to the metal deathtrap, sitting a few feet away from them, menacingly. She stuck the key into the ignition, the engine roaring to life when metal met metal.

Alexa's heart dropped.

"Not bad, huh?" Becky said, clearly proud of herself.

"Okay, it's yours. But, uh… where's your license at?!" Alexa asked, a few decibels louder than she meant to be. She was grasping at any straw within arm's length. "You can't ride without a license!"

With pockets seemingly deeper than the empty pit of Alexa's stomach, Becky pulled out another object from her jacket. It was unmistakably a small, white card. Becky's face, uncharacteristically stoic, was plastered on its left side.

Alexa took the card with shaky hands, reading its contents, mostly to herself.

"Yada yada, state driver's license, Rebecca Lynch. Dumb name," Alexa muttered softly under her breath.

"I heard that, you little twerp!" Not softly enough. "And isn't your last name 'Bliss'?"

"I happen to come from a long line of exceptional Bliss men and women, thank you very much."

"Sure."

"Why do you even have a motorcycle anyway?"

"Because it's freakin' badass. Why else?"

"Aren't they dangerous?"

Becky rolled her eyes, probably used to being questioned from other people. "Anything can be dangerous if you don't know what you're doing. You think they just give out licenses like candy?"

She had a point. Becky had to have some modicum of experience riding the thing. It was a small
comfort. The thought of having to ride on it made Alexa physically ill. She wasn't made for this. A large, bulky, metal car that could protect her from danger was much safer than a glorified bike.

"The fire is kind of lame."

Becky gasped, pressing her palms against the side of the motorcycle's handles. "Don't say things like that to my baby!"

"Oh, you're one of those. I should've known. Alright, what's the name - Harley Quinn?"

"Harley Dent. Like Harvey Dent. Damn, Harley Quinn is good though."

As the discussion died down, Alexa struggled to come up with more ways to stall. It didn't matter. Within a few seconds, Becky was already sitting on her motorcycle, gripping the handles as if she had done so a million times. She probably had. It gave her some confidence in Becky's abilities, but not enough to stop picturing herself flying from the vehicle.

Trying her best to cease the morbid imagery, Alexa took in the scene in front of her. Becky was seated confidently on her motorcycle, jacket sleeves rolled over her arms, accentuating the contours of her well-defined muscles, her fingers swatting away stray strands of sun-kissed hair that made her face glow. She looked so natural, like the motorcycle was specifically made for her to ride. It was so picturesque - Alexa could see her on any magazine cover.

She felt the tempo of her heartbeat change within her chest. It was louder, faster, enough for it to nearly overwhelm her hearing.

"Let's get you home," Becky said, snapping Alexa out of her stupor. "You look like you're going to pass out."

"I'm fine," Alexa lied. She was obviously not fine, but didn't know why she wasn't fine.

"Then feel free to hop on, whenever you're done staring off into space."

Alexa swallowed the lump in her throat, steeling herself. Her legs were heavy - her joints were cinder blocks, weighing her down with every motion. She was taking literal baby steps, and Becky openly yawned at the display. With some effort, Alexa made it to the motorcycle. She haphazardly threw one of her legs over the seat, unsure of the proper way to be doing any of this. Uncomfortably, she began to shift in her spot. The seat was harder than she expected, but nothing unbearable. The two were close, so close that Alexa's sight was engulfed by a mass of red. She didn't appreciate just how non-existent the space between them was until Becky turned to tell her something, their noses - their lips - inches apart.

"Put this on." Becky handed Alexa a thick helmet, the same, custom-made design as her motorcycle painted across the sides.

"I'm kind of surprised you even have these."

"Safety's pretty important. Besides, I can still feel the wind in my hair just fine."

"Good. I don't want to feel the dirt in mine."

"Now we have an excuse to go fifty on a twenty-five!"

"Becky!"
"Kidding. I'll be careful. Promise."

If Alexa had to put a price on what a Becky Lynch promise was likely worth, it would be between fifty and fifty-two cents. The words did calm her down, however, her boiling rage subsiding before it could become a towering inferno.

"Oh, and remember to hold on tight," Becky added.

"Hold onto what?"

Becky's uproarious laughter soon filled the air. It was hard to place whether the shock waves coursing through Alexa's petite body were from mild embarrassment, or if Becky's laugh was actually shaking the earth. Alexa didn't find the sound unpleasant, but that didn't stop her from pouting.

"To my waist, ya goof," Becky said, wiping a tear from her face.

"I'm glad you find this so amusing." Alexa gently grabbed Becky by her waist, as instructed. She could now safely say that the shock waves were from embarrassment, the close, somewhat intimate contact doing nothing to quell the tremors. If someone had told Alexa a week ago that she would be in this position, she would've called them vile, or called the police to deal with their level of madness. "This is weird, isn't it?"

"Nah," Becky reassured her. "I've had girls back there before, so this isn't anything new."

Alexa slapped Becky in the back of the head. It was a reflex.

"Ow!"

"Just go."

"Alright geez. I wasn't even trying to be funny. That time."

Alexa had told her to go, but she was fully unprepared for the revving of the engine, instinctively tightening her grasp on Becky's waist. If the latter had any issues with this newfound closeness, she didn't say. It wouldn't have made a difference - there was no way Alexa was going to loosen her death grip. Once they started moving, her hands would be going nowhere.

The anxious passenger began to psyche herself up as the wheels began to turn. They were beginning to move at a brisk half mile per hour, the concrete beneath her feet - beneath the spinning wheels - passing her by. It was different than sitting in a car, much different. There were no windows, no protection between her and the pavement. Looking down was frightening. Earlier images of her body colliding full force with the ground came back to her like a boomerang. If boomerangs carried visions of mangled bodies.

Steadily, a half mile became one, one mile became two, two miles became five, until they were moving at a consistent twenty-five miles per hour. With her eating habits less-than-desirable, Alexa had nearly forgotten what it felt like to be nauseous. Once they picked up speed, the dirt and concrete melding together into a singular grayish blur, her insides threatened to spill over until they were on her outside. She didn't know what to do, or where to look.

Without thinking, something that was completely unlike her, she closed her eyes and leaned into Becky's back. Her obscured, blushing face pressed into Becky's jacket. Alexa's fingertips were grazing the skin of her stomach - softer than she would've guessed - lightly exposed as the hem of her t-shirt blew gently in the wind. The touch was strangely soothing. Despite the speed at which
they were moving, she could feel the rhythmic motion of the Irish girl's breathing, her back and her stomach, both rising and falling with every breath. Becky wasn't scared. Becky wasn't nervous. She was calm, she was born for this. Alexa admired it. She admired her.

That feeling of serenity - the feeling of pure, complete calm - it had to be infectious, because slowly, Alexa started to feel it too.

Channeling every ounce of courage left within her, Alexa opened her eyes. Everything around her was spinning - the floor below, the clouds above, the cars to her left, and houses to her right. But when she picked her head up, it wasn't the terrifying ride that she had expected it to be. Her golden locks flowing in the wind, not caring if it made her look like a fool. It was exciting. It was exhilarating.

But more than that, it was freedom.

For the first time since she started high school - maybe the first time in her entire life - Alexa understood what it meant to feel free. It was letting the sounds and the sights and the feelings overwhelm you. It was letting your fears go, dropping them into an abyss that they couldn't climb out of. It was allowing yourself to just be, to let the spinning of the ground and the clouds, and the cars and the houses, pass you by and keep moving.

She felt herself smiling. She had been searching for this feeling for so long, and it came to her in the form of a jacket-wearing girl and her motorcycle.

"This is your street, right?"

The trip couldn't last forever, but Alexa was disappointed that it had to end so soon. "Yep, the blue house, right there."

Becky pulled into her street, parking in front of Alexa's house. The task was made simple with no cars around, most residents in her neighborhood off to work.

Or school.

They both got up off of the motorcycle, Alexa taking care to not fall as she did. It was a short joke served to Becky on a silver platter, but she graciously kept any jokes to herself. Once she removed her helmet, tossing it to Becky as she ignored the beads of sweat collecting across her forehead, Alexa walked up to her front door with Becky close behind.

"So, uh," Becky started, her head now free from its helmet-shaped prison. "You alright? You were pretty freaked out before."

"I'm okay. It was actually pretty fun. I wouldn't mind doing that again." Realizing the implications of what that meant, Alexa was quick to speak again. "R-ride on a motorcycle, I mean! It doesn't have to specifically be this one or anything. In general. Sometime."

Alexa could've been wrong, and maybe she was, but Becky's face changed - a flash of hurt taking over her features before she shook it off. Why did she have to say such idiotic things sometimes?

"Yeah, for sure," Becky responded. She didn't sound hurt, or angry, which was good. The look on her face was imprinted in Alexa's mind though, and it wouldn't be easy to forget. "Give me your phone," Becky demanded.

"Why?"
"Just give it here."

After pulling her phone from her bag and unlocking it, she handed it over to Becky, the latter scrolling through it.

"You better not be going through my pictures."

"Ooh, got something spicy in here?"

"I'm not even going to ask what that means. Idiot."

With another few clicks of the phone, Becky gave it back to Alexa. "Done. Now we have each other's numbers."

"Random, much?"

Becky straightened up, presenting herself in a more dignified manner as she spoke. "As Hand of the Queen, it's my sworn duty-"

"Becky."

"Give me a call if you need anything. Lunch, a ride, whatever."

"Thanks. I will."

Alexa wasn't entirely sure how serious Becky was, but Alexa was serious.

"So," Becky said, shuffling her feet. "Do we hug, or salute or…?"

Alexa giggled, stepping up to Becky and giving her a small hug. Her nerves were shot, but her arms were begging her to hug Becky. Catering to them was important. It just was. The hug was nothing compared to what she had just experienced on her motorcycle, but it didn't matter.

Becky didn't immediately return the hug, her joke taken a little too seriously, but she eventually gave in, wrapping her arms around the smaller girl. Alexa was disappointed when she let go shortly after.

"See you tomorrow. Be safe on that thing," Alexa said.

"Harley Dent would never let me down. Well, he can be a bit of a Two-Face."

Becky nodded her head, walking back to her motorcycle - to Harley Dent - and hopping on as effortlessly as she hopped off. Alexa could hear the redhead shouting over the sound of the engine's low humming.

"See ya tomorrow, Queenie!"

Alexa's heart was racing again. She couldn't take her eyes off of her. Not as she waved goodbye, not as she rode off, not after she was long gone. She checked her phone for the time - it was half past noon - but what really caught her attention was Becky's name in her phone. It made her sigh, wistfully. They had only just recently taken their first steps across the border between acquaintances and friends, but this outing, this one, random outing, gave her a much clearer picture of who Becky was then any of those mid-class jokes did. Compassionate, understanding, pretty.

It was unbelievable, really. Out of all the people in the world, it had to be Becky. It could've been anyone, but it was Becky.
It was Becky that she developed a crush on.

She really did need to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

I may or may not have taken bagged or boxed lunches with me until I graduated from high school. Anyway carry on.

Tumblr @starchild-5, for all your "God I love Alexa Bliss" needs.
Stepping through the front doors of the school, Alexa was refreshed, ready to face whatever trials the universe wanted to throw at her. It was amazing what a long nap could do for the human body. Well, amazing to people that never slept. For Alexa, waking up lively and full of vigor was rare. She felt rejuvenated, like she was truly living. She wasn't tired, or sleepy, or grumpy. She just was.

She had Becky to thank for that, and she would willingly thank her again sometime before the day was over. She didn't have to bring Alexa lunch, or give her a ride home. It wasn't her job to take care of her, but she did, because Becky Lynch was a riddle. Alexa wasn't the best at solving riddles, but she was willing to try. For now, she would settle for being wide awake, for once.

She didn't get the chance to revel in this brand new sensation - someone had tackled her from behind, the force of the collision nearly dropping her to the hallway floor. It didn't take a psychic to figure out who it was.

"Hey, Nikki," she said, familiar with her friend's affectionate ways.

"Lexi!" Nikki's voice could be piercing, at times, but Alexa was in too good a mood to care. Other students, hanging about their lockers and chatting with friends, probably did care.

"Easy there, girl. It's only eight."

"Sorry sorry. I'm just glad you're alright."

Alexa was confused, but then it dawned on her. She never told Nikki that she was leaving school early yesterday - 'ditching,' to be more precise. She basically disappeared, took a nap, and then spent whatever was left of her evening catching up on missed episodes of her favorite shows. Her phone lay forgotten by her bedside, a text or two from her best friend surely having gone unnoticed.

"I am so sorry. I, uh, wasn't feeling well." It wasn't a total lie, though it wasn't the total truth either.

"Were you sick?"

"Kind of."

"Did you eat lunch?"

"Yeah."

"How'd you get home?"

Nikki's intentions were pure, but the barrage of questions was starting to become grating. She was a naturally inquisitive person, sometimes borderline nosy. Alexa had unresolved feelings that she wasn't ready to deal with, and having to recount the previous day's shenanigans to Nikki would only sour her good mood.

"A… friend."

Hoping that answer would suffice, Alexa continued to walk down the hall, creating some much needed distance between the two. The sound of Nikki's footfalls weren't far behind, the Scot...
catching up to Alexa before she could wander too far.

"But you don't have any friends." Nikki received a glare from Alexa. She wasn't wrong, but she definitely needed some lessons in tact. "Um, I mean, you know. You're kind of a loner. Except with me."

"I get it," Alexa said. It wasn't Nikki's fault. She was a loner, by design. Mostly. It would be impossible to get anything done if people were hovering around her constantly. That's what she told herself. It's what she had to tell herself, because the truth was a lot more painful - that being alone ate away at her like an insidious parasite, engorging itself on her insecurities.

"Do I know him? Or her?"

Alexa was at a crossroads. If she lied, it could snowball into a massive avalanche that she would have to deal with down the road. If she told the truth, it would mean exploring her potential feelings for Becky - and she couldn't believe those were words she was thinking - a little more closely. Lying was the easier option.

But why did Nikki have to be so damn soft?!

"Becky."

Alexa was sure that Nikki's eyes would pop out of her skull with how widely they opened. The thought of having to escort a blind Nikki around was a disastrous one.

"Becky?! You two are friends? I knew she was nice! Ever since she stood up to Mandy and Sonya! She's a good person."

"I guess so."

Alexa didn't really know how to respond to her friend's ramblings. Becky had a good heart. She could be a bit gated off at times, but when she opened those gates - when she was being herself, being Becky - she was like this vast landscape that Alexa wanted to explore, but afraid to traverse. There was so much there, and all of it was complex. Part of her wanted that complexity. She wanted to figure out everything about Becky. She was so free, and Alexa loved that.

She was a sap. A total and complete sap. That was the last straw. No more romantic comedies for at least another three weeks.

"Oh! She must have found you during lunch."

"Yeah. Thanks for getting her to check on me, by the way."

"She's the one that came to me, actually. She asked me where you were, what your favorite sandwich is - ham and Swiss, obviously! It's the Lexi special! She must have wanted to see you."

Alexa considered that as a possibility, but it was weird hearing it from the horse's mouth. Becky came to check on her of her own free will. Becky asked Nikki about her, she wanted to know if Alexa was okay. She was taking her role in the Student Council very seriously. That had to be it - Alexa didn't want to delude herself into thinking otherwise. That was a potentially dangerous path to tread.

"Come on," Nikki went on. "She's won you over, hasn't she?"

"No."
"Yuh-huh."

"Nuh-uh."

Nikki gently tugged at Alexa's shoulder, staring her in the face. "I can see it in your eyes," she said gleefully. "She has totally won you over. I think you li-iii-iike her!"

"Stop it. It's too early for singing," Alexa scolded. Lying wouldn't have been so bad, she mused. At least then, she wouldn't have to put up with this teasing. She batted away Nikki's finger, which had begun the first of many pokes. No matter how many times she pushed the finger, it kept coming back with a vengeance.

"You like her! You like her!" Nikki sang.

"Shut up! I don't have a crush on Becky!"

Alexa started to walk faster down the hall, until she realized that the Scot wasn't by her side anymore. She turned around, watching as Nikki looked at her, dumbfounded.

"What?"

"I never said anything about a crush."

Right then and there, Alexa wished more than anything to be shipped off in a rocket to the moon. Or Mars. Or Mercury. Or anywhere else that wasn't on this planet.

"I can exp-"

"You like like her! You want to ki-i-iii-ss her!" Like clockwork, Nikki resumed her prodding, this time using two fingers to mercilessly poke Alexa's arm.

This was exactly what Alexa was afraid would happen. Not that Nikki's light taunting bothered her - although she might be losing one or two of her fingers if she kept this up. It was having to think about Becky in any regard. She couldn't take it. Her feelings were another language, hieroglyphics that she couldn't decipher without studying them under a magnifying glass. And she hated studying more than she hated History.

"It doesn't mean anything."

"Aww, it's okay. I think it's cute."

"It's not cute, it's dumb! Ugh, it's so messed up!"

"Why are you freaking out so much?" Nikki asked, her tone that of genuine puzzlement. "Is it because you've never been in a relationship before?"

Alexa wondered if it was against school policy to spontaneously combust in the middle of the hallway. The janitor would have his work cut out for him.

She felt her skin growing pale, her blood going cold. It didn't seem like anyone heard Nikki's tactless outburst. The rumor mill would have already begun turning if they had, making a complete revolution back to her by now. 'Student Council President is a Lonely Baby.' The headline that would be front-and-center on the next edition of the school's paper, if she wasn't careful.

"Tell the whole world, why don't you?" Alexa whispered.
"It's nothing to be ashamed of. I only started dating my first boyfriend a few months ago."

Nikki was right. It wasn't anything to be ashamed of. Many people went years and years - after high school, through college, into their thirties - without ever getting into a meaningful relationship. Nose-deep in work and responsibilities for as long as she could remember, Alexa could never indulge in the idea of relationships. With a majority of the school having someone to call their own, including Nikki with her boyfriend, she couldn't say that she wasn't envious. Her blue eyes, clear and undisturbed as the morning sky, became a sickly green whenever they fell victim to the monster known as jealousy.

"You're right, you're right. I just wish I wasn't so insecure about it."

Nikki placed a hand on Alexa's shoulder, attempting to console her, doing her best to make Alexa feel safe and secure. Alexa placed her own hand atop Nikki's, giving her a 'thank you' in the process. She was happy that Nikki was here for her. Things were complicated, but her best friend was the one constant in her life that kept her going, the shelter that she knew could protect her.

"Any girl would be lucky to have you."

"Yeah, I'm sure girls are lining up to date the student body president that stays home on Friday nights to watch movies in pajamas. That's what they all want."

"It might be what Becky wants."

"Becky's… Becky's so free-spirited. Why would she want to be with some loser like me that'll just tie her down?"

She didn't mean to be so down on herself. Becky's lifestyle was just so different from her own. What qualities could Alexa bring that would improve Becky's life in any way? An extensive knowledge of Harry Potter and the distinct features that made each and every wand unique? Describing, in detail, the history between Ross and Rachel's relationship and how they were so obviously not 'on a break?'

She needed to get out more, and that was the entire point. She could be so introverted, so reclusive. Their lifestyles wouldn't mesh well.

"Before you were calling her names. Now you're crushing on her. Maybe her opinion of you has changed too."

"I doubt it."

Using both of her hands, Nikki grabbed Alexa by cheeks, squishing her face and making sure that she couldn't look away from her. Alexa felt like a goldfish. Struggle as she may, she was unable to break away from her friend's hold. They were both of similar size and stature, but somehow Nikki was much stronger than her. According to her throbbing cheeks, anyway.

"Listen to me, Alexa Bliss. You are funny, smart, gorgeous, and - and you really love Disney movies a lot. And you like board games! And you make me laugh! And you make these really cute cards for me on my birthday! No one is allowed to talk bad about you. Not even you! Got it?"

"Ymmf hmftmf mmfh."

"What was that?" Nikki relinquished her vise-like grip of Alexa's face, allowing the struggling girl to pull away.

"I said that you're hurting me."
"Oh."

"But thanks. I needed that. The pep talk, not the crushed lips."

Nikki's brand of compliments didn't do much to convince Alexa that she wasn't a recluse that stayed indoors way too often, yet hearing them did convince her that she wasn't as bland as she originally thought. She had something to bring to the table. Sure, a lot of that 'something' was useless trivia and hit-or-miss jokes, but if anyone could wind up being a fan of that, it would be Becky.

It was scary to acknowledge it - the crush, her growing feelings for the Irish girl. She knew that she needed to be honest with herself. The sooner she accepted her feelings as fact, the sooner she could find some peace of mind and figure out where to go from here. Lay her cards out on the table and tell Becky? Keep those cards close to the vest, and let this game play out slowly?

Her shoulders slumped over. All of this introspection was pretty meaningless anyway. There was no way she was going to pursue Becky. Of course she wasn't - she couldn't. Aside from the humiliation that came with rejection, there was too much work to be done. She didn't take the role of council president to slack off and become caught in a web of romance. She needed to remain focused before the spider found her trapped and helpless.

"Does Becky even like girls?"

Her focus was broken - the spider would be full tonight.

"Uh, I-I don't know. Maybe? She mentioned something about having girls on her motorcycle."

"She has a motorcycle?!"

"Nikki. Inside voice."

"Yeah yeah, got it!" the Scottish girl exclaimed loudly. In one ear and out the other. "Anyway, I'm pretty sure - no, no, one-thousand percent certain - I saw her with a girl last year. I can't remember who, but that means you still have a chance."

Last night's sleep must have given Alexa superhuman restraint, because it took a superhuman level of willpower to not bombard her best friend with a dozen questions. Becky having a previous girlfriend was news to her. Although, she never paid much attention to Becky before these past couple of weeks.

Becky.

Becky.

Becky.

The mix of those five specific letters was beginning to lose its meaning, what with how frequently they took up residence in Alexa's head over the past twenty-four hours. She would have to start charging them rent before long. She couldn't take this - she had to do something to evict these Becky-related thoughts taking up valuable headspace.

"I'm going to the council room. I need to go finish up some paperwork." And to pick up some long forgotten folders. It was a decent idea, distracting herself with work that should have been finished yesterday, before a distraction of a different kind happened. A redhead, school-ditching, well-toned, smooth-skinned distraction.
"I'll see you later then! Love you!"

Nikki threw her arms around Alexa, squeezing the oxygen out of her, as was tradition whenever the two went their separate ways. She wanted to spend more time with Nikki during school hours, but for now, she was relieved at not having to talk about Becky anymore. Class would begin within the hour, and it gave her just enough time to fix some minor school issues. Finalizing a date for picture day for the upcoming graduating class would be a good start.

Walking over to the classroom door, she could tell that something was off. The door was ajar, and the lights were flicked on - it was normally Alexa who did those things every morning. She crouched over to take a peek inside, pushing the door ever-so-slightly to avoid detection. She cursed as the door creaked, blowing her cover instantly. These ancient wooden door frames were straight out of the nineteenth century and begged to be put out of their misery with every wail of death that they made. She stopped her harsh criticisms of the school's shoddy construction when she saw movement from the room. Someone was looking at the door, peering back at her through the small crack. She stood up and pushed it open when she saw who it was.

"How did you get in here?!!"

"Asked the janitor to open it," Becky replied. "It was easy. Said I was part of the Student Council."

"I mean, you're not technically wrong, but he didn't know that. Anyone could've done the same."

"Good thing it was me then."

"Good for who, exactly?"

"For the council president that would be bored without me."

It wasn't enough that Becky had occupied every facet of her mind this morning, but now she was here in front of her too, occupying this room. She was never going to get a break. Not from the universe, not from her own feelings, and surely not from Becky. Her mind was a treadmill and Becky was practicing for an upcoming marathon.

"What are you doing here anyway?" Alexa asked, making her way over to Becky. She was getting an intense feeling of deja vu - asking her why she was here, the redhead playing coy, aloof with every response. This time, however, there was no aloofness in Becky's reply.

"I wanted to see if you got some sleep yesterday."

Alexa's eyebrows raised, nearly leaving her forehead and skyrocketing towards the ceiling. That wasn't what she was expecting. Becky was thinking about her too. In a, 'I wanted to make sure you were alive' sort of way, but she was willing to take what little scraps she could get from her.

"You could've texted me. Or called. You do have my number now."

"I could've, but I was in the neighborhood, taking a little midday stroll, and I figured you might need some help with things."

"Okay, you're starting to scare me."

"What?"

"First you bring me lunch, then you give me a ride home. Now you're offering to help out? It's been over sixty seconds and you haven't even called me Queenie, or Shorty, or Madam President. You
sure you're not the one who needs some sleep?" She placed the back of her hand on Becky's forehead, then her palm. "Hmm, you don't seem to be running a fever. Should I get the stethoscope?"

Becky's face was flushed. "Come on, quit teasing me."

"Sorry," Alexa said, unable to keep the giggles pouring from her mouth like a waterfall. It was true that they had been on relatively good terms, even before yesterday, but Becky's behavior was seriously perplexing. It was a complete one-eighty from her usual demeanor. "You've just been so... nice."

"Are you saying I'm not always nice?" As expected, Alexa simply stared at her. "Yeah, uh, don't answer that."

"A couple of weeks ago, we were at each other's throats. Now we're kind of buddy-buddy all of a sudden. Doesn't that seem a little strange to you?" Alexa asked. "Not that I'm complaining."

Becky stood still, save for her fingers fiddling with a particularly interesting strand of hair. It was possible that the Irish girl hadn't noticed anything had changed, but how could she not? She personally took Alexa home, for goodness' sake! And now this - checking up on her again, only to make sure she had gotten a good night's sleep. It made Alexa's task of clearing her head that much harder.

"I used to think you were one of those preppy, popular dopes."

"I don't know where you're going with this, but I gotta say. You're starting off really strong here."

"Hear me out," Becky said, holding her hands up defensively. "I didn't give you a fair shake. I made all these assumptions about you. When you were running for Student Council president, I knew you were doing it to look good on college apps - you had to be."

Becky cleared her throat. This was taking a lot out of her, Alexa could tell. She didn't want to interrupt, not when Becky was speaking so candidly.

"Then I got sent here. We started off kinda rough, but I could see how much this meant to you. Stressing out over every little detail. And then you hit me with that 'make the school a better place' thing. You're nothing like I thought you'd be. I just want to make your life a little easier and help you out as much as I can. You deserve that. And, well, we are friends. Aren't we?"

Becky tried to conceal her slight bashfulness, but Alexa was flattered nonetheless. For three years, they had both made ludicrous assumptions without bothering to hear the other's side. It was wrong - they both knew it - but despite what they might have felt in the past, they were seeing how wrong they were to live in their bubbles. This was the chance that Alexa wanted all along, to prove that there was more than what people might see on the surface.

"We are," Alexa said. She wasn't sure how to properly voice her gratitude, but she knew where to start. "Thank you. Really. That means a lot. Don't think this means that I won't still call you a dummy, dummy."

"Wouldn't dream of it, Madam President."

"You're not so bad yourself, you know," Alexa admitted freely. Becky's grin grew tenfold, a minute twitch of the face, and Alexa's heart did the same. "You could stand to follow the dress code a bit better..."

"Disgusting blazer or cool jacket? Tough choice. Gonna have to stick with the jacket."
The subject was immediately dropped. It was a losing battle that even the most stern of teachers couldn't hope to win. Becky would sooner be buried in that jacket than take it off during school hours.

"And I can't believe you thought I was popular. Trust me, my hobbies kept me out of that circle years ago."

"Oh? Do tell," Becky said, playful curiosity dripping from her lips.

"Well, I've seen every episode of *Friends* a dozen times, if that doesn't tell you all you need to know."

A flicker of amusement crossed Becky's eyes, like Alexa had said some centuries-old magic words that reawakened the sleeping sitcom enthusiast within her. "Can you believe some people actually think Ross was right? They obviously weren't on a break."

"Seriously!" she exclaimed. "All he had to do was wait one day."

"That's what I'm saying! I kne- wait wait wait," Becky said, holding out a hand to stop Alexa before her torrent of thoughts could wash her away. "That can't be it. People really didn't like you because you talked about *Friends*?"

"High school is dumb. When you're a freshman going on about your favorite romcoms and asking people what Hogwarts house they're from, you're pretty much a social outcast."

"They're just a bunch of idiots. If it's any consolation, you seem cool enough to me," Becky said, though her eyes narrowed as she finished speaking. "That is, unless you're a filthy Slytherin."

This conversation had taken an unexpected turn some minutes ago, but Alexa was elated. She had never known anyone to be into any of this stuff as much as she was! It was incredible - someone was willing to talk to her about things that *she* was interested in. Not brush her off like a piece of lint, or scowl at her like she told an unfunny joke, but just talk. Nikki was an avid listener - a good best friend that would never tell Alexa how annoying she could be - but she couldn't reciprocate Alexa's delight. She had several years' worth of opinions that she had kept bottled up, and Becky had uncorked them all.

"I think they're misunderstood, personally."

"Not a chance. Those snake lovers are evil!"

Alexa could see that the redhead was becoming completely invested as the conversation went on and on and on. The intensity with which she spoke, her wild gesturing. This was the last thing she expected they would have in common, but maybe there would be more, if she dug deep enough. Maybe Nikki was right, and maybe they weren't as different as they both had assumed - as Alexa had assumed.

Alexa caught something out of the corner of her eye. A pile of discarded folders, scattered beneath her feet. She didn't make a move to pick them up. As their chat became more lively, she had a hunch that work wouldn't be getting done for some time.
Tag yourself I'm Alexa

Tumblr @starchild-5
The first third of autumn had nearly come to a close, the leaves having begun their yearly transformation from a warm, dark green to a dash of cinnamon brown. The days were moving along quickly, becoming much shorter as the nights grew longer. The thirty-first of the month was on the cusp of making its spooky entrance, but Halloween was the furthest thing from Alexa's mind.

It had only been a full week - so Alexa believed, but she was too preoccupied to keep track of the days - since her last conversation with Becky in the Student Council room, but it was far from their last conversation in general. Their talk of cheesy sitcoms went on until the morning bell. It left the room with them, left school with them, and continued through blocks of texts and extended, late night phone calls. There was just so much to talk about - from TV shows, to fantasy novels, to the odd romantic comedy - and they hadn't even scratched the surface. She was skeptical when Becky proclaimed that she was a Gryffindor like her, but a screenshot of the famous quiz was enough to convince her.

Her interests weren't exactly obscure, but to have someone share so many of them was something special. It opened up a new realm of possibilities and things to discuss, daydreams and fantasies - of resolute princesses, of stalwart warriors, of castles in the sky - that she never felt comfortable discussing with anyone else. She didn't expect that someone would be Becky. The girl was usually so calm, cool, and collected, back in their earlier years of high school. Alexa had never seen her as excitable as when she told her that 'Under the Sea' wasn't her favorite song from *The Little Mermaid*.

Which was why she was standing in front of the school entrance before classes started. It was more than a little chilly on this October morning, but Becky had texted her saying 'meet me outside' and 'I have a bone to pick with you!' She could only assume it was another wayward attempt at changing Alexa's song-related opinions, and far be it from her to miss a chance to drop some musical knowledge onto her friend.

Friend.

They spent time during the day together, time after school together, and time on the phone together. It wouldn't be incorrect of her to say that they spent nearly all of their spare hours with each other. They were the most unlikely of pairings, but everything clicked - they were a lock and key, opening a chest full of splendor and wonder, together. It was a connection that most wouldn't believe, but that didn't matter to them. And while this was all well and good, Alexa yearned for something more, something intimate. She got a taste of that intimacy when her arms clung to Becky's waist, riding through the streets on the back of a motorcycle, and she greedily wanted another sample. Her hands were still tingling from the touch.

A relationship wasn't good for her, she tried to accept originally, but she gave up fighting her emotions. Every time she tried, swimming rapidly against the force of Becky's immense current, she was always pulled back in. She allowed herself to be. She didn't try to fight her thoughts anymore -
she allowed Becky to take over her dreams, both sleeping and waking. It made her happier than she
had been in years - it was good for her. Becky was good for her. That was all there was to it.

Although, she couldn't ignore the ball-and-chain labeled 'crippling fear of rejection' cuffed to her
ankle.

They spoke of 'love' a lot in her novels, but Alexa believed something as delicate as that took much
more time, months, maybe longer. A loving relationship was a plant that needed to be nurtured,
nourished, so that it could continue to grow. But trying to define her feelings in that way, so early
and so specifically wasn't important, and it would only confuse her further. Her feelings were her
feelings and that was it. They could answer the 'love' question together, in the future, after their
fourth date.

Alexa would suggest a fancy dinner, and Becky would obviously refuse. 'We did that one already,,'
she'd say. 'It was our second.' Of course, how could Alexa have forgotten? She would be out of
ideas, but Becky would pull out a picnic basket from thin air. Sandwiches, not too dissimilar to the
one she'd made before. Only this time, they would be eating together. Alexa would thank her, first
with words then with actions. She would crawl over to Becky's side, and then slowly, ever-so-
slowly, she would-

The familiar buzz buzz buzz of her phone stole the conclusion of her fantasy. She checked her
messages to see who was texting her.

Ariel Mermaidington: Turn around.

Alexa went to turn, only to let out a yelp as she bumped into Becky's larger frame. How long she
was standing there, Alexa could only hazard a guess. Her footsteps were more silent than Nikki's,
and the Irish girl had four to five inches, and two to three shoe sizes, on her.

"Ariel and I are nothing alike."

They weren't, unless Becky was living a double life as a mermaid princess, but they both had
brightly colored hair. It was the best Alexa could do. Besides, she had grown accustomed to seeing
the name in her phone and didn't plan on changing it anytime soon.

"Are you ever going to say 'hi' like a normal human being?"

"Hi."

Becky's sense of humor could be defective sometimes.

Alexa pursed her lips disapprovingly. She didn't want to give Becky the satisfaction of laughing at
that terrible joke. "And like my name on your phone is any better. It's 'Queenie,' isn't it?"

"Don't worry about it."

It was a curt, dismissive response, but Alexa let it go, thinking little of it.

"So, what's this bone you wanted to pick with me?"

"Listen here, you." Becky pointed a lone finger at the smaller girl, her nostrils flaring as she puffed
out her chest.

Looking up at Becky, Alexa realized that she was at the perfect angle to bury her face into the crook
of her neck. The smooth curves of her skin were so inviting - so tantalizing. It was a porcelain valley,
molded from the earth for her to rest her weary head, staying there for minutes, hours, days. It was so tempting. She managed to tear her gaze away from her friend's exposed neck, catching the bits and pieces of what she was telling her.

"I watched it again. 'Part of your World' is not better than 'Under the Sea.'"

"It absolutely is."

"How?"

"Oh, you poor, unfortunate soul."

"Good one." Becky was being sarcastic, but Alexa just knew that she was quietly marveling at her prowess to make conversationally relevant references.

"It's a song about freedom and being able to choose your own destiny," Becky gagged, to which Alexa responded by flicking her in the arm. "It's a good message!"

"It's about a mermaid who wants to grow feet. Big whoop."

"And what's the message to 'Under the Sea'? Drowning?"

"I dunno," Becky said with a shrug. "But the song is so damn catchy. Makes me want to snap my fingers."

Becky demonstrated this by snapping her fingers directly in Alexa's face. Not wanting to listen to this so early in the morning, she grabbed Becky's hands, attempting to get her to stop her antics. Instead of letting them go immediately, she held onto them, their warmth radiating to her own. Becky's palms were slightly calloused, but the blonde didn't mind. She wanted to run her thumb along them, to trace every bump and ridge, to commit them to memory forever.

Alexa dropped her hands and gulped.

"You have no rhythm," she said meekly.

"Yeah. I've... never been good at that." Becky was looking down at her hands, and Alexa would've given anything to know what was going through her head.

"So we agree that 'Part of your World' is better then," Alexa said, trying to ease the awkward tension. Her plan seemed to be working, with Becky taking a combative stance once again, ready to argue until her face turned a dark shade of blue.

"You wish."

"Just accept that you're wrong."

"You're so confident. Alright, how about we watch it together and-"

"Alexa!"

Alexa had no idea who had called out to her. It was of the utmost importance that she figure it out soon, so she could know what to inscribe on their epitaph. Spending an entire evening with Becky - alone. Nothing would please her more. They would only be watching this movie to settle the silliest argument in history, but any alone time with Becky, especially outside of school, would make her week, and make her weak.
But now, the sweet fantasy of hanging out was gone in a puff of smoke. She didn't know when she would find the courage to bring the topic up again. It was all thanks to whoever had the audacity to interrupt them.

"Trevor."

Alexa spat his name with so much ferocity that the air could catch fire. Next to her, Becky tapped her foot, arms folded over her chest. Her recent bout of openness seemed to only extend to Alexa. It shouldn't have made her feel special, but it did.

"Hey, Alexa. And, um… Becky," the boy said, fearfully.

"Relax. I'm not going to bite your head off. Unless, of course, the Student Council president demands it."

"No biting heads." Alexa was annoyed, but not 'murder a visibly frightened Trevor' annoyed. "What's up?"

"Did you get my note?"

"Your note?" Alexa turned to Becky, who looked just as bewildered as she did, if not moreso.

"Yeah. I stuck it in one of your folders."

Alexa pinched the bridge of her nose. The folders. They were no longer collecting dust, but a majority of them remained unopened. She went to tap Becky, but the girl took a step to the left, whistling her favorite aquatic tune as she avoided Alexa.

"I must have missed it. Was it important?"

"It's about the Fair."

The Fair. Oh no. How did Alexa forget the Fair? There were only so many days left until Halloween, and she had no earthly idea how the festival preparations were progressing. It wasn't like her to not be on top of things. The past couple of weeks had been such a rollercoaster- she didn't have the opportunity to get off and see what she was missing. Apparently, she was missing a lot.

"Please, please tell me everything is going well."

"Everything is going well."

"Good."

"…Is what I want to tell you, but we've got a bit of a problem."

"It's not the money, is it? Because I already pre-approved everything."

"No, it's not the money."

"Then spit it out, lad!" Becky shouted, rejoining the conversation. Striking fear into the soul of a boy that was terrified from the start didn't seem like the ideal way to get him to speak. It did, though Alexa was sure his legs would give out, shaking like they were made of jelly.

"It's Mandy and Sonya."

"Tweedledee and Tweedledum? What are they up to?" Becky asked.
“Ruining the Fair. They convinced some of the Student Council to bail on it.”

Alexa was mortified. They didn't get their way, so they decided to sabotage the entire event. She should've seen this coming - they were always scheming, like witches encircling a cauldron, cooking up diabolical plots to run the council as they saw fit. She had assumed that Becky's words had gotten to them, with the way that they stormed out of the meeting where the Fair was conceived. In retrospect, those words probably motivated them to put twice as much effort into ruining everything.

"Student Council: Civil War. Which side are we?" Becky asked, scrounging for any crumbs of humor she could find.

"Captain America, duh," Alexa stated matter-of-factly, as if the answer were clear as day.

"I'm glad we can agree on that, at least."

"Is there anyone left?" Alexa turned her attention back to Trevor.

"Me, Bayley, Sami, and Johnny. Nikki has been leading the whole thing though. We'd be pretty screwed without her."

Nikki? Nikki was helping them - leading them? That was strange, really strange. Why hadn't she come to Alexa for help, or to remind her about the Fair at all? They told each other everything, in excruciating detail. This wasn't like her.

Could it be Alexa's fault?

It had been a fleeting thought, one that she initially shrugged away. She didn't want to venture down that road - she didn't want to let the negative thoughts ruminate, but her worst fear was coming true right before her very eyes, and it wouldn't vanish from her sight. This friendship with Becky, this intense crush, it was getting in the way of her work. Missing one or two deadlines, postponing projects, asking for extra time. She thought she was handling everything fine, but that was clearly not the case. Her mistakes were stacking on top of each other, supported only by a thin plank of wood. This - being out of the loop on the Fair, Nikki having to cover for her carelessness. It was chipping away at it, piece by piece, her perfectly built structure of responsibilities collapsing under the weight of her mistakes.

Alexa wasn't saying much, so Becky took the initiative to speak for her. "What should we do then, Trevvy Boy?"

"We could really use a few extra hands."

"Sounds good." She looked to Alexa to see if she had any input to add. There was nothing, not a sign that she registered what Trevor was saying. "We'll, uh, meet you after school."

"Cool. Meet you guys there."

Once Trevor had officially made his exit, Becky shook Alexa's arm. "Hey, you good?"

"Oh, yeah. Everything's fine."

"You're such a bad liar."

Alexa didn't want to mention it.

"I need to talk to Nikki."
Alexa felt guilty, keeping what she was feeling from Becky, but telling her the truth - telling her that their friendship and her feelings were breaking down the foundation that she spent so much time building - was not an option. She would never put that on Becky, especially when it was her own fault. Apologizing to Nikki was the only thing she knew she could do correctly.

"I'm sure she'll be there after school," Becky said as she pat Alexa on the back, doing her best to alleviate her worries.

Alexa was scum, worse than scum. She hoped that Nikki didn't think the same.

The area behind the school was a relatively spacious plot of land, a football field having once stood tall there countless decades ago. Due to budget cuts throughout the years, the football team was long since disbanded, and its field demolished shortly thereafter. Though it served little purpose nowadays - used sparingly as a place for schoolwide gatherings and announcements - it was largely kept tidy. With its grass cut and turf uprooted, smoothed over with fancy tiles and bricks, the former football field was more reminiscent of a town square than a sports arena.

And it was the perfect place to hold a Fair.

When initially searching for a place within the school to hold the upcoming Halloween event, the space behind the school immediately jumped out at Alexa. The parking lot, despite being decently sized in its own right, would be a hassle to get approved. Having to inconvenience staff and students alike by blocking off their vehicles would have been a nightmare to deal with. This spot was virtually unused and could fit any activities that they could come up with.

Alexa envisioned it like a scene from her favorite films. Booths, little tents of various activities lined up on either side. Orange, green, and purple lights, strung atop the tents, illuminating the darkness with their festive tones. Lanterns - of pumpkins, of witches, of black cats - hanging from makeshift poles. Students wandering about in their costumes, scary or otherwise, enjoying the spectacle as they partook in the festivities. It was magic waiting to happen. It was a sprinkle of fairy dust away from becoming all of that and so much more.

She only wished that she had a hand in any of it.

Arriving after classes concluded for the day, Alexa and Becky were stunned to see the progress that had been made without them. While the lights weren't aligned properly - were some of those red? It wasn't Christmas, for crying out loud - they were strung up, decorating the fifteen or so booths that had been set up.

The booths themselves were... adequate. Some of the tents were lopsided, while some others sported crooked and misspelled signs. Alexa was going to have a long, serious talk with whoever wrote 'Holoween' over the dunk tank. She didn't actually remember signing off on a dunk tank, but she chalked that up to stress. This might need an entire bottle of fairy dust.

"You guys made it."

While the pair were gawking at the work of the Student Council, Trevor walked over to them, shirt soaked in what they assumed was sweat.

"Swimming with your clothes on, eh?"

"Rude," Alexa stated, reprimanding her redheaded friend.

"The guy is making his own puddles."
"Look, I'm just glad you're here," Trevor said, glossing over Becky's remarks. "We got a few more people to help out, but we still need all hands on deck."

Alexa took a quick look around. Indeed, there were more people than she'd been expecting to be here. The faces were unfamiliar to her, and some appeared to be on the younger side, perhaps ninth or tenth graders.

"How'd you manage that?"

"They're getting paid in pizza."

"The universal currency," Becky quipped.

Alexa's mouth began salivating at the prospect of enjoying a delicious slice of pizza. To the displeasure of herself and her stomach, it wasn't for them to enjoy. The volunteers earned it, giving up an entire afternoon to offer their assistance. It wouldn't stop her from living vicariously through their taste buds.

"What do you cheese us to do?"

"Huh?"

Alexa fired off a multitude of mumbled curses while Becky put a hand over her mouth, having to physically hold her laughter back. The smell of melted cheese wafting up into her nose was pure, unadulterated torture. "Uh, what do you need us to do?"

"Nice save."

"Hush."

"Only if you admit I was right."

"'Part of Your World' is better! End of story!"

Trevor watched the two girls bicker, but if he had anything to say, he kept it to himself. He seemed hesitant to interrupt, only doing so after another minute of back-and-forth. "Sami was supposed to be helping Bayley with the signs."

"He didn't show?"

"Nope. Said he was - let me see if I got this right - 'averse to physical labor'?"

"Moron."

Alexa wasn't going to disagree. When Sami wasn't sucking up to the nearest person in power, he was blatantly pushing his duties aside, exonerating himself from doing any work, no matter how light said work was. If Alexa had the authority instead of the principal, she would have kicked him out of the council before their first meeting. It was like he was never there when people were counting on him.

Just like Alexa.

No! Alexa wasn't anything like Sami. He was an egotistical creep who made excuses whenever things became a little too tough. Alexa might have stumbled over the past few days, dipping her toe into the carefree life, but she never gave up on her goals. She wanted to do good, she wanted to make things better. She would never give up holding onto those ideals.
But Becky.

Sharing with her, talking with her, spending time with her. And that wonderful freedom to be herself. She couldn't give up that newfound happiness either. She was living a little selfishly, but was that necessarily a bad thing? She was happy with Becky. There were some nights where her mood was an unsalvageable nightmare, until a call from Becky gave her something to laugh about, to smile about, to feel good about. The Student Council never made her feel that way. Few things did.

Doing good for everyone and doing good for herself. The two opposing forces were pulling at her in opposite directions, neither one willing to give. But why did they have to be opposing? Why did it have to be one or the other - her happiness versus the happiness of everyone else? This job of being Student Council president. It was a martyr's job, and she was chosen as the sacrifice. She had been since birth. She was a trapeze artist, trying to maintain a delicate balance between self-imposed responsibilities and her friendship with Becky. The tightrope of life was giving way, and she had to find Nikki before she fell.

"Hey, um, Becky? You should go help Bayley while I take care of something."

Becky didn't ask. With an understanding nod of the head, she let Trevor lead her to where Bayley was failing spectacularly at hammering boards and hanging signs on tents.

Leaving Becky to handle working with Bayley - again, skipping out on work. Alexa was the worst - she went off in search of Nikki. She had expected the search to be arduous, considering the mess of construction, lights, posters, and everything else. Many booths had been set up, while others were mashed together with sticky tape. The mess was obscuring her vision, yet amidst the disarray and clutter, she could make out Nikki's form in the distance.

Clipboard in hand, the brunette was directing traffic like a leader. Like a real leader. Nikki treated everything that was important to her with care. That's how Alexa had known her, ever since grade school. She was hyperactive, loud, and sometimes clingy, but when she cared, she showed it in her actions and her words. She didn't let anything she cared about slip through her fingers like Alexa seemed to do at every turn.

Nikki should've been council president. She cared about this, and she showed it, more than Alexa could ever hope to.

Before Alexa approached her hardworking best friend, she was stopped by Nikki shouting her name from across the former field.

"Lexi!" She dropped everything she was doing to sprint over to Alexa's side, leaving a group of volunteers to chat amongst themselves. Alexa hadn't worked out what she was going to say before Nikki was standing in front of her, concern written on her face in bold marker. "What are you doing here?!"

So it was true - Nikki didn't count on Alexa showing up. Maybe she planned on it.

"I'm sorry," Alexa said. Two words in and her voice was cracking. Why was she like this?

"What for?"

"I haven't been here. I haven't been doing anything. I'm supposed to be doing my best for the Student Council, but I've just been letting everyone down. I get why you didn't want me here."

"Wait, what are you talking about? Slow down."
"You don't have to pretend."

Nikki was frantic, completely distraught. Taking Alexa by the wrist, she dragged the blonde behind a finished booth. There was no one to hear them, no one to listen in.

"Nikki..."

"No, you hold on here!" Nikki wasn't giving Alexa another chance to apologize. She was taking over, firmly behind the driver's seat of this discussion. Alexa left her the wheel. "You better stop apologizing right now before I... before I steal your nose!"

Alexa blinked. Not twice, but thrice. It was certainly a Nikki threat.

"You haven't done a thing wrong! You're the hardest working person I know!"

"That's - wait, time out. Why didn't you tell me this was going on then?"

Nikki bit the inside of her cheek. It was her biggest tell - a sure sign that she was keeping something from Alexa. A secret, a future surprise party that she couldn't keep under wraps, a present in her locker that she didn't want Alexa to know of but couldn't hide its existence before blurting out what it was.

"I wanted you to have a break."

"Break? All I've done is take breaks."

"You needed it!" Nikki shouted. "Watching you work nonstop, starving yourself, staying awake for days. What else was I meant to do?"

"I-I don't know." Her bad habits had gotten much worse since the beginning of the semester, that much was true. She failed to understand how that could be affecting Nikki. Great, so not only was she careless with her job, but she was careless with her friendship.

If she kept up this cycle of beating herself up, Nikki would likely steal her nose.

"You've done so much, Alexa. So much. Not just for the Student Council, but for me. You take care of me, you taught me how to love myself, you showed me how to be happy. But I can't be happy when I'm watching you slowly kill yourself, trying to do everything on your own!"

Alexa recalled Becky showing up with a brown paper bag, offering her lunch and a ride home. She remembered how good it felt to take that first bite of food and how good it felt when she climbed into bed and rested. This whole time, Nikki told her to eat, told her to sleep, but she stubbornly refused.

"I'm sor-"

Nikki held her middle and index fingers out, ready to pounce on Alexa's nose. Alexa didn't continue.

"I love you, Alexa. You are my best friend forever and ever and ever and ever and... and ever. All the evers. I wanted you to feel the same happiness that you've given to me. You feel that with Becky."

"Becky?"

"She makes you happy, right?"

"Well... yeah."
"That's why I didn't mention this to you. I wanted you to keep being happy. To take time and just live your life for yourself instead of for everyone else."

"But I'm the Student Council president."

"But you're not the entire Student Council!" Nikki was desperate, shouting louder than Alexa had ever heard her shout before. They were hidden, but she wasn't sure that mattered anymore. "I don't know why you have this need to make everyone happy, but you can't do everything alone. Please, Alexa. Just rely on someone else for a change. Rely on me."

Every syllable was like a stab to Alexa's chest, a silver dagger twisting in her heart. It was just like she said - when Nikki cared about something, she wouldn't let it go. In this case, she wasn't willing to let Alexa go, doing everything to not let her fall, and to catch her if she did.

"I'll try - I will. I know I always can."

"Good. Now, for my first official decree as honorary Student Council president for the day-
"

"Say what?"

"I am telling - no, no demanding - no, ordering you!"

Those were the same things, but Alexa didn't want to rain on Nikki's parade.

"Go to the Fair with Becky."

"But we're supposed to be working the booths."

Nikki poked Alexa in her nose, not stealing it, but bashing it. "Don't worry. We've got it covered."

"We?"

"I cleared it with everyone that showed up today. We all agreed that you deserve this." Alexa was going to protest, but Nikki pushed a finger to the blonde's lips, quieting her, nearly shoving the digit into her mouth. "Go have fun."

A reversal of roles, Alexa snatched Nikki up from the ground, arms wrapped tightly around her. She was definitely crushing Nikki's lungs, sucking the air out of her with a hug that could bend steel, but she couldn't contain her emotions.

Why did Nikki have to be so soft?! The question was a recurring one.

"Y-you're kind of hurting me."

"Welcome to my world."

"That's o-okay, you know? I like hugs!"

She dropped Nikki before she realigned her spinal cord, the Scot rubbing the small of her back. "Before you go, you might want to help Becky with that sign."

Alexa spun on her heel, making a full one-eighthy to catch a glimpse of Becky. There she was, fighting to the death with a giant piece of cardboard with ink on it. From where she was standing, it appeared that the sign was winning, Becky stomping her feet in agitation as it fell on her head.

"She's hopeless. Well I… guess I'll see you later?"
With a quick thank you and a quicker goodbye, Alexa saw Nikki off and walked over to Becky's booth. Upon closer inspection, the redhead was alone, with nothing but a rickety ladder to keep her company. Bayley was nowhere to be seen.

"Having trouble there?" Alexa chided as Becky punched the sign from hell.

"It won't stay up!"

"What's with the ladder?"

"It's for Bayley."

Alexa checked once more. No Bayley.

"Where is she?"

"I told her to get lost."

"May I ask why?"

"She couldn't climb the ladder and hold this devil sign up. So - god damn this sucks - I told her to beat it."

"And how did that work out?"

Becky dropped the sign in an act of submission. Her normally pristine hair was matted against her forehead. Her jacket - the symbiotic piece of leather that it was - was slung across her shoulder, no longer bonded to her back. She was sweating worse than the boy she had mocked only twenty minutes prior, utterly defeated by cardboard.

Something was wrong with Alexa. She found this sweating, disheveled girl attractive - she found her pretty. Her skin was glistening from sweat, and it only highlighted her beauty. It was unfair.

"Can you just climb the ladder for me?"

Alexa picked a horrible time to be afraid of heights. She wouldn't need to climb to the top to center the sign, but a nasty fall from halfway up the rungs wasn't a much better prospect.

"What if I hold the ladder and you climb?" she asked.

"Don't take this the wrong way."

"I'm already taking it the wrong way."

Accompanied with a pout stretching a mile long, Alexa put her hands to her hips, anticipating the words that she knew Becky was going to say. She warned the other girl that she better not, with a stern shake of the head. It wasn't going to work - it was a Caution sign that Becky was going to plow through.

"I don't trust you holding the ladder."

"I can hold a ladder!"

"With a person on it?"

"I'm not that weak."
"But you're not this strong."

Becky flexed her muscle, and Alexa did the same. There was no comparison.

"You suck." With a huff of resentful acceptance, Alexa began her ascent up the ladder with careful, deliberate steps. One rung. Then another. And another. She was becoming faint, a sensation of queasiness coming over her from being so high up in the stratosphere. "This should be good, right?"

"Given that your backside's at eye level, I'm gonna go ahead and say that you need to climb higher."

"If I break my neck, I am so going to haunt you."

"'Tis the season."

It didn't take much more climbing for Alexa to reach a point where she could efficiently hang the sign. Standing on her tiptoes, Becky handed the world's deadliest piece of cardboard off to Alexa, who - from her precarious position - was slow to grab it. The Irish girl was holding the ladder, but Alexa was still cautious.

"You get everything settled with Nikki?"

Becky's question was a welcome one - a distraction that allowed Alexa to focus on anything other than tumbling backwards and cracking her skull open like a ripe coconut.

"Yep. She said we-" She was seconds away from putting her foot in her mouth, biting her tongue before she could let slip the real reason - the real, Becky-related reason - why she and Nikki spoke. "She, um, wanted to surprise me!"

"Surprise you?"

"Y-yeah. She said that she'd cover for me so I can go to the Fair!"

"She can do that?"

"Sure…?"

The explanation was brutally unconvincing, but Becky seemed to buy it, whining as soon as she heard the news.

"Lucky you."

"Hey, don't be jealous. You're going too."

"You serious?" Becky asked in disbelief. "Why me?"

"One of the many perks of being my right hand lady. So, you're coming with me."

She was deathly afraid of looking down to see Becky's reaction, but she didn't have to. The elation on her face was strong enough to be felt. Becky went quiet, completely lost in reverie, future excitement at the Fair undoubtedly on her mind.

"I take it you're excited?" Alexa asked.

"Yeah. I've never been to a Fair."

"What?" Alexa did look down this time as she addressed Becky, her fear eradicated by astonishment.
"But the Fair was your idea!"

"I've seen them around when I was a kid, but I never went myself. Looked fun."

"I can't believe your parents never took you to one."

"Like my mother was gonna stop drinking long enough to care about me."

Her mother? Becky never mentioned her mother - not during late night phone calls, or texting sessions, or before class. Never. Alexa couldn't remember any mentions of Becky's family whatsoever. Her parents, her home, her past - it wouldn't be wrong of Alexa to say that the subject of her personal life was intentionally avoided. To have it brought up now, it had to be an accident.

"Your... mother?"

"Forget you heard that!"

Alexa wasn't worried, not until the earthquake started, the ladder commencing its endless rattling. Except, it wasn't an earthquake that was the cause. She could see Becky, petrified after letting loose something that she wanted to conceal - a box of memories left in the attic to be hidden away forever. Her grip on the ladder was loosened completely, and with no support, there was only one direction for it to go.

Down.

"Becky!" Alexa screamed for dear life after losing her footing.

"Alexa!" Becky screamed in response. Her fingers made a grab for the ladder, hoping that her reflexes would be fast enough to save it from crashing downward. They weren't, and the ladder continued tumbling towards the ground.

For a split second, Alexa felt like she was walking on air. With her support gone, it was as if she were floating - flying, able to see the world from a different vantage point. It wasn't to last. Gravity remembered that she wasn't meant to be up there. She had no wings, no ability to fly. She wasn't a plane, and she wasn't a bird. She was Alexa, and Alexa couldn't fly.

And so she fell. The irony was almost humorous - work really was going to be the death of her. If her muscles weren't paralyzed, rigid from the speed at which she was falling, she might have laughed.

It was true what they said. When faced with death, your life does flash before your eyes. She thought about Nikki, her best friend. Years of keeping each other company, protecting each other, lifting each other up, walking through the dark corridors of life together until they reached the light. Nikki meant everything to her, and Alexa meant everything to Nikki. She proved it time and time again, even today.

She thought about her parents. They weren't perfect, but no parents were. They played it by ear a lot, doing their best. When Alexa refused to eat, when Alexa couldn't stop eating, when Alexa was disgusted by her own reflection in the mirror, they were there for her, supplying her with love. Some weren't so lucky, and she never took that love for granted.

Her thoughts came to Becky. Her life was flashing before her eyes, but half of it was centered around this past month. She unfairly wrote the redhead off as another delinquent that would be jailed before a high school diploma ever graced her. She was glad to be wrong - so, so glad. Becky was funny, charming, caring - she was a girl that did what made her happy, whatever that may be. She
didn't think about what the future may hold. The present was what mattered to her. She added something special to Alexa's life. Becky was special, more special to her than anyone else.

A few weeks wasn't enough. She wanted more time with Becky. There was much more life left to explore together, but it was too late.

What would people say at her funeral, she wondered.

'A Alexa - the girl that worked herself to death.'

'A Alexa - she spent her whole life worrying.'

'A Alexa - she died before she could live.'

Living. Why couldn't she just live? Why did she put so much pressure on herself to be perfect? Why did she willingly carry the weight of the world on her shoulders? Why did she insist on doing it alone? She still didn't understand any of it, and she never would.

She wanted to start living for herself a little more - she wanted to play hooky for a day, to ride on the back of Becky's motorcycle and share godawful jokes. She wanted to ask Becky to go costume shopping with her this weekend because there was no way on this green earth that Becky had a costume ready to go.

But she would never get the chance.

She listed off her apologies in her head - to Nikki, to her parents, to Becky - before landing with a thud, the darkness slowly taking over her.

Until she opened her eyes.

When the unrelenting pain never came, Alexa allowed herself to open her eyes. It was neither heaven nor hell, like she expected, but Becky, staring down at her. "I've got you," her Irish savior whispered in her ear, repeatedly. "I've got you. I've got you."

Becky was kneeling on the floor, one of her arms hooked under Alexa's thighs, the other supporting her back. A bride without a wedding. Alexa looped her hands around Becky's neck, thanking her in the only way she knew how.

"I'm so sorry," Becky said. "I'm sorry I-"

"It's okay," Alexa reassured her. "It's okay. I'm okay."

It was hard to believe her own words, but she was okay.

"Thank Christ. I was almost ready to start bargaining. Another second longer and I would've said that 'Part of Your World' was best, if it'd wake you up."

"I wouldn't have believed you even if I was unconscious."

Neither of them moved. They stared long into each other's eyes, afraid that any sudden movement would cause something to break. Alexa's body, the moment - they didn't know, but they weren't ready to find out.

Alexa was fortunate. She had another chance. She couldn't let this opportunity pass her by.

"Becky?"
"Yeah?"

Maybe she didn't understand herself fully, or why she did the things she did, but if she learned anything today, it was that she needed to live her life for herself, just a little bit. Not later, not once she graduated, not in the future, but now. It didn't matter if she failed - it didn't matter if she fell, because she knew that there would always be someone there to catch her.

Not just Nikki, but Becky too.

"Are you free this weekend?"

Chapter End Notes

Wanderin' free
She wants to be
Paaaaart of that wooooorld!

Tumblr @starchild-5
Where We Belong

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Alexa had asked Becky to go to the mall with her, mere seconds after a harrowing near-death experience, her hero presumed she was delirious. She wasn't - in fact, her thoughts had never been more clear than when she was lying in those comforting arms, listening to those sweet whispers, staring up at those sparkling, starlit eyes. Her life could have been over, and when she realized it wasn't, she decided that this was the time to make time for herself, to do the things that she wanted to do.

Right now, the only thing she wanted to do was go to the Fair with Becky.

The redhead was hesitant, unsure if the girl in her arms was suffering from some sort of post-traumatic shock, but immediately relented once the words 'costume shopping' traveled the distance from Alexa's mouth to her ears. Alexa found her unabashed excitement for the Fair to be adorable. When Becky called her the following night, just to make sure that their plans for the weekend were still intact, Alexa's heart could've melted. She couldn't let it, not yet. She needed to share that heart with Becky.

It was a few days later, a Sunday afternoon, the thirtieth afternoon of October. It was very last minute for them to be buying costumes, but Alexa hadn't considered buying a costume at all until Nikki told, demanded, and ordered her to go to the Fair. She was fully expecting to be working, manning a booth, watching students smash rotted pumpkins, or trying to win stuffed animals for their significant others. Now, it was her that would be smashing pumpkins and winning stuffed animals.

Minus the significant other part.

Alexa wasn't sure what she was going to do about her feelings for Becky, which became stronger and harder to ignore with each passing sunset. Even on those days before today, those afternoons and nights following her fall, they couldn't stay apart, talking constantly as they had been doing for some time. Alexa so-very-obviously wanted to be with her, but she was too afraid of rejection - too scared of ruining such a blossoming friendship. Becky cared about her because they were friends - she'd rehearsed these words in front of her bathroom mirror. There was nothing more to it. They had so much in common, so much they would talk about. They gelled, but Becky would never look at Alexa the same way Alexa looked at her - with longing, with affection.

In everything she read and watched, these dreaded feelings appeared often and without restraint. She had never felt like this before - she didn't know what being into someone was supposed to feel like. Every show and every book, every movie and every play, seemed to describe them in much the same manner. A warmth that burned from the inside, sweet like caramel, smooth like jazz.

But they also mentioned the cold - the bitter cold that swept through the night with no one to keep you warm. They mentioned the sour, the face-clenching reflex that came with the fear of brutal rejection. They mentioned the unpolished rock and sharp metal, because navigating through the deafening sounds of the heart was never as smooth as the movies.

This is what waiting did to Alexa. They had agreed to take the bus separately, Becky's motorcycle having little space to fit anything too large. There was also something about Alexa 'leaving too early' for Becky's liking. Sure, the blonde was twenty minutes early, but being prompt was an important life skill! But her biggest mistake was choosing to sit at the food court. The money in her wallet was
being saved for Halloween expenses, but the temptation to buy and eat an entire pizza pie was strong. She would have to resist, somehow.

She flipped her phone over, intending to play a dumb game to pass the time, when she spotted a message from Nikki.

_Cross my heart: Are you two going to kiss :)_

_Alexa: No we're not going to kiss…_

_Cross my heart: Noooo why not? :( _

Why was Nikki doing this to her? She didn't need to keep imagining the feel of Becky's luscious lips pressed against hers. She didn't need to be imagining the taste, the texture, the adrenaline rush. She didn't need to be imagining their tongues entangled, Alexa refusing to let go until they made up for every envelope that came unglued because someone's tongue wasn't wet enough.

What she did need was a freezing cold shower.

_Alexa: Because I don't think she wants to kiss me. _

_Cross my heart: Well I think she does. She's always staring at you when you're not looking. _

_Alexa: You're just making that up! _

_Cross my heart: Nope :) _

Was Nikki secretly practicing the art of being coy from Becky? Her phone vibrated again before she could question it.

_Cross my heart: If you kiss, will you let me know please please please? _

_Alexa: Fine sure. _

_Alexa: I mean wait no we're not going to kiss shut up _

Before her thumbs could continue mashing at her phone's blinking screen, a bundle of bright red peeked from the corners of her vision. Becky was here, walking towards her slowly. Alexa scrambled to stash her phone in her bag, fumbling with the device like a clumsy oaf.

"Hey!" Becky greeted. A normal greeting. A very normal greeting.

"Wow. That was anticlimactic."

"What?"

"I'm just so used to you scaring me. It's kind of boring when you don't follow the formula."

"Sorry, professor. Just wanted to keep things fresh. What was it again - 'subverting your expectations'?"

"Do not go there."

Becky didn't, thankfully, and instead held her arms out, confusing a still sitting Alexa greatly. "Aren't we supposed to hug, or whatever? Those are the rules, right?"
The fact that there were no set Student Council rules exclusively for hugging was criminal, in Alexa’s point of view, but she would settle for these spur of the moment ‘Alexa and Becky’ rules. She stood up from her seat, practically throwing herself into waiting arms.

There was nothing warmer, nothing more calming, then being held in Becky's embrace. Maybe it was the romantic movie cliches getting to her, or the softness of her own heart. Everything felt so right like this, like nothing else mattered except this.

"You learn fast," Alexa said, reluctantly stepping back.

"Check you out. No blazer."

Alexa wasn't wearing anything special - a Jack Skellington t-shirt and some black pants she pulled from her drawer this very morning. Her normally loose hair was tied into a ponytail. If they were going to be walking, she wanted to be as comfortable as possible.

"You think I wear that thing for fun?"

"Should I lie and say no?"

Alexa could tell she would be doing a lot of eye rolling today.

"I didn't say you looked bad or anything," Becky added. "Your hair looks great."

"You're bad at this," Alexa teased, though the compliment did make her chest flutter. "But thanks. You look…"

Alexa paused to examine Becky's clothing. Boots, kinda-sorta jeans, that black leather jacket that seemed to be morphed into her back. If Becky confessed that she had been born with it - that it grew with her like an extra appendage - it would be terribly unsurprising.

"…The same. Do you only own one outfit?"

"I can't part with my jacket! It gets lonely."

"It's less about the jacket and more about the everything else."

"Whatever. Once we get our costumes, it's alllll coming off, baby!

Becky wasn't seriously trying to be seductive, but she still sent chills running up and down Alexa's spine. It was more likely the comical swivel of her hips that did it. Looking at her was like looking through love-tinted glasses - everything Becky said and did just sent her emotions in a tailspin. The list of mental imagery that she didn't need today was starting to occupy its very own corner in her mind. A dirty, filthy, corner where she dumped her worst thoughts.

Like thoughts of Becky in a changing room.

"You okay?"

"Why wouldn't I be?"

"Your face is redder than my hair."

Alexa's hand flew to her cheek, as if touching it would subdue any redness. It was a good thing that Becky was so clueless.
"Ah, that. Yeah, it's hot in here," she said lamely, tugging at the collar of her shirt to emphasize this non-fact.

"Really? It feels kind of cool to me."

"Well I've been sitting at the food court for twenty minutes. It gets hot. All the food. And the steam."

No one in their right mind would believe something so laughably untrue. Whether or not Becky did, she didn't press the issue further, instead changing the subject before Alexa ran out of poorly crafted excuses. "Part of me really wanted to go to the Fair like this. Would've told people that I was dressed as a badass."

God, Becky could be so lame, but it was one of her most endearing traits. The way she said such outlandish things with the utmost confidence - the way she made them sound far more ridiculous than they would've sounded otherwise. That trademark smirk, the wiggle of the eyebrows because she just knew that she said something funny, or cool, or whatever she happened to be going for.

"You have never been a badass a day in your life."

"The trick to being badass is making people believe that you aren't badass."

"That makes no sense."

"It would if you were a fellow badass."

"Sure, Becks."

"Who's Becks?" she asked, quizzically, after a momentary pause.

Alexa was never one for nicknames, but this was one she kept to herself. Until now.

"Um. You?"

"Becks. Becks. I kind of like it. Does this mean I can call you Queenie some more?"

"No. And stop sounding so excited about that," Alexa scolded. She was pretty sure that Becky tainted the word 'queen' for her forever. Her imaginary future trips to Buckingham Palace would need to be canceled.

"What does everyone else call you?"

"I don't know. Nikki calls me Lexi."

"Okay, let me give it a shot." Becky took a deep breath, her fingers clenching and unclenching, summoning powers from the great beyond. "Le- Queenie! No no, hang on. Le- Lex… Le- Madam President! Man, that's a heck of a tongue twister."

"You think that jacket could fit in a blender?"

Becky clammed up without much of a fight, zipping her lip and tossing the phantom key. Seconds later, she swiftly took to the floor, retrieving said key, and unlocked her lips. "Where are we going anyway?"

"It's called, 'Creepy Costumes and Cauldrons,' I'm pretty sure."

"Get all the tropes in there, why dontcha? Well, I'm not much of a shopper, so lead the way."
Alexa wasn't much of a shopper either, choosing to spend any spare time at the mall frequenting its scarce number of bookstores, but she didn't have the heart to tell Becky that she didn't really know where anything was.

Becky found out sooner than she had hoped.

Trying to find this store was like trying to find a needle in a haystack, Alexa was convinced. Fifteen agonizing minutes passed, and they were walking - mostly escalator-ing - in circles. It was a wild goose chase, and neither one of them were happy about it. Becky's comment of buying a compass nearly made Alexa poke a giant hole into her shirt with a hairpin. When they finally reached their destination, any leftover tension was defused.

"I told you it was downstairs," Becky gloated.

"You specifically said *up*stairs."

"I don't go shopping. Why are you listening to me?"

Mostly defused.

They walked into the Halloween store with hastened steps, ready to pick their costumes for the Fair. The store itself was much bigger on the inside than its outside appearance had them believe. They weren't expecting the assault on their eyes that was to shortly follow.

Sugary treats in every aisle - the smell of name-brand chocolates and a rainbow of differently colored hard candies overflowing from their bowls. Paper mache black cats, plastic witches, a large jack-o'-lantern that laughed maniacally when someone crossed its mechanical view. Alexa giggled when its motion detection caused Becky to leap an entire foot off of the ground. It probably wasn't the safest to keep it right at the entryway, but she supposed the intention was to scare, after all.

What really caught the pair's attention, though, and the reason why they were there, was the costumes. They lined the entirety of the store's aisles. Famous characters, movie monsters, ghosts, ghouls. It was more than a Halloween store - it was a collection of costumes, neatly cast aside in this forgotten, costume enthusiast's paradise. It made Alexa wonder what became of this store during the other ten months of the year.

Ten, because everyone obviously knew that Halloween unofficially started in September.

Alexa went to ask Becky where she wanted to start looking, but her friend's eyes were preoccupied with something. The blonde followed her gaze. There, hanging from the ceiling by two thin pieces of rope, was a sign.

'For Tots,' it read.

Becky glanced over to Alexa, then back to the sign. Then back to Alexa, then back to the sign. Then back to Alexa.

"Too easy," she said.

With the speed of a cheetah - or with the speed of an annoyed Student Council president - Alexa's fingers made a beeline for Becky's earlobe, pinching it tightly between two of her fingers. She tugged on the unsuspecting ear before Becky could swipe her hand away.

"Do you have something that you would like to share with the class?" Alexa asked, her cheerful disposition laced with menacing undertones.
"J-just pointing out that the adult's section is over there!"

"That's what I thought." Alexa unhanded Becky's ear, the loudmouth recoiling once freed. "Let's go."

"Yeah, let's," a wounded Becky agreed, holding her throbbing ear. She picked up her feet, following along as the council president took the lead.

As they pushed through crowded aisles, dodging rowdy children and bumping knees with other customers, Alexa's thoughts drifted back to Becky. Seeing these parents with their children - smiling as their child would excitedly run up to them, costume in hand, tender kisses planted on tiny foreheads and cheeks as they basked in their joy. It made her ponder the relationship between Becky and her own parents. Alexa didn't want to overstep her bounds, but it was like they didn't exist. It gave her a horrible feeling in the pit of her stomach, like something was deeply wrong. There was nothing - not a single mention of family vacations, or extravagant weekend dinners, or reunions, or anything to quiet the fears bubbling in Alexa's gut.

There was nothing, except Becky's mother.

Caught in an explosion of emotions during that afternoon's events - her perspective-altering talk with Nikki, a fall from a ladder that was almost fatal - she didn't have the mental energy to dissect what Becky had told her. If she was being honest with herself, she didn't want to think about it, because thinking about it made it real. She didn't want it to be real. She didn't want Becky's home life to be fractured.

She must have misheard her. It was the only explanation. There was nothing to worry about, she tried to convince herself. Nothing about Becky's life at home that she would have to think about. Nothing that would keep her up at night, wondering if Becky was in harm's way. Surely, everything was fine, and even if they weren't, it wasn't her place to ask.

But maybe, if only for a minute, she could-

A glass-shattering screech ended that plan before it could fully take shape.

"I can't believe this!"

"What?"

Becky pointed at a special row of costumes, assorted comic book heroes and villains, grouped together. Superman, Wonder Woman, Scarlet Witch, Spider-Man, an absurdly large amount of Joker costumes. Every comic character that Alexa could ever recall was there, even the more obscure names - just who the heck was the Swiss Cyborg, anyway? She couldn't imagine what would be upsetting Becky to such a degree.

"They don't have Ivy!"

"Ivy?"

"Poison Ivy? The greatest villain of all time?"

Alexa rummaged through cheap plastic and latex, digging deep into the line of colorful garments to try and locate any signs of Poison Ivy. "Harley Quinn, Robin, The Hulk... Wow, no Poison Ivy. Guess she was popular this year."

"That's lame. I've never been trick-or-treating, and I've always wanted to be Ivy. This sucks."
It was disheartening, knowing that Becky had never been to a Fair, but trick-or-treating? It was a blasphemous notion. She never had a chance to dress up, or become her favorite fictional characters for one night, or rot her teeth by binging entire bags of candy. Denying a child that kind of fun was akin to celebrating Christmas and not allowing them to open any gifts! It felt cruel and unusual, and the swirling vortex of mystery that was Becky's family life slowly sucked Alexa back in.

This wasn't the place for that. No, she had to cheer Becky up.

She called Becky's name, the latter turning to her, sluggishly, disappointment apparent in her body language. Alexa covered her own face with her hands. When nothing happened, Becky leaned her head in closer. And closer. And closer still. Her curiosity would be her undoing.

With Becky centimeters away from her face, Alexa swiftly removed her hands, eyelids held up with her fingertips, startling the Irish girl. "I. See. Dead. People!"

"Wha- Oh, you're the… kid. From The Sixth Sense. Not a bad take," Becky said, amused by Alexa's over exaggerated impression. "Do you like scary movies?" Her tone had taken a slightly darker edge, more sinister.

"Uh, Scream right? When Ghostface is on the phone with Drew Barrymore?"

"Yeah, that's it! Though now I'm curious about the actual answer to the question."

Satisfied that her reference had landed, Alexa let her eyelids relax, rubbing away any slight traces of blurriness. "I'm not a horror movie buff, but I don't mind them. You know, during the daylight hours and not before I go to bed. I'm not that brave."

"Not a fan of a little late night screaming?"

"Not if I don't want my parents kicking me out."

Alexa cringed. She discreetly examined Becky's face, searching for any giveaways that the mention of 'parents' might have bothered her. A subtle twitch of the lips, an offbeat blink, a scratch of the nose. She didn't find anything off. Either Becky had mastered the art of wearing the mask of indifference, or Alexa was severely misguided in her thinking.

"Wanna go check out some monsters?" Becky asked.

Alexa nodded in affirmation, relieved that her absentminded slip of the tongue - and this heinous, malicious, and downright tragic act of keeping so little Poison Ivy costumes in stock! - didn't dampen Becky's mood.

Rounding the corner, the pair were able to quickly find the aisle they were looking for. It was home to more traditional Halloween items - bloody entrails made of an unknown gooey substance, severed limbs, and gouged eyeballs that hung from their empty sockets. They made Alexa squeamish, even knowing they were props.

Another batch of costumes stood out amongst the fake gore. Alexa's gaze was drawn to the Freddy Krueger set of clothes. Striped shirt, worn out fedora, and the signature glove. She grabbed it from the pile, showing it off to Becky. "Think I might go with this."

"What will I go as then? Nothing goes with Freddy."

Alexa's brow arched. "I wasn't aware that we were going to be matching."
"W-well, you know." Becky was sheepish in reply, rubbing the back of her neck in embarrassment. "We're going together, aren't we? I just assumed we would match, is all."

Wearing matching costumes wasn't exactly what Alexa had in mind for the Fair, but this would be her crush's first official Halloween outing. Alexa would do anything to make it a special one - to make it a night full of wonder that Becky could revisit on her worst days, and smile at the fond memories. If having their costumes match is what this adorable human wanted, then matching costumes is what she would get.

She dumped the Freddy ensemble back into the fold, searching for any two costumes that might match, or share a resemblance in any capacity. Not werewolves and mummies, not murderers and aliens, and nothing with masks. She wanted to breathe - breathing was essential to the Halloween festivities, as it turned out.

"What's Nikki going as?" Becky asked, interrupting Alexa's apparent quest to ransack the entire store.

"Some kind of mad doctor. Why?"

"She's going to be busy all night. Thought it'd be cool to coordinate and bring the fun to her."

Becky's considerate nature was often overshadowed by her unquenchable thirst for sarcasm during every waking moment of her life, but to Alexa, these moments of immeasurable kindness were as much a part of Becky as her endless joking. It was that same kindness that made her so attractive. Her heart was made of solid gold, shining so brightly that Alexa was always able to find it.

"You're right," Alexa agreed. "She's the only reason we get to go."

"Exactly. So let's get something, like, mad-science-y for her."

It was a very specific request, but one that Alexa was easily able to fulfill. It didn't take long to find a pair of costumes that fit Becky's requirements.

"How's Frankenstein and the Bride?"

"Okay, that's actually pretty cool," Becky said. "But it's 'Frankenstein's monster,' I'll have you know."

"Becks," Alexa breathed out, this conversation already wearing paper thin. "He's not going to care if you don't use his last name."

"Just trying to be respectful to Mr. And Mrs. Monster."

Rather than go down this gigantic rabbit hole of semantics, Alexa handed Becky the Frankenstein - Frankenstein's monster - costume, shoving it into her hands. There was an intense, burning desire to see Becky in a bridal gown - shoulders bared for the world to see, Alexa's dry, thirsty eyes drinking in the sight of her exposed collarbone. It was for this reason, to avoid being a complete mess all night, that she had to keep the Bride of Frankenstein costume for herself.

"I'm not wearing this wig."

Alexa took a glimpse at the wig included with hers - a large, ill-fitting accessory with a white streak down the center. She could tell how much it would itch just by feeling it through its plastic bag.

"Ditto."
"Guess you're going to be my bride?" Becky asked, smirk playing at the corner of her lips. "And little ol' me without a ring."

"Knowing you, it'd be one of those cheap candy rings."

"Hey, only the best, most expensive candy for my future wife."

'Keep it together,' Alexa repeated, internally, despite every muscle in her body threatening to give out all at once. Her knees were buckling, her back struggling to keep her standing upright. She was going to pass out if this went on any longer. She steadied her breathing.

Inhale. Exhale.

Inhale. Exhale.

Inhale. Exhale.

"I've seen enough candy for today," she said, trying her hardest to hide the shakiness in her voice.

"Same here. Let's go before my sweet tooth comes a-knockin'."

Alexa motioned to the changing rooms, excited to see how well these costumes would suit them. They hadn't taken seven steps before taking notice of the mass of humanity in front of them. It occurred to her instantly that everyone in this crowd of people, snaking around every aisle in the store like a contorted conga line, was waiting to use one of the only three rooms available. How had she not seen this before?! She pulled her phone from her bag again, choosing to disregard any unread teasing from Nikki, and checked the time.

"We're going to be here forever."

"I say we go," Becky suggested. "Everything should be the right size. Unless y-"

"If this is a height joke, I'm going to climb up there and punch you."

"Never mind then."

The long voyage back to the entrance looked more treacherous than it had originally. Their path out of the fiery pits of the Underworld would have them dodge the same rowdy children, bumping knees with the same customers. Awaiting them on the other side of the River Styx was the cashier, ready to take their money. Becky placed their costumes on the counter, while Alexa pulled out her credit card.

"That's a fancy card," Becky pointed out.

"Thanks to three summer jobs. And a lot of crying, but we don't need to talk about that."

The numbers flashed on the register - seventy-three dollars, just about. Becky reached into her front pocket, presumably fishing for her wallet. Alexa handed the cashier her credit card before the wallet ever saw the light of day.

"This should be good for both." Stammered noises that Alexa couldn't decipher dripped from Becky's mouth like a leaky faucet. "You doing alright over there?"

"Alexa. No. I can't let you pay for mine too."

"I'm only paying you back for that lunch."
"I spent zero dollars on that."

"Then think of it as payment for picking me up tomorrow?"

She wasn't sure what came over her, but paying for Becky - much like everything having to do with her, from holding her, to talking to her, to being with her - felt right. She had given Alexa so much already and didn't know it.

Once the payment had been made, Alexa took the costumes, leaving a speechless Becky to stand in amazement. Any closer to the window, and she could pass as an incredibly lifelike mannequin, Alexa mused.

"Hey, Becks?"

"Yeah?"

Alexa stared blankly. "You wanna help me out here or…?"

"Oh, yeah. Got it."

Though Alexa only held out one, Becky chivalrously took both from her grasp, carrying them herself. "My hero!" Alexa exclaimed with twinges of a southern drawl.

With a smile and a courteous bow, Becky made her way towards the exit, with Alexa closely behind. "Next Halloween, I'm buying."

Becky was already making plans for next year, and Alexa couldn't be smiling any wider. "I'll mark that down in my calendar. Only three-hundred and sixty-five days to go!"

Spending time with Becky was an experience that couldn't be replicated. The shared laughter, the back-and-forth that never seemed to get old. She wanted to travel to the past, to tell ninth grade Alexa Bliss that she and Rebecca - or 'Becky,' or whatever her stupid name was - would have so much in common. She wanted to tell tenth grade Alexa Bliss that the snoring Irish girl sitting at the back of the class would become such an invaluable friend to her. She really wanted to tell the Alexa Bliss from last year that all of the tears, the struggles, the pain, and self-loathing would be worth it, because she would meet such a special person.

Becky was special, and that's what was killing her.

As they meandered around the mall, aimlessly wandering in and out of stores, Alexa could only think about Becky and her family. She swore that she wouldn't, doing everything in her power to keep those thoughts at bay with a ten-foot pole, but it became an impossible battle to win. It wasn't her place to bring up something so personal. It wasn't, but that boundary, that transparent, fine line that existed between friends, couldn't stop her from doing just that any longer.

"Hey," Alexa started as they continued to wander. "You want to go back to your house and try these on?"

"M-my house? What about your house?"

"They're painting," Alexa fibbed. "It would be easier if w-" 

"We can't go to mine," Becky said, cutting Alexa off.

"Not even for an hour?"
"No."

"Just for a little bit?"

"God, what part of 'no' aren't you getting here? I said we can't."

"Is it because of your mother?"

She grit her teeth, expecting Becky to explode in fury and rage, hurling insult after insult her way, a catapult that couldn't be stopped. The exact opposite happened - Becky gave her a defeated smile, her head hanging low. "I was hoping you had forgotten about that."

"How could I?"

"Guess it wouldn't be easy."

"I know I shouldn't be prying," Alexa said, before Becky could get sidetracked. "But I'm worried about you. If you tell me I'm being an idiot and that everything is okay, I'll stop, but if there's something bothering you, or if you're in trouble, I'm here for you."

She wanted Becky to call her an idiot. She wanted Becky to say that everything was fine. When she didn't do either of those things, that's when Alexa knew things were not okay - Becky was not okay. And she hated that. Alexa hated that more than anything. She couldn't bear knowing that Becky was suffering in silence, alone. Nobody deserved to be alone, especially not her.

"Not here," Becky relented. "Let's talk somewhere else."

Alexa didn't ask where. It didn't matter - she would follow her anywhere.

It was another chilly October evening, too chilly to be sitting in the park without gloves and a scarf. Yet neither girl complained - this was Becky's 'happy place,' as she had explained on the bus ride here. It was where she came when she needed a place to think, or a place to relax, or a place to simply exist, away from life's constant troubles. They sat together on a lonely park bench, forced closer together as their costumes occupied half of its space.

Alexa blew into her palms, staving off the Autumn winds with warm, controlled breaths. Daylight was dying, the sun slowly sinking beneath the horizon. Becky had yet to say much of anything, save for some small talk.

'Sure is cold.'

'Didn't realize it was this late.'

'I wonder when all the leaves will change colors.'

She was stalling, trying to figure out a way to say what it was that she wanted to say. Alexa was an impatient person, but she would wait for Becky. She didn't care if the sun went to sleep and the darkness took over the sky, or if the winds began to howl and the night grew colder - she would wait through it all until Becky was ready.

"Sorry," Becky said, suddenly. "Just need a second here."

"It's okay. Take your time."

"Right." Becky sucked in a large gasp air. Her face was unreadable, a revolving door of emotions
that she fought to keep from opening. Her face settled on 'calm,' her head turning to look at Alexa. "My old man left when I was three."

This revelation took Alexa by surprise. She shuffled through her mind's word bank to find a suitable response.

"Wow." If Alexa could slap herself, her cheeks would be oversized cherries. "Um, I mean. Dammit."

"It's okay," Becky responded with a low chuckle, easing her worries. "You don't have to say anything."

Alexa nodded, choosing to sit back and let Becky speak.

"I never really knew him," Becky continued. " Barely remember a damn thing about him. If you showed me his picture, I couldn't tell you who it was. Mom took it a lot harder than I did, for obvious reasons. I was just a kid. What the hell did I know? I just figured he'd come back one day with a box of chocolates and that would be that."

Alexa listened intently as Becky recounted the details of her childhood. She couldn't imagine growing up without her father. It was heartbreaking, hearing this, but with nothing to say, she let Becky go on.

"Mom bounced back after awhile. She had to work an extra job or two - can't remember exactly. I just know she was gone a lot. She ate dinner with me whenever she could and tucked me in at night before her other shift. Grandpa used to take care of me when she wasn't around. Loved that wacky old geezer. You know he told me that people became stars - like, actual stars in the sky - when they died? Said grandma was watching over me."

"That's really sweet."

"Yeah, it was. I believed it too. He died around the time I started school. I remember going outside every night for months, just staring at the stars, hoping that grandpa was staring back at me."

Alexa grabbed Becky's hand. There was no embarrassment, no hesitation. She caressed her skin, running a finger gently over the back of her hand. Becky didn't pull away, instead gripping Alexa's hand more firmly.

"Mom did her best - picked me up from school, ate with me when she could. Babysitters came and went, but mom always made sure she was the one to kiss me goodnight. Things were fine for another couple of years, but this isn't a happy story, as you can probably guess, so they didn't stay fine. It happened right when was starting middle school. Mom found dad online with his new wife and kid.

"I think that was the last time I saw her as herself - she lost who she was that day. My dad took everything from her. That was when she started drinking." Becky stopped to catch her breath, her grip around Alexa's hand tightening. "When she wasn't working, she was drinking. She changed - I didn't know who she was anymore. She wasn't tucking me in or kissing me goodnight. She was chugging drinks until one of us fell asleep. Usually her."

"Becky." Alexa shook her head. "You don't have to keep going if it's too much."

"No, I think I need to do this. I've never told anyone this stuff before and - and I don't know - I just want to tell you. I trust you more than anyone."
That was all Alexa needed to hear.

"That was my life. Coming home from school, having to take care of some drunken woman while she screamed my dad's name. I just got used to it. How messed up is that? I got used to it - me, a kid. But that's how it was. The worst part was when I tried bringing friends home.

"I'd always sneak them in whenever my mom was at work. I told them it was fine, that she was working and wouldn't be home for hours. Then one day, I had this friend over. Real jackass, that one, but we got along well enough. Mom happened to get out early that day. Apparently she had already been hitting the good stuff."

Becky paused, but Alexa knew she had to keep her going. "What happened?"

"About what you'd expect. She scared the guy right out the door. Next day at school, my alcoholic mother is the talk of the town. Got into a huge fight with the little jackass that told everyone, but it didn't matter. Everyone knew. The few friends that I did have, and the few friends that I tried to bring over again - they all just up and ditched me. I couldn't blame them. No one wanted to deal with that, or me."

"I'm sorry." There wasn't much else for Alexa to say. She just needed Becky to know that she was here for her.

"It's not your fault. But I could never make any friends. I never tried again. I- Ugh, dammit."

Becky stopped to wipe a tear from her eye.

Alexa could hear her heart shattering into hundreds of thousands of pieces.

"When I got to high school, it could've been a fresh start, but what was the point? Everyone would find out about my mother, and then my life would be miserable again. I started pushing people away, acting out. But there was a time where I got so fed up with it. I met this girl. Tall, blonde - like a freakin' amazon."

Alexa could take a few guesses as to who that could've been, but decided not to. If Becky wanted to mention her by name, she would've.

"We started meeting each other after school," Becky recounted, a wistful smile somehow finding its way to her face. "In the boiler room, behind the bleachers. I think she was ashamed of me, but I didn't care. She was there and I was there - that's all I needed. Just someone to make me feel real. She found out about my mother during some PTA thing a couple of months later, and I'll never forget the look of disgust she gave me as she called me lowlife trash. She still hasn't told anyone, at least I don't think. Maybe she wants to keep me a secret, or pretend that I never existed."

"No tha- that's too cruel."

"That's my life. A real 'made for TV' movie, huh?" Her joke was void of all its usual humor, like the joy had been completely sapped from it.

"I don't know what to say," Alexa admitted truthfully.

"Alexa."

Becky didn't get to finish - tears began to flow freely from her eyes, her hand not fast enough to wipe them away before they cascaded down her cheeks. She didn't let go of Alexa's hand, choosing to let them fall as they pleased.
"You're the first friend I've made in years," Becky admitted. She was choking back sobs, belting out her words before they could get caught in her throat. "I never felt like I belonged anywhere. Then you came along with this whole Student Council thing. You stood up for me, you listened to me. You talked to me. For the first time, I felt like I could be myself, like being happy was easy. You made me feel like that. You still do."

"So, that's why you didn't want me finding out?"

"I didn't want you to look at her and think that I'd just follow in her footsteps, or say that I wasn't worth the trouble, or - or something, I don't know. I just didn't want you to leave like everyone else. So… so please, don't?" Becky was openly weeping now, not caring who heard her or if she soaked the entire bench, flooding the entire park in a tsunami of tears. "Don't leave. Please, don't leave. I know I haven't been the best but I promise, I'll -"

That was it for Alexa. The begging - pleading with her not to go, promises of change surely next to seep from her quivering lips. It was more than she could take, so she did what she did best.

She pulled Becky into a hug.

It was like a dam that was slowly cracking. Becky's sobs were getting louder, more tears were falling from her cheeks, as Alexa cradled her trembling body. She held her protectively, letting tears fall onto her shirt. She rubbed Becky's back in circles, whispering soothing words as the girl in her arms collapsed into her.

"I'm not going anywhere," she promised. "I'm right here."

They stood in that position, entangled in a warm embrace, for minutes before Becky calmed down. She was sniffling, but her well had run dry, her tears all but exhausted.

"Feeling a little better?" Alexa asked, warily.

Becky nodded, using her sleeve to wipe any remnant tears from her face. "I haven't had a good cry like that in a long while. Sorry about your shirt."

"What, this?" Alexa scoffed. "I needed a new one anyway."

While Becky was busy cleaning herself off, Alexa seized the opportunity to allay her fears once and for all.

"I feel the same way you do. I used to think that I had to be this hard-working, diligent student all the time," she started, catching the Irish girl's attention. "I spent half of my life trying to be some perfect version of myself. I wanted to help people, and I still do, but I gave up everything to try and do that. I don't know - I wanted to feel like I wasn't worthless. Like, there was this hole I couldn't fill.

"I was afraid to show people the real me. I didn't want them to see me messing up, because then they'd see that I'm some fraud. I wanted them to see me as this perfect girl, and maybe then I'd feel like I belonged somewhere. I didn't know what my life was anymore, or what I was living for. With you, I feel like I've been able to just live my life for myself, and I'm starting to realize that that's okay. It's okay to be selfish sometimes, and it's okay to be yourself."

Saying those words aloud was like a light switch in Alexa's head - she felt that she finally understood. Wanting to do good for everyone, holding herself to this impossible standard, putting so much pressure on her shoulders. It was to fill the hollow space in her chest, to prove to herself that she was worth something. The loneliness - the only presence to keep her company late at night - was all-consuming. She had Nikki, but Nikki had her own life, her own hobbies, her own goals, her own
love. When she was off living her life, Alexa struggled to live hers.

She was like Becky. Lonely, hanging onto life by a thread. But she wasn't lonely anymore. She didn't have to prove herself to anyone, she didn't have to carry this weight. She could do good, but she could do it without being crushed under this constant pressure. She could live her life the way she wanted to, she could be herself, because the hole in her chest was filled.

It was filled with a sense of belonging, with Becky.

"If we're this good for each other," Becky started. "Then we might be stuck together for awhile."

Alexa moved closer to Becky, resting her head in the crook of her neck. She closed her eyes, basking in the touch of Becky's head leaning atop her own. "I'm okay with that."

"Thank you… Lexi."

"See, that wasn't so hard."

"I don't know. Might go back to Queenie tomorrow. It would fit the Halloween mood."

"Don't ruin the moment, Becks."

Becky wrapped an arm around Alexa's shoulders, closing the space between them. "Just for you, Lexi."

And as they sat beneath the dying light, bathing in what little remained of the sun's fading glow, Alexa could just feel it. This was where she belonged - where they both belonged.

Chapter End Notes

The kinda-sorta penultimate chapter?

Tumblr @starchild-5
Chapter Notes

"Imagine a 10k word chapter." - me, two chapters ago, before writing THIS. Also, if you've been enjoying this story, I highly recommend checking out the bottom notes for a bit of an update. For now, I hope you enjoy this one!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was Halloween night, and Alexa felt like she had lived an entire lifetime in the weeks leading up to this date. Nothing was the same as it once was - her feelings, her outlook on life, her goals, her dreams. Despite the rocky start to the school year, swamped with Student Council duties as soon as the calendar flipped to September, Alexa could say with earnest that her life had changed more in just this past month than any other time she could remember.

She had read plenty of books, tales of whirlwind romances where a chance meeting led to a lifetime of love and happiness. She couldn't get enough of those, but never truly believed that they could be real. She had dreamt about it, pictured it a million and one times, but never imagined that a single person could change someone's life forever, just like that, just like in her favorite stories. That was until she became friends with Becky.

It happened before either of them knew it was happening. It just did. Their short-lived rivalry culminating in a budding friendship - two clashing personalities that shouldn't mix as well as they did. But never has another person made Alexa so happy, and wasn't that the most important thing? Becky made her happy - she had skipped cloud nine altogether, and chose to float along clouds ten and eleven.

But it wasn't just that Becky made her happy when they were together. That was a major part of it, but it wasn't the only thing that had Alexa feeling so positive. The lifestyle that she once envied was now one that she could emulate. Not to the extreme lengths of buying motorcycles or ditching class - skipping class once was enough, she told herself, as she witnessed her homework doubling in size. She felt carefree, weightless, drifting along as a leaf in the blowing breeze. Becky made her feel like she had something to give, like she didn't have to be perfect to prove she was worthy of friendship, or romance, or living.

This passion, this affection, these feelings that she had for Becky. She didn't care if it happened a little too quickly, or if anyone would call her mad. She couldn't change how she felt, and she wouldn't want to, not for anything. It was all so unfamiliar to her - uncharted territory on a map with no landmarks. A crush, infatuation. She couldn't say what it was for certain, but it didn't matter, it didn't need a label. She only knew what she felt, and what she felt was real, a burning attraction with roaring flames so white hot that they couldn't be extinguished.

This wasn't as easy as every piece of media around her made it out to be. It wasn't one emotion that made her feel good - it was all of them, every emotion, firing off at once like a barrage of cannonballs from the port and starboard. If they were a gang of pirates, Becky was the most fearsome of them all - she was able to steal the treasure, Alexa's heart, soundly, without hassle. This was all difficult to put into words. Words weren't enough, at least not the words that she knew. She wouldn't mind inventing another language to tell Becky how much she meant to her. But regardless
of how she felt about Becky, she came to another realization.

No matter how fearless she felt she was becoming - no matter how unafraid of the future she was - that fear of being rejected was still prevalent in her mind.

She wanted to shout Becky's name from the rooftops, to proclaim her feelings and let them echo along every corner of the globe. But this fear took on a life of its own - it was a black hole, devouring every potential, blissful fantasy of their future together. She didn't understand how good they were for each other until yesterday, watching the setting sun as they poured their hearts out without reservation. Their connection was organic, pure, beautiful. If Becky rejected her, that connection might snap like a twig. What would they do then? They promised to stick together, but how could they keep that promise if looking at Becky's face filled Alexa with regret? How could they continue on if seeing the other's face was painful?

She wished more than anything that she had the psychic abilities to peer into the mind of Becky Lynch, if only for a micro second - a tenth of a tenth of a micro second. If she could manage to read the blueprint of Becky's brain and study the landscape of her true feelings, whatever those might be, none of this would be so complicated. Without knowing that, the risk of losing this special bond was too great, and too much for Alexa to bear. No, they would have to remain friends for now, and she was fine with that. Perfectly fine. She needed to be fine.

As for tonight, she would be attending a Halloween Fair as Becky's monster bride. Her life was weird.

It was a quarter past six, and Alexa had just painstakingly finished putting her costume on. It was a simple bridal gown with black heels, but the makeup took the entirety of her afternoon to get right. She stood in front of her bedroom mirror - a lengthy piece of glass that she once hated, years ago - and looked at her reflection with confidence, quadruple-checking to see if everything was in working order.

She looked good.

The gown itself was a standard white dress, spectacular as it was, but what really sold the costume was the makeup. Her face was coated a tint of a ghastly gray. Dark circles covered her eyelids from top to bottom, a touch different from her normal brand of darkened eyelids from sleepless nights of old. By far her favorite part, and the most stunning visually, was the line of fake stitching running down her cheek, punctuated by their deep, red color. She wondered if Becky would be sporting her matching set.

Her Irish Frankenstein was meant to pick her up, but was running a few minutes behind schedule. The night was young, though it wouldn't hurt to check on her, Alexa figured. With no pockets to speak of, she was forced to carry an ill-fitting, sky blue bag with her. Reaching into its endless void, she grabbed her phone, prepping her fingers for the text she was going to send Becky. On cue, her phone lit up.

_Ariel Mermaidington: Ding dong. Ding dong. That's doorbell for 'I'm outside.'_

It was impressive how many unconventional ways Becky could find to alert Alexa to her presence. It was more impressive that she somehow failed to notice the actual doorbell. It was her fault, really, for not anticipating this and buying a gigantic neon sign that read, 'Doorbell Is Here,' flashing arrows and all.

Tossing her phone back into her bag, Alexa skipped down the stairs, nearly tripping over her own two feet in her haste. She passed by her mother, casually watching some evening drama or another in
the living room, and went to open the front door. Her hand hovered inches above the doorknob, trembling.

'Stop being nervous!' she told herself. 'You're only making things harder!'

With clammy palms, she gave the doorknob a twist and thrust the door wide open in one swift motion. She felt the wind rushing past her as she allowed the early shades of winter to invade her home. Standing outside in the cold autumn air - made that much colder by the ever-fading sunlight - was Becky, looking at her phone, perhaps waiting for a reply from Alexa. She looked up once the sound of an opening door made way to her ears.

Two pairs of eyes locked together, guided to each other by pure magnetism, and Alexa couldn't tell if the world had stopped spinning around her or if she was losing it. She gazed into Becky's eyes - those hypnotic brown orbs, twin mazes that anyone would get lost inside of. Each second was a day, each day a year. Every thump of her heart was like another blow to her resolve.

Tearing her gaze away from Becky's, choosing instead to concentrate on her nose or her chin or anywhere, Alexa decided to be the first to speak. "We do have an actual doorbell, you know."

Becky, however, was not responding, her mouth opening and closing like a malfunctioning drawer as she continued to unflinchingly stare.

Alexa was confused. She snapped her fingers a few times in front of Becky's face. "Hello? You doing alright in there?"

Becky's head shook, whatever haze she was trapped in seemingly having dissipated with a few clicks of the fingers. "O-oh, sorry. It's just - I mean, you look great."

She was only complimenting her as a friend. It was obvious. It was so obvious. Alexa didn't want to walk down this dead end road again.

"I see you haven't worked on your complimenting skills over the last twenty-four hours."

"I must've spent twenty-three of those putting this stuff on my face."

Alexa realized that she hadn't given Becky's costume a proper inspection. If it wasn't for the fact that she hand-picked it herself, she wouldn't be able to tell that it was a costume. It fit Becky's style a little too well - the dark pants, the dirty boots, the loose shirt that blew with the wind. Her makeup, though not as detailed as Alexa's, was noticeable. To Alexa's glee, a crimson line of stitching ran across Becky's forehead. Tiny bolts protruded from her neck like an actual monster spawned from a laboratory. Her costume was perfect!

Alexa ceased her praise.

She craned her head forward, taking an even closer look at Becky's outfit. She couldn't believe what she was seeing. No, she could believe it, but she just didn't want to.

"Oh my god."

"Don't tell me I messed it up."

"One night," Alexa started. "You couldn't leave your jacket home for one night."

"Wha- the stupid Frankenstein jacket was too small!" Becky explained, trying her best to plead her case. Alexa simply stood at the doorway, arms folded over her chest. She wasn't impressed. "I never
got to try it on beforehand. Turns out the boulder shoulders were too big for the sleeves."

"Okay, I don't want to hear about your arm muscles anymore," Alexa lied. If Becky hosted a seminar where she ranted exclusively about her muscles - carefully mapping out every single curving dip and winding hill - Alexa would attend as many times as possible. It was never a bad thing to gain more knowledge and insight on that particular subject.

"Maybe you'd prefer another demonstration then?" Becky stretched her right arm, ready to show Alexa her unmatched flexing skills.

"Becky, I swear-"

"Is that her?"

A third voice came from the inside of the house. Becky tried to sneak the tiniest of peeks past the blonde and through the corridor, but she didn't have to. Stepping from within was Alexa's mother. Clothed in only a nightgown and fuzzy slippers, she dare not step out into the cold, choosing to stand by Alexa's side at the doorway.

"I didn't know you had a sister."

Throwing her head back, Alexa groaned to the heavens. Unfortunately, it wasn't loud enough to drown out the sounds of her mother's laughter.

"This is Becky? She's a keeper."

"I'm sorry?"

"Oh! I'm Lexi's mom. You can just call me Angela."

A greeting sputtered out from Becky's lips before she jogged over to the door. Meanwhile, Alexa was struggling to keep her irritation in check. If she hadn't spent so much time staring at Becky, they would be long gone by now, avoiding what was sure to be an embarrassing situation. But Alexa knew that not looking into Becky's eyes was a task that was always doomed to fail. Her and those rich, brown eyes that melded into the sweetest of chocolates the longer that she gazed into them.

"You're her mom. Right. Makes sense, but damn. You guys could be twins." Becky reached out to shake her hand, a gesture that was returned promptly.

"Oh, stop." Angela waved the comment away, and it was at this moment that Alexa contemplated jumping into a nearby bush. "So Lexi was telling me that the Fair was your idea?"

"Eh, I only brought the idea up, but she was the one that got the ball rolling."

"And she's so modest too," Angela complimented, leaning over to her daughter. "No wonder why you talk about her so much."

"Mom," Alexa growled. "Shouldn't you be going to bed?"

"But it's only six."

"The perfect time for you to rest up for your long day of work tomorrow!"

Using the full extent of her strength, Alexa tried to push her mother back into the house. Her mother refused to budge, her feet planted firmly on solid ground.
"You'll take care of my little Lexi, won't you?"

"You have my word, ma'am. Scout's honor," Becky replied with a salute.

"And make sure she drinks enough water. And that she doesn't eat too much candy an-"

"Goodnight, mom!" Alexa bellowed, finally able to shove her mother back inside. She slammed the door behind her, making sure that there was no room for the woman to escape. Once she was certain that her doting mother wouldn't be making another surprise entrance, Alexa breathed a sigh of relief.

"She seems nice."

"She talks too much."

"So that's where you get it from."

Alexa took a measured swipe at Becky, slapping her in the shoulder. Judging from the Irish girl's lack of reaction and Alexa's sore palm, the slap did a lot more damage to her than it did to her target. "It's your fault for showing up late."

"It's only…" Becky took a second to check the time, the numbers glowing brightly on her screen. "6:27. What's a measly twenty-seven minutes between friends, huh?"

Friends. Friends.

Alexa could write her own books about how much she cherished her friendship with Becky, adoration flying from the tip of her pen and filling each page with her affection. They deserved more, though - what they deserved was each other, and maybe it could happen. All Alexa needed to do was take the first step. She just needed to say what her heart was yelling at her to say, rioting from within its caged walls. She had the power to change everything, right here and now.

"The longest twenty-seven minutes of my life."

That power would be going to waste this evening.

"Alright, alright. How can I make it up to you?"

'Tell her to take you on a date! Tell her to kiss you! For the love of god, tell her to kiss you!'

"Carry me to your bike," Alexa joked, shutting out the incessant screaming in her head.

It was a joke - an obvious joke. The only way it could have been more of a joke is if Alexa was performing stand-up in front of a live audience, adding wacky sound effects and puppets to her routine. The joke had apparently been unfunny, for Alexa's field of view changed as she was lifted from the ground. Becky had swept her off her feet, literally, and very much figuratively, but she had already done that part many days ago.

"Becks?" she managed to croak out. Her throat was dry, far too dry to ask the dozens of questions that sat on her tongue.

"I-I don't know if they were technically married, but it'd be a waste of a good gown to not carry you like this at least once tonight."

Alexa was stunned into silence - a habit that wasn't uncommon whenever Becky was taking the initiative. It reminded her a lot of the day she fell into the redhead's arms. A sturdy, yet gentle hand tucked against the back of her legs, her other hand placed firmly against her back, keeping her
steady. It was the same position, but the feelings were incomparable. There was no tension, no panic, and no terror associated with this. She didn't feel fragile - like any false move or sudden spill would cause her petite body to break. She felt cared for, she felt protected, she felt loved. The affection was coursing through Becky's veins like electricity, and Alexa could feel its frenetic energy.

With nowhere to look but up, she found herself marveling at the different features of Becky's face. Her eyes were radiant, sure, but there was much more than that to take in. Her jawline was chiseled like granite, polished like marble - only the most skillful of artists could create such a magnificent sculpture. If Alexa wasn't hanging onto Becky's neck, her fingers would undoubtedly be brushing against those rosy, rounded cheeks, thumbing the outline of her jaw with touches light as feathers.

And her lips - god, her lips. Lush, pink, softer than the finest silk. She didn't need her lips to meet Becky's to confirm this - she could just tell - but what she wouldn't give for their lips to say 'hello.' They were so enticing, inviting Alexa to cross the invisible street separating them for a quick chat. She wouldn't be long, she told herself. She just wanted to be a good neighbor, and good neighbors said hello. She moved her face steadily closer, until the space between them was but a distant memory. She was almost there, almost across the street, where she could snatch Becky's lips away for a small conversation. Almost. Just a little more.

Overcome with embarrassment, Alexa buried her face in the succulent space of Becky's neck, careful to avoid poking her decorative bolts.

"You okay?"

"I'm cold," came Alexa's muffled reply. She was cold, everywhere except for her face - the greatest source of heat on the planet was in her cheeks.

"Don't worry - Harley Dent's right here. Your carriage awaits."

Alexa would have to take her word for it. Any thoughts of moving her face from Becky were discarded like trash. She nestled her face deeper into the curves of Becky's neck. Her nose was rubbing against plush skin, smooth like the rest of her. She closed her eyes, attempting to make the most of these few seconds of tranquility. This was her new home, her shelter, cuddling the girl she desired most.

That was until they reached Becky's motorcycle, parked feet away from Alexa's driveway.

Delicately, like a lily finding its place in a bouquet of flowers, Becky placed Alexa on the back of her motorcycle, while she took her position at the front.

"Carriages typically have horses pulling them," Alexa remarked as Becky searched for her keys.

"Cool. Let me just go rent some from our local horse store."

"It'd only cost you a couple hundred bucks."

"Doesn't sound like a very stable decision."

"Quit foaling around and get your keys."

"Man, that was good. I've always liked the cut of your jib."

"You don't even know what that word means."

"Does anyone?"
As their battle of puns and witty remarks slowly dwindled, Becky pulled her keys from her unnaturally deep pockets with a quiet 'Aha!'

The key was only three-fourths of the way into the ignition when Becky spoke again. "So," she started, as she tossed a helmet to Alexa. "You talk about me a lot?"

"Only to tell my mom about your awful music opinions."

Becky spun around. "Is that all?" she asked with an air of levity.

Even with the added undertones of humor, Alexa just couldn't tell her the truth about what she and her mother spoke about. She couldn't tell Becky that her name was like a drug - she was addicted to bringing it up at the dinner table. And there was absolutely no way she was going to mention the night her mother caught her muttering Becky's name in her sleep.

Alexa strapped the helmet to her head before wrapping her arms around Becky's waist, hugging her close. She didn't need to be told this time - she was more than willing. "That's all."

"If you say so."

Alexa didn't like the grin on Becky's face as she began to pull from the sidewalk. This was going to be a long night.

The long night's festivities had already begun, and they both knew it, even before Becky managed to completely park her motorcycle. The voices of the students were heard from the school entrance, the ongoing chatter blending into a mishmash of different sounds. For Alexa, it was music to her ears. They were the sounds of a job well done for the Student Council. Though she had no direct part in a good majority of the setup, she was still eager to see the fruits of their labor. Making their way to the back of the school, the sounds of the students becoming louder with every forward step, Alexa was hardly able to contain her enthusiasm.

Dual gasps escaped from their lips as they soaked in the scenery. Everything was exactly as Alexa had envisioned. No, she corrected, it was even better. The decorative lights, the booths stacked with prizes, bobbing for apples! This festive wonderland had come a long way from the pile of wood and crooked tents that it used to be. Seeing the picture clearly in her imagination was one thing, but seeing it now with her own eyes was something completely different. It was like they had jumped headfirst into a fairy tale, the tiled floors and large, open space adding more to the fantasy-driven atmosphere than Alexa could've imagined.

And the costumes! Seeing the monsters, the TV characters, the superheroes, the magicians, and even the occasional warrior princess. It all made her giddy with excitement, ready to join the party of ghouls on this Hallows' Eve, where tricks and treats were the law of the land.

And aside from her giddiness, Alexa also felt proud. The Student Council was a disorganized heap on its off days, a shambling corpse of its former glory, but on its good days - on the days where some of its members were able to put aside their petty, juvenile differences and work together - they were a well-oiled machine. Whatever the endgame was for Mandy and Sonya, they had failed miserably, for the Fair was alive and well.

Alexa felt someone tugging at her gown. It was Becky, the redhead transfixed with the kaleidoscope of sights and sounds. Alexa didn't have to ask - the awe was evident from the look on her face, the magic enveloping her like a blanket, surrounding her with its warmth. Alexa couldn't be happier. It was the only thing she wanted from this whole venture, for Becky to have this experience, to feel the
wonder she was robbed of as a child.

"I've got goosebumps. Silly, right?"

"Not at all," Alexa reassured with a smile. "You never had the chance to celebrate Halloween growing up. You deserve to enjoy every minute of this."

Becky was still distracted by the hustle and bustle of the students milling about, but she managed to pull her gaze from the bright lights and focus on the other, brighter light in her life. "Thank you, Lexi. Really." For the second time tonight - perhaps one time more than Alexa's heart was able to handle - Becky stared at her. "Can I ask you something?"

"S-sure."

Alexa felt every individual muscle in her body lock up, pins and needles rushing to her hands and feet as she succumbed to the nervousness. Not once has Becky ever had to qualify a question in this way. It had to be of the utmost importance - a question so meaningful that she was left with no choice but to give Alexa ample time to prepare for it. And Alexa was ready. Whatever Becky had to ask, she would be there to answer it.

"You think I could fit two of those apples between my teeth?"

Sometimes, Alexa wondered if Becky lived in her own dimension, far removed from the rest of humanity.

"No."

"You sure, because my jaw-"

"Becks." Alexa held her hand up, stopping Becky before her apple-related tangent went any further. She wasn't mentally prepared to deal with that. "Apples later. Nikki first."

"Ah, right. Let's go see if we can't find the good doctor."

It was tricky, getting Becky to keep walking with her and not come to a grinding halt at every booth they passed by. There was so much to do, so many different booths to explore - from tossing rings to collecting candy, to taking a large mallet and swinging it down onto unsuspecting pumpkins. Neither of them understood the purpose of that one, but judging by the pieces of pumpkin guts and seeds painting the floor, it was a popular attraction.

Alexa could see Bayley, running her own booth, dressed as some sort of blue monster. Though her attempts at scaring the other students were largely a failure - she looked far too huggable to be scary - her attraction had garnered much attention. Trevor and Johnny's joint booth was a little more successful on the frightening side of things, challenging students to test their mettle, earning a prize if they held in their shrieks. Given the amount of prizes left and the frequency of shrieks in the air, they were doing a good job.

"Look at that!" Becky yelled again, upping the total to five yells in three minutes. She pointed to a nearby attraction, her arm narrowly avoiding the blonde's nose.

Alexa turned to check what had gotten Becky so riled up. There, in the far corner of the Fair, an old, decrepit-looking structure of some sort towered above the tents. Shrouded in artificial mist, it's peak illuminated by the moonlight, this structure gave off a more menacing vibe than any other attraction did. Alexa tried to read the lopsided sign hanging from its front wall, tilting her head slightly.
"I think that says 'Haunted House?' How did they do that?" She remembered there was a decent amount left in their Student Council budget, but she never imagined the money could produce something of this caliber.

"Oh, we have to go check it out."

"No!"

"No?"

Alexa gulped, fear creeping in from the back of her throat. Halloween was at the top of the list for her favorite days of the year, but entering a haunted house was her greatest fear. Her last memorable experience saw a five-year-old Alexa Bliss running back through the entrance at the sight of a masked teen. In her memories was the imprinted image of her little legs carrying her as fast as they could, plowing into other kids as she ran from the terrors lurking inside. From that day onward, she vowed never to step foot inside of a haunted house ever again, and if Johnny and Trevor's horror-centric booth was anything to go by, she was making the right choice.

"You scared of little haunted house?" Becky chided, nudging Alexa in the ribs.

"I am not scared! I just… had a bad experience when I was a kid. That's all."

"D'awww, ain't that precious?" Becky pinched Alexa's cheeks, only to have them slapped away immediately. "And you're not scared?"

"Nope."

"Not even a little bit?"

"Not even a little, tiny bit."

"That's good. These things kind of give me the creeps, you know?" Becky shuddered in such an over-the-top manner that it caused Alexa to snort. She knew what Becky was doing, but adored her for it nonetheless. "Might be best to avoid them, for my sake."

"For your sake."

In response, Becky did something that Alexa would never forget for as long as she lived. She winked at her. Maybe Alexa had been wrong this whole time. Maybe it wasn't Nikki who was soft - maybe she was the soft one. Her gooey, marshmallow-y center was melting under Becky's heat. Who gave her the right to make Alexa feel this way with a simple blink of the eye?

Moving past the haunted house, they continued their search for Nikki. Luckily, it was a search that didn't last long. A high-pitched 'Lexi!' cut through the noise like a knife through butter, and the pair were able to locate her with ease. It would be hard not to notice her, the brunette bouncing up and down in her cramped booth. She beckoned them over with frantic arm flailing, and Alexa was becoming concerned - what if she hit her head?! She sprinted over to Nikki before the Scot could injure herself in excitement.

"You two made it! And - oh my god!" Nikki gasped. "Your costumes look so good! They match mine!"

"That was the plan," Alexa explained. "It was Becky's idea."

"Come on. You're making me look like a sap here."
"Aren't you?"

"You guys!" Nikki placed a hand over her chest, touched by the gesture, that they would bother to include her at all. "You're the best. Oh, I'm actually going to start crying." She was fanning her face, doing everything possible to keep her eyes dry. The display was very dramatic, and very much Nikki. Alexa almost felt sorry for the vampire impatiently waiting behind them, wanting desperately to play the game at Nikki's tent.

"You might want to take five, Dracula," Becky said. She urged the young blood sucker to head out with an emphatic 'shoo!', and after a slight grumble of annoyance, he did just that.

"You two are the cutest. I'm just sad that Lexi never invited me to the wedding," Nikki teased with a smile so wide that Alexa could count her teeth individually.

"We eloped. Lexi's idea."

"Uh. No. Our wedding would be extravagant, and everybody would be there."

"Our first dance would have to be to 'Beauty and the Beast,' right?"

"Obviously. We wo-" Alexa paused. She turned to Nikki, feeling her watchful gaze, the Scot's toothy smile overtaking her face. Why did this happen so often? "Um, so." Alexa played with a lock of her hair, thinking of ways to change the subject.

"Oh! Why don't one of you play a game!"

Alexa internally thanked Nikki for the assist, her friend having caught on to Alexa's discomfort. She supposed playing a game wasn't a terrible idea, and it was a simple enough game to understand - throw a ball, knock over the six empty bottles, win a prize. It didn't really scream 'Halloween,' but the ball had the wicked smile of a carved jack-o-lantern, so it was, if nothing else, thematic.

"I do want that stuffed pig," Alexa said, pointing to a spotted pig sitting on a lonely shelf. "Every time I try, the bottles just won't go down."

"Not a problem! They don't call me 'Big Arms Becky' for nothin'." Becky snatched a ball from the counter, confidence radiating off of her like steam from a sauna.

"Nobody calls you that."

"Calls me what?"

"Big Arms Becky."

"Why, thank you, Lexi! My arms are pretty big."

Alexa was tempted to punch Becky in her arm, but she couldn't. Her arms were fairly big, after all.

"Hey," Becky said, catching Nikki's attention. "How did you set this all up anyway? I mean, where'd you get the stuffed toys from?"

"Okay okay, so! After Alexa approved everything, a few of us went to the store and told them that we needed all of the toys in stock! It was a really long process that-"

"On second thought, how about I just throw this ball and you get me my prize?"

Though she was offered more, Becky only took the solitary ball. It was standard Becky fare. The
Irish girl was way too cocky for her own good sometimes. Yet, the way she was positioned - her feet inches apart, her tongue circling her lips, her eyes studying the bottles carefully. She was like a pitcher on a baseball field, poised to throw her ball as swiftly and fiercely as her muscles would allow.

Alexa hated how many times her mind wandered to Becky's muscles.

Becky hit her mark with ease. All it took was a single throw for the bottles to meet their untimely end. They fell over immediately upon impact, crashing to floor. Nikki and Alexa both cheered while Becky let out a confident 'Told ya!' Alexa didn't complain. She earned the right to brag, at least for now.

"I'm actually impressed," Alexa said as Becky handed her a stuffed pig.

"See, what did I tell ya? Do I ever disappoint?"

"Yeah, I'm just gonna not answer that."

"Fair." Before Alexa could continue to trade barbs with her, Becky approached Nikki. "Thanks for this, you know? Without you, neither of us would be here right now."

Nikki stepped from within her booth, running over to Becky and latching onto her. Her grip must have been stronger than the redhead had been expecting, her attempts to shake her off proving to be futile. "It's kind of hard to breathe."

"You'll get used to it," came Alexa's reply. Alexa was already used to Nikki's bone-crushing hugs. "We should probably keep it moving, though." She motioned to the line behind her, growing in length as they hogged all of Nikki's time and attention.

Becky nodded in agreement. "Let's get some quick pictures before we go. A doctor and her monsters. This'll be fun to look back on."

Alexa hadn't known Becky to be sentimental, but she was always ready to take as many pictures as her phone's storage space would allow. Nikki didn't say much of anything, but her bouncing only increased in speed, threatening to shatter the earth beneath her feet, at the mention of picture taking. Alexa took that as a good sign.

"Here, get one of me and Nikki." Becky gave Alexa her phone, intending to keep some of these precious memories for herself. She jogged back over to Nikki, Frankenstein and her creator standing side-by-side, posing for the upcoming picture.

Alexa examined the phone between her fingers - a different model than her own device. How did one even open the camera? She scrolled through Becky's phone, clicking on any app that might take her to the camera screen. It wasn't the green, pear-shaped icon. It wasn't the icon that looked like a camera - that was apparently a mobile game. It wasn't the icon that read 'Flash,' Alexa learned, blinding herself momentarily as a white light repeatedly flashed in her face.

"Do you know how to work that phone?" Becky questioned. They were a fair distance away, but the flashing of her phone led her to believe that Alexa had no clue as to what she was doing.

"I think I know how to work a cell phone in 2019!" Alexa shouted. She was lost, but she was positive that she would find this stupid camera. Continuing her random clicking, Alexa accidentally opened Becky's texting app. She didn't mean to snoop - it was such an invasion of privacy to read through someone's text messages! - but there was little to see. Becky wasn't an avid texter, the only conversation being one with Alexa. At least, that was what she assumed. She strangely couldn't find her name anywhere in the thread of messages, but it was their messages. She recognized the most
recent of the bunch, the text from just thirty minutes prior, but her name wasn't anywhere to be seen. She froze. She found her name. Only, it wasn't her name.

**big stupid gorgeous crush**

Alexa couldn't tell how many times she read the words - how many times her eyes scanned each and every letter, making sure that her mind wasn't playing some cruel trick on her. She couldn't have been reading that right. She checked it again.

**big stupid gorgeous crush**

The words weren't registering in her head properly. There had to be some sort of explanation for this, other than what she was thinking. This couldn't be - it wasn't possible. Was it?

She thumbed over the name, fingers shaking worse than a rickety ladder, and Alexa knew a thing or two about rickety ladders. Her number, along with the large list of calls between them, was listed there. Another thing stood out to her amongst the numerous calls, however.

It was her picture, a plain picture of Alexa, with hearts littering half of its space. It was a throwaway selfie - a picture of her smiling face that she had sent at two in the morning some number of days ago. It wasn't an odd occurrence. They had sent each other a multitude of selfies before bed. She could make a collage with the amount of pictures Becky had sent her. Though usually, their selfies were silly in nature. Puffy cheeks, tongues hanging loosely from their mouths, eyes shut tightly or opened wide as saucers. This picture was different. It was a picture Alexa sent to show Becky how happy she was in the moment.

And Becky kept it. Not only did she keep it, but she chose to look at it every time she received a text message or a call from Alexa. She wanted to see Alexa's face, her smile. Because she had a crush on her - because she thought Alexa was gorgeous.

It hit Alexa all at once, her breathing becoming rapid and out of sync. She couldn't remember how to breathe. Inhale, then exhale? Or was it exhale, then inhale? Maybe it was two inhales, followed by three quick exhales. None of it sounded remotely correct. But was breathing even important right now? Cloud ten, cloud eleven - neither of those were enough to support her. She jumped straight to cloud one-hundred - if Becky felt the same way as she did, then she had nothing to be scared of! Fears of rejection, of being alone, of losing her friendship with Becky. She could finally lay them to rest - a final nail in the coffin.

"My face is getting stiff over here," Becky complained, holding a grin fit for a photo.

"Right! Sorry! I got it! Picture coming up! Like a… plate of hot food!" Alexa was shouting any words that her brain came up with, unable to keep her garbled nonsense from leaking out. She was surprised that her brain was functioning in any capacity. Once she remembered how to breathe like a normal human being, and not an alien pretending to be one, Alexa began to calm down. She needed to play this cool. She needed to ask Becky while they were alone. For now, she would have to somehow manage to use whatever amount of brainpower that wasn't being spent on panicking and take this picture.

*Click!*

It was the shakiest picture she had ever taken, but she didn't care. Becky was going to have to live with a slightly angled picture.

"Hmm," Becky pondered, once she retrieved her phone from Alexa. "Not the best, but it'll do. Let
me get one of you and Nikki too."

To hell with pictures! All Alexa wanted to do was whisk Becky away to a quiet location and talk about this. She didn't want to abandon her 'keep calm and don't be a creepy weirdo' strategy just yet - she didn't want to give the impression that anything was wrong, despite the agonized wailing coming from her insides.

She walked up to Nikki's side, trading places with Becky. Her gait was off, her brain struggling to send the proper signals to her legs. Walking was as difficult as thinking. She wrapped her arm around Nikki's shoulders, the brunette following her lead. Alexa couldn't take this. She had to say something to someone.

"Becky likes me too!" she blurted, her voice barely above a whisper. She felt like a ventriloquist, a fake smile adorning her face as she whistled words through clenched teeth. This situation had to be handled with extreme care, lest she end up saying the wrong thing. They needed to remain quiet.

"She what?!" Nikki shouted, not-so-quietly.

"Not so loud!"

"But how…?"

"It was on her phone. In big, bold letters. Oh my god. I'm going to pass out, oh my god."

"Okay, okay. Don't panic. This is a good thing," Nikki said, doing her best to calm Alexa down. "Go somewhere private. Talk to her."

"Yeah. Yeah, you're right. I guess I'm just nervous."

"You'll be fine."

"Will you two goofballs stay still?" Becky shouted. "I'm trying to show Lexi how you really take a picture."

"Right! Don't mind us! Just a couple of goofballs! Keeping still now!"

"You're not very graceful under pressure, are you?" Nikki asked.

"Stop talking."

With another click, Becky's phone snapped a second picture. Alexa's nerves were on fire. The moment of truth was slowly approaching. She wasn't going to let another opportunity pass her by. No, she was ready. There was nothing else to hold her back - no excessive work, no fear of rejection, no worrying about the future. This was it.

Becky held her phone high, gloating with her actions, then her words. "Look at this beauty. Perfection. None of that seventy-five degree angle stuff you were doing."

"Wow, you sure did crush on Lexi! Sorry, I meant you crushed Lexi!"

While Nikki was trying to push them together, Alexa was contemplating pushing Nikki into the nearest sewer drain.

"We should get going!" Alexa butt in, trying to get Becky alone as soon as she possible. "We'll see you later, Nikki."
Becky was obviously confused by Alexa's sudden erratic behavior, but said nothing.

"See you guys later! Good luck!"

Breaking the world record for the quickest goodbye, Alexa parted with Nikki, dragging Becky by the wrist away from her booth.

"Good luck?"

"Ah, she meant with the bobbing for apples!"

"Oh. Yeah, I don't need luck." Alexa felt relief wash over her - a cold rain in the middle of summer. For someone who had once dubbed her a bad liar, Becky was pretty easy to fool sometimes.

Alexa looked around. Alone - they were finally alone, or as alone as they could be for a schoolwide Fair. They stood out in the open, but in a less crowded, less noisy area. This was the perfect spot to confess. Alexa felt her courage rising in her gut. It was either courage or the side effects of a nervous stomach. Something was rising. She pretended it was courage.

"Becky."

"What's up?"

Even in their stupid Halloween costumes, Becky was as beautiful as ever. Nothing could truly hide her beauty - she was still Becky, a girl too beautiful, both in spirit and appearance, to exist. To think, Alexa had once thought this girl was nothing but a delinquent. She had never been so happy to be so wrong about a person.

"We should talk." Alexa wondered if maybe her words would send Becky into a state of anxiousness, or cause her to worry. Becky was neither anxious nor worried. In fact, Becky had little reaction at all. "Becks?"

Becky's head was moving to and fro, the Irish girl paying Alexa no mind. The excitement from being at a Fair had yet to fully leave Becky's body. "Come on! There's so much left to do!"

"Wait, we should talk first."

"Ah, we have our whole lives to talk!" Becky wasn't listening. She had a one-track mind, and right now, the train was moving too fast for Alexa to catch it. "Let's go!"

Before Alexa could protest, Becky was dragging her away with such ferocity that she was afraid her shoulder might pop from its socket. She did want Becky to have a good time, so she was willing to play along, for now.

Besides, there couldn't be that many booths, right?

"Easy as cake," Becky bragged, drying off the remaining moisture from her red locks. Squeezing the water out of the sopping wet towel, she handed it over to Alexa, the latter shoving it into her bag with unintentional aggression.

The night was no longer young. Becky's appetite for fun was insatiable - she had dragged Alexa to just about every booth that they were able to find. Alexa's bag was bulging, filled with so much candy that it was actually beginning to weigh her down. Her shoulder, already sore from Becky's yanking and pulling, was throbbing, crying out in pain. If Becky managed to finish this year off with
no cavities to speak of, Alexa would count that as a miracle.

It had to have been over two hours since they left Nikki, yet Alexa was unable to get a single word in edgewise the entire time. They were running from one attraction to the next, with no downtime in between for Alexa to speak her mind. The telltale signs of irritation were presenting themselves in her mannerisms. Yet, seeing Becky this happy - running around without a care in the world, childlike glee and wonder practically oozing from her pores. It was amazing for Alexa to witness firsthand, and the only thing keeping her from grabbing Becky by the hair and shaking her until she listened. That, and the fact that Becky's hair was damp from dunking her entire head into a barrel of apples.

"It's 'easy as pie,' dummy," Alexa corrected. "You missed the perfect opportunity to make an apple pie joke. Who even are you?"

"Guess I'm too excited to be thinking about puns."

"Too excited to- Okay, that's it. I'm calling the police. Something is definitely wrong with you." Alexa held her hand to her ear, her lips quivering as she feigned terror. "Hello? Officer? Yes, m-my friend suddenly doesn't want to tell puns anymore and I… I just don't know what to do!" Alexa wiped imaginary tears from the corner of her eye.

"I'm being serious!" Becky chuckled as she jabbed Alexa in the shoulder - the one that wasn't weighed down by sugary, tooth-rotting treats. "It's all thanks to you for letting me put those planning committee dopes in their place."

"We're going to need an extra pair of hands for how many times we've been patting ourselves on the back tonight."

"I'll pat yours anytime," Becky stated. "You really are something special, Lexi."

And there it was again - her eyes. Becky's eyes. They were undiscovered galaxies, constellations and the stars within, waiting to be wished upon. Alexa's only wish was to never lose track of them, to be able to look into her eyes in the darkness and find her way back home. She was lost in them, as anyone would be, but they were also her guiding light, leading her home.

"Becky," she breathed. She needed to tell Becky everything. She couldn't let another second go to waste.

"Hm?"

"I think maybe w-"

"Do you all see?! This is an infringement on my rights as a human being!"

Fate, much like every other force in the world, was not on Alexa's side. Cutting her off before she could bare her soul to Becky Lynch, a sharp, shrill voice broke her concentration. Before she could even think about continuing from where she left off, Becky was already dragging her toward the center of the commotion. Gathered around the dunk tank - which Alexa still could not remember signing off on - were a group of students, listening to the angry tirade of one Sami Zayn.

"I didn't ask to be put up here!" he shouted from atop his perch, sitting above a vat of green, slimy liquid. "I was forced - forced! - by a group of angry Student Council pests! The Student Council is a plague to society, and all of you parasites just stand around and watch from the safety of your ivory towers!"
"How does he come up with this stuff?" Becky whispered.

"Dunno. Maybe he does improv?"

"Well, look who it is!" Alexa cringed at the sound of Sami's voice. A thousand mice squeaking directly into her exposed eardrum would be a much more pleasant sound to listen to. They'd be a lot less whiny, at least. "Excuse me! I'd like everyone to turn their attention to the two egomaniacs standing in the background!"

She prayed that Sami wasn't referring to them, but her prayers went unanswered as she felt dozens of eyes fall on her. Instead of being alone with Becky, she was as exposed as she could possibly be.

"Thanks to Alexa and her lackey, I am sitting here against my will. This is an egregious and deliberate abuse of power. Shame on you. Shame on both of you!"

"You sure do talk a lot for a guy sitting where you're sitting."

This was getting out of hand. She had willingly followed Becky everywhere she wanted to go, but this was too much. They were wasting precious time on Sami, of all people. "Becky," Alexa stated, pulling at the sleeve of Becky's jacket. "I really, really need to talk to you."

Becky held a hand to Alexa. "I won't be long. Just going to do the school a favor and shut his stupid mouth up. Somebody hand me a ball." With ball in hand, Becky took aim at the dark blue target, preparing to send Sami to his slimy doom.

"Ugh, he's not worth it."

"You hear that, Becky? Why don't you listen to our little president and tuck your tail between your legs."

Alexa didn't know if Sami was being intentionally antagonistic to draw people over, or if he was just being Sami, but either way, his words were starting to anger Becky. Much like before, the redhead took aim, keeping her feet apart in a pitcher's stance, and tossed the ball with all of her might. Unlike before, however, the ball missed her target, landing a few inches to the left with a smack.

"You're even worse than I thought!" Sami said, cackling loudly. It was an insidious, evil cackle, fit for a gnat like him.

Alexa's impatience was reaching a boiling point. She watched as Becky grabbed another ball, intending to try her luck yet again. She missed after throwing the ball with reckless abandon. This was followed by another insult from Sami - it was an insult of the perfect flavor, keeping Becky distracted so that she continuously missed her mark, but also keeping her fired up, willing to try again and again. And again. And again.

Alexa lost count of how many balls were piled on the ground beneath them, collecting at her feet. There was no price for the extra attempts, and no one dared tell Becky to quit, the other students holding onto the outdated belief that Becky was a car-stealing, bank-robbing, mafia-running delinquent.

"This is so pathetic," came Sami's most recent insult. "Did you leave your glasses at home?"

"Keep talking and my next target will be your face."

"I'd be scared if you hadn't spent the past ten minutes showing me how awful your aim is."
"Don't need to aim to slap you upside the head."

Alexa had enough of this mindless bickering. Marching up to the target - the target that had eaten up minutes of her life - she slammed her fist into it, sending Sami plummeting into the bucket of liquid goop with a cry of displeasure. The other students were applauding her, but she didn't care. She shoved Becky off to the side, away from the crowd, leaving them and a grumbling Sami.

"What gives?" Becky asked. "I almost had it! Well, uh, maybe after another couple of tries."

"Would you just listen to me?!" Alexa was trying her best to keep her voice down, but her emotions had been shaken so wildly - they were ready to burst. "I've been trying to talk to you, but you keep ignoring me!"

"I-I'm sorry," Becky apologized. "I've been having so much fun, I guess I've been all over the place." Her expression softened, her gaze focused solely on Alexa, giving her blonde bride her undivided attention. "You've got me - what's on your mind?"

"I. I, uh." Alexa was tongue-tied. They had spent so many minutes wandering the Fair, yet she hadn't spent any of those minutes thinking of the correct way to start this. She was at a loss for words - at the most pivotal moment of her life, she was at a loss for words. Well, she didn't get this far by listening to her brain. No, her heart had always been in firm control, from the day Becky walked in on her, lying face down on a desk. Letting her heart take the wheel was the best decision she had ever made, and she wasn't going to have it let go now.

"I know," she said simply.

"You know? Is this some kind of riddle? I'm awful at those."

So was Alexa.

"I know you have feelings for me."

Alexa couldn't believe those words had come from her mouth, but they did. They were out in the open now. There was no turning back - the road behind her was closing, the street disappearing as she walked along its cobbled pavement.

"What?! Wait, what are you talking about?" Becky was, as expected, in a state of confusion, but Alexa wasn't going to back down.

"I saw it - on your phone. The name. The picture. You don't have to lie."

"Dammit!" Becky cursed. "I knew I should've changed that dumb name. There was no way you didn't know how to work a freakin' camera!" She pointed an accusatory finger at Alexa.

"Calm down!"

"Calm down?! How the hell am I supposed to calm down?!"

To Alexa's horror, Becky began to walk away from her. She quickly sprinted over, clutching Becky's hand. "Stop!"

"Why should I?"

"Because I have feelings for you too!"

This wasn't how Alexa had pictured it going. She wanted to sit Becky down, to calmly explain to her
what she was feeling. She wanted to tell her how her heart wanted to explode every time Becky so much as looked in her direction. She wanted to tell her how silly she used to be for ignoring her, because just talking with Becky - being with Becky - gave her a place to belong. She wanted to tell her how right everything felt with her, and how wrong it would be to let these feelings thrive without ever acting on them.

This confession wasn't like that, but she was acting on her feelings, and she didn't regret it.

"You... you like me too?"

"Yes, dummy. I like you, a lot. I... don't even know how long it's been now. Everything has been so complicated. My feelings are all over the place, but I just know that I like you, okay? I like you. I like you. Now please, let's just talk."

Alexa was beaming. It felt like three tons of emotional weight had been lifted from her shoulders. It wasn't the smoothest of confessions, but she didn't care. It was out there - it was real, she made it real. Finally, they would be able to be together. The weeks were long and tough, trying to deal with her emotions, but everything was paying off. Her legs, her arms, her spine - everything was tingling. Her dream relationship was on the cusp of becoming a reality. All Becky had to do was say 'yes.'

"No."

No?

Alexa assumed she was hallucinating - hearing things that weren't really there, hearing a rejection that wasn't happening right now. But when Becky pulled her hand away, forcibly yanking it from Alexa's own, she knew that it wasn't a hallucination, and it wasn't a dream. It was a nightmare.

"Why?"

"I just - I'm sorry. I can't. We can't do this!"

With nothing else to say, Becky sped off, running away from her dejected bride. Alexa was powerless to stop her - she watched as Becky became smaller and smaller in the distance, until she became an unidentifiable speck in her vision. Alexa was having trouble comprehending what had just happened. Didn't Becky like her too? Had she misread? She couldn't have! Her eyesight wasn't that terrible. And the hearts, the 'crush' - did that mean nothing? She didn't understand where she went wrong. Maybe Becky never had feelings for her, and maybe this was all for nothing.

She wanted to lie down on the floor and cry, bawling until the sun came up.

She stopped, taking a second to think, giving at least partial control back to her brain. Her heart was in shambles anyway, too broken up to drive.

'You like me too?'

The question had came from Becky hesitantly, as if she were scared. Why would she say that if she didn't feel something for Alexa? No, there was something more to this - there had to be. Becky wouldn't abandon her, not after everything they've been through. Not after the promises, the tears, the harmony that they felt basking in the warmth of the other's glow. She needed to fix this - she would fix this. She was done waiting.

With the resolve of an unbreakable wall, Alexa broke off into a dash, running as fast as she could to try to catch up with Becky. She tripped and stumbled over pebbles, her heels preventing her from moving any faster. The bright mess of red hair was nowhere to be seen. Becky's physique wasn't
merely for show, Alexa realized - she was in great physical shape, her built leg muscles allowing her
to flee the scene much faster than Alexa would've guessed.

She tried to think carefully about where Becky would go. She wouldn't leave Alexa here, that much
was certain. They had been everywhere around the Fair. Bobbing for apples, the Black Cat Ring
Toss, the Candy Cauldron of Mystery, even pumpkin smashing - Alexa's dress was caked in tiny bits
of orange from the ordeal. There was nowhere else for Becky to go!

It came to her like a bolt of lightning, striking her sleeping form as she lie prone in her creator's lab.
There was one place that they hadn't ventured through, choosing to ignore the massive shadow it cast
over the rest of the Fair. She found herself face-to-face with the attraction she hated the most.

The haunted house.

Becky had wanted to step inside, but decided against it, to spare Alexa the embarrassment that came
with facing her greatest fear. Well, her greatest Halloween-and-October-related fear. If there was
anywhere that would have the highest Alexa avoidance rate, it would be here. There was nowhere
else.

Alexa gulped as she looked up and down the outside of the decaying structure. She knew that it
wasn't really decaying - that this was all smoke and mirrors, and that the rusted, broken down doors
 teaming with cobwebs were for show - but memory of her younger self kept speeding through her
mind's eye. There was no line at the entryway, and if it weren't for the tenth-grader out front, wearing
his tacky hockey mask, this would've seemed a little too real.

Whoever set this up was truly an evil mastermind, the double-doors creaking as she pushed them
open with the tips of her fingers. In spite of her best efforts to try and keep them open, placing a stick
in between the gap, the doors closed eerily behind her. As she took a step inside, the first thing she
noticed was that she couldn't notice anything - the darkness had quickly swallowed the room, the
moonlight from the outside having no way to enter its cold, stone walls. She hoped that she'd grow
accustomed to the darkness, because right now, she was unable to see her hand in front of her face.

She took another two steps forward, then three, then four, until she had walked a grand total of
thirteen feet. The fourteenth foot would be put on hold, for as soon as she lifted her leg to take the
next step, the screeching of a banshee began to fill the room. The glowing pupils of a mechanical bat
were glaring down at her. It's not real, she reminded herself. She was no expert in zoology, but she
was pretty sure that bats didn't make those types of noises.

She kept walking, ignoring the voices in her head telling her that this was a terrible, terrible mistake.
Her feelings for Becky were no mistake though, so she kept pushing forward, walking through the
dark corridors, feeling around the walls with her palms to have some semblance of direction. The
darkness was so thick - there were no stars to keep the rooms even remotely lit. Everything was dark.
The floor, the ceiling, the walls. The only thing she could do was trudge through it.

Suddenly, as if someone had read her mind, the lights came on. It wasn't just an ordinary light - it felt
like a spotlight, and Alexa couldn't determine where it was coming from. She followed the light's
shimmering trail, hoping that Becky might be at its end. Instead, what she saw made her scream.

Disembodied heads were aligned perfectly behind a glass window, poles sticking straight through
their bloodied necks, propping them upright. It was like a shopping display from the darkest pits of
hell. They were fake, she knew they were fake, but their eyeless sockets and open mouths -
screaming at nothing, yet creating a terrible sound in her head - were too much for her. She backed
away slowly, not wanting to look away from them. She wasn't able to back away any further. She
had bumped into someone. It was Becky, surely! She turned around, prepared to hold onto Becky
for dear life until she led her out of this haunted house.

A hockey mask stared back at her.

With another scream, Alexa ran. To the entrance, to the exit, she didn't care where she was going. She needed to get out of there. She apologized to her ankles - her joints would be sore in the morning from running in these heels. That is, assuming she survived this godforsaken house of horrors. She continued to run until the outline of a door became visible, specks of light creeping in from its underside. She couldn't find the knob, the darkness still stronger than the small light, so she did what anyone else would do in her situation.

"Open this stupid door!" If they didn't hear her shouts, she hoped that they would hear her banging, her fists pummeling the wooden frame.

When the door was opened, she took off again, running, putting as much distance between her and the haunted house as she could. She didn't get far - her body smashed into someone else's before she was able to stop her momentum, sending them both spiraling to the floor.

"Alexa?!" a voice said from beneath her.

Alexa picked her head up. Brown eyes - those mesmerizing brown eyes that she had come to know and love - looked up at her with concern.

"Becky!" She helped Becky to her feet, taking her hand and pulling her up from the dirty floor. Thankfully, there was no one around to see this spectacle. She was relieved beyond belief to see her. "You idiot!" she said, her relief immediately crossing over into anger. "Where were you?!!"

"I was at the churro stand!"

"Churro stand?!!"

"I was hungry! I was going to come find you right after."

"So you weren't in the haunted house?"

"Why would I be in there? We said we weren't going to go!"

Alexa rubbed her hands over her face, not caring if the last remnants of makeup that hadn't already washed away with sweat were wiped off. "Awesome. Just. Awesome."

"You didn't actually go in there to look for me, did you?"

"What do you think, genius?"

"I thought you hated them."

"Are you seriously this dumb?" Alexa stomped her foot in frustration, wondering how someone could be so obtuse. "I went in there because I care about you!"

"Alexa-"

"No!" Alexa stated, cutting Becky off. "You listen to me. I like you, Becky - I really, really do." Her voice lowered as she repeated her confession. "I want to spend all of my time with you. I want to have stupid movie nights, where we nitpick everything for hours. I want to take walks in the park, and go on motorcycle rides. But more than that - I just want to be with you. I can't stop thinking about being with you. I have so many feelings for you, and I don't know what to do with them"
anymore. And I know you have feelings for me too! So please, just talk to me!"

Like Becky had done twenty-four hours ago, sitting on a dusty park bench, Alexa was pleading. She fought tooth and nail to keep the tears from flowing. If a single drop fell, she knew the rest would soon follow. They were waiting in the wings, ready to spill freely from her cheeks, but she wouldn't let them. "Please," she whispered, one more time.

Becky exhaled through her nostrils, nodding at Alexa's request. "Of course I have feelings for you," she admitted. "You read my phone, so you already know what I think. You're gorgeous, inside and out. I haven't been able to sleep in days, just thinking about being with you - just holding your hand. The Fair is exciting and all, but the thing that made me happiest tonight was being here with you."

"Then why?" Alexa asked. "Why did you run?"

Becky started pacing, walking back and forth with such meaningful, repetitive steps that a rut was soon going to form. "What if we start dating?" she asked, hypothetically. She didn't stop her pacing while she talked. "What if we just start dating and - and we have a grand old time? And we date for months and months, and we learn everything about each other? What if..."

Becky paused, blinking away tears of her own. "What if we fall in love? And then one day, we break up? Just like that. We - we break up and we never speak to each other again? What if we forget about each other forever?!

"That's not going to happen!"

"But you don't know that, Alexa!" Becky had finally ceased her pacing, but channeled that energy into her throat, shouting her words of fear and worry. "You can't possibly know that! What if we lose this? I'm not willing to - I can't! I can't lose this, because this is the best thing I have! It's the only thing!"

Alexa wanted to scream her lungs out - she wanted to call Becky the biggest idiot in the world for suggesting, for a split second, that they would break up. She wanted to grab Becky by her face and yell obscenities at her for having so little faith in them. She wanted to, but she couldn't, because she knew that Becky was right. But it didn't matter, because Becky being right didn't change anything.

"You're right."

Becky was bemused by Alexa's response. "What?"

"You're right. I can't promise that we'd be together forever, and it would be stupid of me to make that promise. But does that mean we shouldn't even try? Does that mean we should just give up? I care about you so much, Becky. So much. You taught me how to live - how to live in the present and not be scared of the future. Why are you scared now?"

"Because I don't want to lose this."

"You keep talking about 'this.' This - what we have - it's whatever we want it to be. It's not going to disappear. I'm not going to suddenly stop caring about you. So what are you so afraid of? Just stop thinking about all of the ifs. Stop thinking about what's going to happen five or ten or twenty years from now and just focus on tonight!"

"Alexa."

"Stop letting your fears take over and start living for the present."
"Alexa."

"-and focus on making every today worth living because-"

"Alexa!"

"What?!"

Alexa didn't receive an answer, not verbally. Her lips were silenced and her words kept tightly within - not by lock and key, not by a cage, but by a force of nature much stronger, more effective, than anything else. Becky's lips were pressed against hers, sealing the gap so no more words could escape. They were trapped, dangling precariously from the tip of Alexa's tongue, never to see the light of day.

Becky kept two digits under Alexa's chin, holding her in place. It was unnecessary, for Alexa wasn't going anywhere. This kiss was everything. Becky's lips were everything. There was no sound, no air, no reason to hear or breathe. She closed her eyes, as did the girl standing in front of her. Seeing wasn't as important as feeling. It was her, and it was Becky's lips - the only two things to exist at this crossroads of time, where nothing seemed to move.

When she returned the kiss, snaking her hand around Becky's waist to instinctively pull her closer, it was like two universes colliding in a marvelous eruption of space and time. Alexa could swear that she was tasting the sweetest honey - those luscious lips were a nectar, its juicy flavor and rich texture sending her back for seconds, thirds, fourths, until Alexa had her fill. She was hungry, so hungry that she dove in for more.

Becky's hand made the ascent up Alexa's back, climbing its own personal Mount Everest until it reached the peak. Alexa felt those fingers playing with her hair, stroking it, comforting her as she leaned into the kiss. Becky's tongue was knocking at her door. It was her neighbor, asking politely to be invited in. Alexa opened her doors, her lips parting as she greeted Becky's tongue at the entrance. They shook hands before settling into a dance - Alexa didn't know the moves, but Becky was taking the lead, showing her the proper way to do a waltz.

And their waltz continued until Alexa's tongue was sore, begrudgingly parting ways with Becky's pink muscle. The kiss was heavenly, but the skies above would always be second to this. She opened her eyes - Becky was smiling, and Alexa was smiling too. Becky moved a lone strand of hair from the blonde's face, running a thumb along her cheek.

"Anyone ever tell you that you talk too much?"

Alexa giggled. "Maybe once or twice." She stood on the tips of her toes, taking the initiative and placing a brief kiss onto Becky's lips. "So, you're not scared."

"Not anymore."

"Not even a little bit?"

Becky leaned down, planting a small kiss onto Alexa's forehead. "Not even a little, tiny bit."

Alexa was in a dream, she convinced herself, but no dreams were this real, and none this gratifying. Her body was shivering, the icy winds of dusk catching up with her. Before she could complain, she felt Becky drape something across her shoulders and over her gown.

"Your jacket?" Alexa asked, examining the black leather. "But you never take this off."
Becky shrugged. "Looks better on you anyway. So," she began, holding her hand out for Alexa to hold. "Wanna grab some food?"

Alexa grabbed her hand - if she was following Becky, she knew that she had nothing to fear.

She nodded in agreement. "I'm thinking churros."

Alexa found herself yawning. It was the third time in five minutes, but she couldn't help it. Two weeks removed from Halloween, and her Student Council duties were keeping her busy. Nikki and several other members had taken the liberty of doing much of the work the afternoon before, but Alexa insisted on showing up to school early every morning.

Mostly to see her girlfriend before class.

She glanced at her watch. '7:46,' it read. Becky was late. Not late by school standards, but late by 'Kissing in the Student Council room before class' standards. Their priorities were just right, she mused.

The turning of a doorknob caused her to look up. The door opened slowly, very slowly - so slowly that Alexa was sure she was going to march over and open it herself. Before the thought could properly be given its fair share of space in her head, Becky's face peeked in from a tiny crack in the door.

"You in here?" she asked.

"If by 'you,' you mean your loving, caring, adoring girlfriend, then yes."

"I was actually talking about the janitor," Becky joked, opening the door and strolling over to Alexa's side. She sat down next to her, plopping in the empty seat, throwing an arm around Alexa's shoulders. "Guess you'll have to do."

Becky leaned over to plant a kiss onto Alexa's cheek, but the council president held her palm out to block this display of affection. "You're late," she scolded.

"Sorry. I had a run-in with Vanessa. Knocked my breakfast right out of my hands."

Alexa pouted, giving Becky a disapproving look. "You didn't key her car again, did you? I'm not having my girlfriend get expelled."

"Nah, I behaved myself."

"Did you?"

"Well, she might have some garbage stuck to her rear from when I shoved her into a trashcan, but other than that, she should be okay. Mostly."

"You know, we kind of have to thank her. She's the reason why we're not still insulting each other before class."

Becky pondered this for a moment. "True. If I never keyed her car, we wouldn't be together right now. Holy butterfly effect, Batman."

Alexa chuckled. Everything was so surreal. Calling Becky her girlfriend, kissing her, being with her. Part of her couldn't believe it, but another part of her wondered why it took so long to get here. She
smiled at Becky - she was always smiling at Becky. "Alright, let's get to work."

Becky looked at Alexa, and then at the pile of envelopes littered across the table. "Do you mean with the kissing or…?"

Alexa rolled her eyes. The answer was obvious. "I'll give you one guess," she said, sliding the envelopes to the floor.

"My kind of work."

As they wrapped their arms around each other, dancing their special dance that was so familiar to them now, Alexa thought about how much things had changed. Life was always going to be complicated, and people moreso. Yet, there was always something more to people than what they showed on the surface. They just needed to be afforded the chance to show who they really were.

Their tongues engaging in a waltz of true emotion, Alexa was happy that she gave Becky that chance - the chance to show her what was beneath the surface.

Chapter End Notes

And there it is. It's been a heck of a journey, this one. I've marked this down as finished, for now. I have a few more ideas left to continue their school life, but I'm not entirely sure if/when I'll get back to this. A couple of weeks, a couple of months. Or maybe it'll be a new story altogether and I'll combine them into a series. I think this is a fitting end, but definitely check around in the future for the possibility for more. Check out my tumblr for any future updates, or just keep an eye out!

If you're reading this in the distant future, none of this matters to you and I'm sorry for wasting your time. Hello from the past.

Tumblr @starchild-5

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