Fake It Until You Make It

by NataliaCS57

Summary

It's mid-2013 and Prince Harry, who has moved to New York City to heal a broken heart, is dating multiple-award-winning, teen-favorite actress Jen Silva. The entire world has an opinion on the couple that seems to be perfectly wrong for each other's worlds, but what no one knows is that the relationship is a PR move to shift the media's attention from things the two of them were sick of talking about. If this information leaks, their image is destroyed. So acting is now life or death. Can they pull it off? Can they pull it off well enough they'll even fool their own hearts?
“Oh, crap!”

“I am so sorry, Ms. Silva!” the poor stage assistant cried as she dropped the coffee on me, probably seeing her career ending before her eyes.

“Don’t worry”, I said, “I have an extra dress, it’d be okay”.

“I am really sorry, is there anything I can help you with?”

“No, it’s okay. I wasn’t looking where I was going. It was my fault”, I entered the dressing-room designated to me and placed the cell phone on the makeup table, running to my bag and fishing for the extra dress I learned years ago I should always bring to interviews.

I stood there for a moment, taking a deep breath and mentally reciting my mantra: ‘Keep your shit together, keep your shit together, keep your shit together’. ‘I’m such an idiot’, I thought, going to the bathroom to change into the other dress, cussing myself for being looking at the phone while walking again. I couldn’t help it, though. I had avoided those headlines for long enough before Harry called the day before and, since our conversation then, I couldn’t help but wonder if things were really that bad. They were.

Harry was right, every possible story about him since last October, when everything hag happened, involved also her. And I knew just how suffocating that could be. Oh, yes, I knew, I knew way too well. It had been almost a year since something similar but not nearly as bad had happened to me and people were still going on about it, so I knew how Harry felt and I knew that getting out of London would do him… Well, if not good, at least it couldn’t make things worse. Nothing could.

My phone alerted a new message so I got out of the bathroom and picked it up, shoving all the stories I had just read to the back of my mind. Ironically enough, it was from Harry.

‘Hey you had a chance of checking on those apartments for me?’, I typed a quick answer and hit send.

‘I scheduled a visit for an empty one tonight, and for the penthouse. If you can be by your phone around 8, NY time, I’ll show you the place via Skype’

I looked in the mirror, making sure the dress worked with those shoes. I was so on my nerves about the whole Harry situation and the coffee scare just a minute ago that I didn’t trust my instincts so I grabbed my phone again and decided to call Sel.

“Hey there”, she said, after a few rings, “I was wondering when I was gonna hear from you”.

“Hi Sel, bad time?”

“No I’m just taking a break as we speak. What’s up? Is the interview over? Did you get my text?”, I could hear her breathe heavy on the other line and didn’t need to ask to know she was on dance rehearsal.

“Uh, no, it’s still early. And sorry not to have answered your text things got kind of crazy. Listen, can you get on skype real quick, I need fashion advice”, I said going staring at the mirror.

“Sure, wait up”, she hanged up and called me again less than a minute later, on Skype this time. I
saw Selena Gomez’s sweaty face staring at me with her straightened hair falling perfectly on the side of her head and rolled my eyes very dramatically so she could see.

“How can you look so good after dancing?”, she laughed.

“How do you know I’m dancing?”

“It’s all you do nowadays. How’s the recording going?”, I asked.

“Taking longer than expected”, she said, looking really pissed. She had been trying to release a new album for months now but her record label kept postponing it and we all knew it was driving her mad, “I swear to God if they give that poll bullshit one more time… But I’m not thinking about it right now, no. Now I’m relaxing”.

“Justin’s advice?”, I asked, not trying to hide my tone, and thank God I didn’t have to, because apparently she was getting as sick of him as the rest of us.

“Staying friends sucks. Of course he doesn’t get it, if he wanted to release a country album in Japanese his label would cry of happiness!”, we laughed for a bit letting the silence bring the serious tone back to the conversation, “You’re the smart one for not wanting to go on music career. Seriously though, what’s up with you?”

“You mean why I don’t want to go on music career or why did I called?”, I laughed and this time she was the one to give the eye roll, “Tell me if this dress goes with these shoes”. I turned the image back to the main camera and showed her what I was wearing, “this is my back up dress, the other got ruined, but it worked perfectly with these shoes”.

“Happens to the best of us”, she said, “And yes, I think you can pull it off. You look great in anything, anyway”.

“Awn, that’s why I’m friends with you”, I smiled changing the image back to the front camera, just in time to see her roll her eyes again.

“Someone has to be the nice friend now that Taylor’s on tour”, Selena joked making me smile.

“She’s the nice one?”, I asked, making my way to my makeup bag, “Then what are you?”

“Obviously the crazy one”.

“Obviously”, I laughed, “And what am I?”.

“The dork one”, she said and I gasped.

“Excuse me?”, I heard her laugh, “Why do I sense that’s not a compliment?”.

“It is, I swear! Anyway, talking about Tay… Have you heard from her?”.

“Isn’t she in France now? I think she is. We texted a couple days back and she said that was the next destination”.

“Well I envy her very much”.

“Tell me about it”, I agreed.

“And when are you coming to Cali, by the way?”. 
“Unless I end up having to go for something work related, not until summer”.

“I hate that your show is over”, she looked sad, “now you’ll just abandon me for Manhattan just like Taylor with Nashville”.

“Well, I’m sad I won’t get to see you as much, but it was time the show was over”.

“Do you already know what you want to do next? Other than modeling?”, she asked.

“I want to do movies, and I want to find someone to talk to about the fashion line, but if the meeting I had yesterday is an indication, than things won’t be as easy as I ha-“

“I know I’m late, I’m so sorry!”, Janine, my PR, burst through the door with a Magnolia Bakery doggie bag, “but I brought gifts!”

“Relax, you’re early”, I calmed her.

“She already dealt with a crisis on her own, Jan”, Sel interrupted.

“What crisis?!”, Janine almost screamed, her obsessive personality coming up, trying to control everything.

“Hardly a crisis, my first dress got ruined, so I changed into the back up one”, I explained in a breath, “You two need to relax!”

“This is a big deal, Jenifer!”, Janine dramatized, while I got the Magnolia Bakery package from her finding my favorite: Banana Pudding. “This is your first interview since it happened”.

“It is so not, I’ve done tons of press for the show since then”.

“Yes, but this is the first time where going to actually address the whole… Thing”, Janine said, “We agreed to talk about it, please be serious”.

“I’m dead serious”, I said, “I just refuse to believe people still aren’t sick of this whole drama”.

“Oh, honey”, Sel said, in a condescending tone, “You’re surely not serious, you know better than this”.

“Whatever”, I rolled my eyes, “run the plan for me again as I eat”.

“Don’t eat you’ll ruin the dress.”

“You should really leave that for afterwards”, they both protested at the same time, so I left the pudding unopened and went back to retouching my makeup with a roll of my eyes.

“Okay”, Janine started, “You’ll be there for two parts, divided by the break, in the first part we’ll cover the thing, get it outta the way as soon as possible, and then we’ll talk work on the second. Jimmy will say something about how are you feeling or something like that, and you’re supposed to just say it’s been a while so you’ve had time to deal with things on your own way, he wasn’t the first person to let you down and won’t be the last, and…”

“I’m thankful for the support I’ve received and for everyone that prioritized making sure I was okay instead of pointing fingers”, I finished the sentence for her, robotically, she looked annoyed, but satisfied, sitting down and picking her phone from her purse.

“Ouch”, Sel joked, “Honey, I gotta go, good luck today, alright? I’ll be thinking of you”.

"Ouch", Sel joked, “Honey, I gotta go, good luck today, alright? I’ll be thinking of you".
“Thanks Sel, I’ll let you know how it goes”, we bided each other goodbye and I went back to fixing my eyebrows, feeling Janine’s eyes on me, “I’m fine”.

“I know”, she said, bringing her eyes back to her phone and starting to type frenetically. Janine wasn’t always with me on interviews, she usually just ran over details with me over the phone on the day, things to make sure I remembered to mention or to avoid. But today, as much as I tried to convince myself otherwise, was different. Today was the first time I’d talk openly about the jerk that made me believe he loved me as much as I loved him despite our 25 years of age difference and then got back together with his wife and didn’t bother telling until we were done working together so it wouldn’t affect his career. He had been the first public relationship I had had in Hollywood and I was starting to think that was the only kind of relationship I could ever have: the bad kind. The type that always ended with me broken on covers of tabloids.

“I just hate being the victim”, I said, staring at every bit of lipstick on my mouth to make sure everything was on place, “It’s been almost a year, I’m tired of it”.

“I know”, she said, only stopping the typing for a second, “Remember, if he asks more about David-“

“I know. Just say it’s been a while, I was young and naïve. I wish him well, and I’m focusing on my career right now”. She didn’t answer. She didn’t type either. We just sat there, in silence, staring at different points. “How did I got here?”, I asked, not to her, in particular, just… To the universe, “How did I went from innocent Disney Channel kid-star to idiot that always dates the worse possible types?”, Janine kept her silence, which was so rare for her, so I enjoyed it to keep talking. “I mean, I used to think that’s just what happens when you grow up, you know? You find someone to love and you get married, that’s what adults do. When did life get so… Messy? Why didn’t I listen to you, to my mother? To every single person in America that had an opinion on my love life, and that at the time was so annoying, but that turned out to be so right?”

“Stop”, she broke the silence, “Sweetie, you should never apologize for following your heart, even if it led you to pain. You did what you thought was right and you should wear that as a badge of honor”.

“Don’t tell me I shouldn’t have regret”, I said, “You know that doesn’t apply here. It’s just stupid here. We’re talking about a 45 years old man that made me, 22 at the time, his mid-life crisis, as I made him nothing but the love of my life, and then got back together with his ex-wife and didn’t bother telling me until the Broadway musical we were costarring in was over so that I wouldn’t ask the producers to take him out”. She took a deep breath, avoiding eye contact, letting me go on. “Dear God, Janine, I found out on the news hours before our last performance of that season. I loved that musical so much and he just ruined it for me. I had to be the bigger person and let him kiss me in front of an audience one last time knowing that not just me, but everyone was thinking ‘she was warned’”. We let the silence calm me down, both of us knowing without words being necessary that my fury was about way more than David. Knowing that to say the words out loud about how worrying the path my career was taking was was to make them true, and in this business the confidence on what you are doing is half the way.

“What are you doing tonight?”, she asked after another minute had gone quiet.

“I have to go see an empty apartment in my condo”.

“You’re moving?”, she asked.

“Not for me, for Harry”
“What Harry?”

“From England”, I answered.

“You mean Prince Harry?!” she squealed, “I underestimated how close you two have become since September when you met!”

“It’s not a big deal”, I told her, “we just have a lot of tastes in common. And... problems in common”.

“And why does he need an apartment?”

“He’s coming to spend some time here”, this was followed by a series of new squeals over how amazing new charity balls he’d probably be throwing. “I’m not sure if he’d be working on that, he hasn’t told me what he plans to do here yet”.

“And why is he coming?”, she asked.

That was a good question. Back when Harry had called me the week before, I didn't think this is what he had in mind.

“I meant to call”, I said, the phone warming my ear as I fought the cold January air of Manhattan. “I just wasn’t sure you wanted to talk about it”.

“Yeah, thanks”, he said quickly, reassuring me, probably without noticing, that I was correct: he didn’t want to talk about it. “Hey, listen, remember when we met?”

“Sure”, I said in a laugh, mentally debating if I had time to stop for a bagel, “not very easy to forget when a real life prince tries to steal from you”. Four months before I had gone to Scotland for a couple of weeks to shoot a small part in Game of Thrones. A call from one of the charities I used to work with and next thing I know I'm using one of my days of to attend a charity gala for them. There, I met Harry.

“Alright, first of all you know that is not how it happened”, he said, making me roll my eyes and losing sight of the street for half a second, long enough so that I almost ran against someone carrying what looked like eight cups of Starbucks. 'Keep your shit together, Jenifer', I thought, 'you do not want to get to a meeting with coffee stains on your coat'. “Second of all... Screw it, I have no time for this. Do you remember that you told me you lived in a nice enough apartment close to Central Park?”

“Yeah”, I answered, seeing my little cozy home in my mind without difficulty. “Why?”

“I was just wondering if you knew of any empty apartments to rent there”.

“Hm, I’d have to ask, Harry”, the building finally became visible to me, so I slowed down not to get in on the phone. “I know for a fact the penthouse is. Why do you ask?”

“I’ve been talking to my family… I think I might be coming there”.

“Well, if that’s the case you know you can just stay with me right?”, I asked, thinking how weird it was that this grown up, late-20s, man still had to talk to his family about things like this, when I, early 20s, pretty much was taking care of my life for years now.

“Yeah I was thinking of something more long-term”.
“Like what… Moving here?”

“Just for a season or two”, he was quick to justify, the mere thought of ever living anywhere that wasn’t London being so ridiculous for someone like him.

“Wow”, I said, letting the thought of having him as my neighbor settle in. The paparazzi surely would go crazy. The rest of the building would hate him for it. Even I’m not sure I’d like that and I actually have to deal with them for a living. But I couldn’t resist the thought of having him just a couple of stores up or down. “This is new”, I said, “why would you want to come to the only other country where they worship you more than here?”.

“I just…”, I heard him take a deep breath and somehow knew he had his eyes closed, trying to explain the decision to himself maybe, “I need to take some space, you know? And I need to… Give space, things are… Very intense here right now”.

“Yeah I get it”, I leaned on the wall to stay out of people’s way and tried to block all the city noise so I could focus on what he was saying. “I’m really sorry… About all of that”.

“I know”, he said, “I know you are. Thanks”.

“Have you heard anything of her?”, he took some time to answer that, and I felt just how the conversation theme had dropped. I didn’t want to go there as I knew he didn’t want to talk about it, but for him to make a decision this big I knew he had to be in a really bad place.

“Yeah, she’s been uhn… She’s been working in this firm in London”, another deep breath, “She’s on the news almost every day. They won’t leave her alone. So I thought, maybe if I’m not around, maybe if they have something interesting to say about me they’ll leave her alone”.

“Harry…”, I started, unsure as of how to make him understand, “She brought this on herself. You cannot put your life upside down to make her feel comfortable…”

“I know! I know it’s a long shot, ok? But… Look, please don’t give me a speech. I’ve heard the speech, trust me. I heard it from almost everyone of my friends and family members who seem to think they know how I feel better than myself. But they don’t. The papers don’t. Nobody does. And I want to stop talking about and have it define me. I want to be my own person again and… And yes I want them to leave her alone not because I think I owe her anything but because I don’t think I can make trough one more day of those stupid headlines”.

I stared at a couple of pigeons on the sidewalk fighting over a half eaten hotdog someone had dropped. I tried to think of what to say but wasn’t sure so I just stayed quiet, hoping that saying all of that would make him feel better.

“Did you know I went back to work in the end of November?”, he asked after a while. “And did you know they’ve said nothing about it? All they seem to talk about is how pale I look or how much weight I have lost, which is none, by the way. And how I appear to be trying to make myself look good to win her back. It’s all about her now, and I can’t have it. I can’t have it affecting my work”.

“Okay”. I said, finally. “I understand. If you think it’ll help… I’ll try to ask on my building”.

“Thank you, Jenny. And if you can make sure you have some pictures as well. Or a video, or something. I wanna make the move as fast as possible”.

“But what exactly…? Oh, crap, I’m late”. I said, realizing the time, “Harry, I will, don’t worry, but I gotta go now”.
“Okay, I’ll talk to you later”, he rushed a goodbye, “And Jenny?”

“Yes?”, I said running to the elevator, trying to get my coat out at the same time.

“Seriously, thank you”. I stopped at the sound of his words, and gave the ground a sad little smile I’m glad he couldn’t see.

“Anytime, Mr. Prince”. I could hear him break into a smile on the other line, “Anytime”.

Looking at the pudding on the dressing room, I thought of how to answer Janine's question.

“The same reason I spent a month home after what happened with David”, I explained, “to avoid confrontation”.

“Oh the poor thing”, Janine said, running her hand through her perfect short blond locks, “That Chelsy Davy bitch it’s probably the most hated person in the world right now”.

“Let’s not go that far”, I said.

“I am serious, Jen. Who would break an engagement to the world’s most eligible bachelor?”

“Someone who clearly didn’t love him enough”, I said, shaking my head right after. “I shouldn’t say that, I don’t really know why she did it”.

“Everybody knows why she did it!”, Janine said, “She didn’t wanna live the princess life, that idiot”

“Is that what they’re saying?”

“They’re saying she called off the wedding because she got a major job offer on a kick ass law firm in London, but that’s how I chose to read into it”.

“Why would they even offer her a job knowing she was engaged to a prince?”, I asked, not expecting an answer, that Janine gave me one anyway.

“That’s the point, love”, she said in a low tone, getting close to me, “She applied for the position in secret after the engagement had been announced. Obviously she wasn’t that satisfied with the direction her life was leading… They always said she was too much of a free spirit to ever marry a prince”

“Excuse me, Ms.Silva”, the stage assistant walked in, “We’re ready for you”.

Janine walked me out, bidding goodbye as I got to the entrance of the stage.

“I’m not ready for this”, I said, holding her hand before she left me.

“Fake it until you make it”, she said with a smile, giving my hand one last squeeze before disappearing between the cameras and staff.

“Or break it”, I emended after she was gone, wondering how much more I could take of this, before, like Harry, I decided the only way would be to run away.
The Dance Party

Chapter Summary

Jen helps Harry move in and they talk about how similar their problems is. They dance their problems away. Jen makes a crazy joke, but Harry doesn't seem to think it's so crazy.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

I was having the best of dreams, with David Tennant on a beach as we tried to find our way back to the Tardis, when the doorbell started to ring. In my sleepiness delirium I just chose to assume it wasn’t important and kept my eyes shut with all of my strength. Then my cell phone rang.

“Uuuugh. Shit. Fuck you. Shit”, I picked it up and answered, without bothering to check who was it, “what?”

“Good morning, sunshine!”

“Harry?”, I took my sleeping eye patch out and looked around, by the lighting it couldn’t be more than 6am, “It’s super early, dude, what do you want?”.

“It’s 11am”, he said.

“Maybe there, stupid, not in New York”.

“Yes, in New York”, he said, calmly, “I’m in New York”.

“What? When did you get here?”, I got up and went to my bedroom window, “Wait, what do you mean it’s 11am?”, I opened the curtains and there was at least 3 inches of snow everywhere. “Oh my God, it snowed overnight!”, I gasped.

“I know, it took forever to get here from the airport”.

“Here where? Where are you?”.

“I’m at your door”.

“No, you’re not”, I said in disbelief, hearing the doorbell go crazy.

“I am, I’ve been ringing your doorbell for ten minutes”, I made my way out of the room, feeling how the temperature had changed overnight, “There she is!”, his smiley face greeted me at the door, arms open, cell phone in hand, red cheeks and even red-er hair. Another man stood behind him, slightly smaller.

“Harry”, I said, “you’re really here!”.

“The real question, Jenny dear,” he started, stepping forward to hug me, “is why are you still in bed at 11?”
“Shut up”, I said, “I don’t exactly work a 9 to 5, I don’t need to wake up early”.

“And you say I’m the one who doesn’t have a real job…”, he mocked, “I’m going up to meet my new place, come with”.

“Sure”, I looked at my pajamas, “let me just change, get in”.

“Do you mind if my friend Clark takes a look around?”’, he asked, pointing at the guy behind him, whom I assumed was his bodyguard, “he’s an interior design enthusiast and would love to take a closer look at what you’ve done with the place”, he joked as Clark rolled his eyes, probably so done with that joke.

I stepped aside, and Clark circled the place, giving us an okay before heading out to wait in the hall. I ran to my closet, screaming at Harry to make himself at home. He followed me, taking a look around.

“It snowed overnight”, he said, “it was a nightmare to make the way here from the airport, most roads were closed, the car we had hired couldn’t make it, we had to take a taxi”.

“Oh, you poor thing”, I joked, “Had to take a cab like the rest of us, upper class mortals”.

“Shut up”, he said, in a low voice, but I could hear the smile on it even from a different room, “you have no idea how much security crap we had to bring, we had to take two taxis”.

“I thought they brought all of that already when they came to see the place and install the cameras and bullet proof glass and all”

“They brought most of it, yes”, his voice got closer, as he made his way into the closet, “Dear God, do you really need all of this?”,

My closet was a smaller room, right beside my bedroom. I had the wall taken down and a door made to it. There was a small island of drawers in the far end, a makeup table, a head to toe mirror and, coming from the wall to the middle of the room, many shelves made mini halls along the way.

“If you even have to ask it makes it hard to believe you’ve actually met any public-figure women”, I answered, putting on black jeggings and a green and pink Victoria’s Secret bra, making my way to one of the drawers to find a sweater. Harry turned to the door, not trying to hide the little smirk on his face, a gift from the partial view of my breasts.

“Nice bra”, he said.

“Oh please”, I said, “just pretend is a bikini”, I found my favorite sweater, and headed to the bathroom, where I began to brush my teeth.

It had been almost three weeks since Harry had called me asking for information on an empty apartment on my building. Almost three weeks since the interview with Jimmy Fallon, when I talked about David for the first time, the story gaining tabloid covers again. On the night of the interview I got home and went to the penthouse, where my syndic was waiting to show me the place. I got on Skype with Harry and filmed around, one look at the terrace and he was sold.

“There’s four bedrooms, Harry”, I said, “why do you need all of this?”

“You really think they’d let me go to the States on my own?”, he asked, cynic. “I’m bringing two protection officers and an assistant aide; they’ll need rooms as well”.
On the very next day, his aide got in touch with the syndic about the ‘security changes’ that would have to be done on the place, on their expense, of course, and at the end of that week they started installing bullet proof glasses and extra cameras on the halls. Now, three weeks later, on early February, Manhattan had one new ginger citizen.

“First rule of being a New Yorker”, I said, applying bb cream, “when you’re going to someone’s house first thing in the morning, the least you should do is bring them Starbucks. If you’re waking them up you should bring bagels as well”.

“Eleven AM, it was eleven AM”, I heard his voice leaving the closet, “Fancy, what is this?”

“People’s Choice Awards”, I said, leaving the bathroom to check what he was looking at and returning quickly, “Two for Favorite Sci-Fi/Fantasy TV Actress, for the last two season of my TV show, and one Favorite Movie Actress for the 1-800-Where-Are-You movie”.

“That was a good one”, he said, “was it last year?”

“The year before”, I said, “But I won it last February, along with one of the TV actress ones…”, I remembered how at the time it seemed that year would go great, and then the very next month I went to Broadway and met David, and then everything went down.

“Are you putting on makeup just to take the elevator and go to my place, four floors above?”, he asked, walking in on the bathroom.

“Seriously, have you met famous girls at all?”, I asked back, “It is never just ‘going over there’, one person sees us, snaps a photo and that’s is. That’s a TMZ article on how I look without make up. And why are you in such a hurry, anyway?”

“I want to see if the place I’m supposed to be living in for the next few months is really good, I haven’t seen it yet”.

“The first thing you did was to come here?”, I asked, in a fake squeal, “Awn, that’s sweet. Don’t you trust me?”

“Whatever”, he rolled his eyes, “And what I don’t trust is the quality of your cell phone camera”.

“Well, you should. The place is beautiful, the ceiling is amazing.”

“Enough with the ceiling crap, why did you get so obsessed with it?”, he said as we made our way to the door, after I grabbed my cell.

“Well, you’re going to love the terrace, is beautiful, and the living room ceiling has hidden lights…”

By the time we got to the penthouse floor, his other security officer and his assistant aide had already laid the bags on the floor of the living room, that had been add proper furniture over the course of the last weeks. The concierge and a employee of the building were helping them move boxes around and unpack things.

“You changed the chandeliers?”, I cried, “They were beautiful!”

“They were a bit too feminine for a bachelor pad”, he said, walking in taking his coat off and looking around.

“Bachelor pad? Please”.

“Ms. Silva, I presume”, a black haired guy, in his 30s, made his way to me, “Thomas Hill, the prince’s assistant aide, we talked over the phone when I asked your syndic’s contact info”.

“Right. It’s nice to meet you”, I shook his hand and he offered me coffee, “You see, Harry, this is how you greet people in the morning”.

“Eleven fucking AM, man”, he mumbled, going to see his room, “You should have been awake, I don’t care if you didn’t have to”.

“I was in a shoot until late last night”.

“What shoot?”, he shouted from the hall.

“For the New Yorker magazine”, I rolled my eyes when he gave me a long whistle, “is for the Golden Globe’s next week, I’m nominated”.

“Congratulations, miss”, Thomas said, handing me a coffee, “Hopefully you’ll win it. I understand this is the first time one actress could win two acting awards in one night?”. 

“Yes.”, I smiled, “you’re well informed, thank you. I’m nominated for my TV show, in a drama category and for a guest actress one, for Game of Thrones.”

“Was that the one you were working on last September when you met Harry?”, he asked, and I nodded taking a sip at my coffee.

“Thomas here has the job of checking on people around me”, Harry said, coming back from his room and throwing himself in the couch, “He had to dig up all the dirt on you in case someone decided to talk shit about you finding me this place”.

“You had your people spy on me?”

“It’s hardly spying when all your info is on Wikipedia”, he answered and I couldn’t argue with that, “I must admit I was surprised, you have quite the résumé. Did you really become a millionaire at sixteen or was NetWorth.com wrong?”. 

“Yes, everything I own was bought with child labor money”, I joked, making my way to the terrace doors, noticing the snow made it look slightly less interesting, mainly because the outside couches we’re impossible to sit in under this conditions. Harry came after me and opened the doors.

“But seriously, how many times have you been nominated for awards?”

“There was…”, I tried to remember mentally, as he made his way through the terrace, I was careful enough to only place my feet on his footsteps since I wasn’t exactly wearing snow appropriate shoes, “A Bafta at 16, for an independent film, a Tony at 17 for Les Mis, and then after I started the TV show, I started being nominated every year for People’s Choice and Teen’s Choice. We have a pretty big teen fan base, it’s a blessing and a curse, really”.

“Oh boo-hoo”, he said, “Look at how sad my life is, I’m nominated for too many awards”.

“Should we go find some place to buy food?”, Clark put his head outside, “oh, nice view”.

“I can take you guys, I’ll show you the best restaurants around”, I said, and we made our way back to my place so I could grab a jacket.

I took Harry and his other PO, Nathan, around town, as we made our way through Central Park,
enjoying the lack of paparazzi around in that cold winter day.

“I have to enjoy walking around for now”, Harry said, half way through, “They will announce I’m here tonight and then goodbye normalcy”.

“Do you normally suffer with the paparazzi here, Miss?”, Jon asked.

“Well, they’re always around”, I said, “Not as much as they’ll be now with Harry here, I’m sure, but yeah, they’re around. The good thing about New York, thought, is that they keep a good enough distance, you know? They’re there, and you can see them, and hear them, but they usually respect personal space… They like to run in front to get full body pictures, which gives you some space… Unlike Los Angeles. Because of the snow, I think they decided to stay at home today, thought.”

I walked around, pointing to Harry and Nathan where my favorite places where, the Italian food one, the vegetarian one, Whole Foods… But in that day we decided to go with a Manhattan moving day tradition: pizza. We sat on the living room, the TV on, everybody making it a big deal when a promo for the show came on. I curtseyed with a piece of pizza in my hand.

After we ate, Harry and I helped the guys get the boxes to its places and then they went to their rooms to unpack. Harry and I were left alone, just the two of us and a bottle of vodka, actually.

“So when’s the Golden Globe?”, he asked, cleaning the snow off the terrace’s couch.

“Next week”, I said, “I’m not gonna be there”.

“Why not?”, he asked, “Bored? Too many ones already?”, he joked and I laughed.

“I don’t have Golden Globe’s… It just feels kind of pointless, I never win, I just get nominated”, I said.

“What about that list from Wikipedia?”

“Fan voted awards are flattering, but they don’t really count for you to get good big new roles… My show is still judged by the people who matter as just a fantasy teen story… No matter how much we’ve improved the writing, no matter how bad we still defend that the acting is really good, we’ll always be the teen show with bad special effects”. He sighed, sitting on the couch and putting his feet up the table; He signed for me to get him the vodka bottle, so I sat beside him. A few seconds passed as we just stared at the snow covered floor and the building tops around.

“Okay”, he said, finally, “But it’s over now, right? Your show. The final episodes will air soon… Get yourself into a new story, a good one, and that’ll bring you those good big roles you said”. I stayed quiet, but gave him a smile, appreciating his effort. “What?”, he asked, “You have a face on”.

“I just…”, I sighed again, “Hollywood is not… That easy.” He kept staring at me. I wondered if he was just being polite and if I should really start this conversation on his first day in the city.

“Okay”, I started, “there’s this really – and I mean really – nice movie being made, is based on a true story, adapted from a book this woman wrote about losing her younger son to cancer, a four year old boy. Heartbreaking. A recipe for nominations. The casting is in process, and I really wanted an audition, but the problem is, the director of the movie might have the priority of casting someone with talent, but the people who, kind of, grant auditions, are the executive producers, the people who are paying for the film to happen, and all they care about is casting someone who will make the movie gain more visibility, someone who’s… Trending”
“Okay”, he said, nodding serious.

“And right now, I’m famous for Disney, a bad special effects teen show, and being cheated on by my super older Broadway boyfriend”.

“So they didn’t give you an audition?”, he asked.

“Nope”, I said, and he just said an ‘it sucks’ very low, passing me the vodka. “My PR says if the movie means so much to me I should take matters on my own hands and get myself on the news to get an audition”

“Seems pretty obvious, isn’t it her job to give you an actual idea on how to do that?”

“It is”, I said, smiling coldly. He kept staring. “She says my best choices are a sex tape”, he made a face, “nude pics”, his face got worst, “going to rehab, or making a mini documentary on MTV about how I overcame the pain of the David-thing”.

“That’s ridiculous”, he said and I laughed.

“I know... I don't think she's serious about the sex tape or nudes, but... She did talk a lot about the documentary or taking a small break in a rehab clinic”, I passed him the bottle, laying more on the couch and staring at the sky, “Isn’t it horrible that to get a chance that I know I deserve – because I do, I deserve it – I need to either show my body, pretend to have an addiction or talk about something I don’t want to?”. He looked at me, but didn’t say anything. “I’m not asking for much, am I? Am I being greedy or pompous? No, right? I doubt the People’s Choices and the Teen’s Choices, but they would never nominate me for a Bafta of for a Tony, not even for a Golden Globe if I didn’t deserve it. I don’t care if I didn’t win it, they put me on those categories because they thought I deserved it, so I did.” I finished, mumbling one last sentence, “I’m a good actress.”

“You are”, he said, patting me on the shoulder. It started to snow again, so we went back inside and I followed him to his bedroom, opening the curtains and staring down at the great view as soon as I got there, while he took off his shoes and lay in the bed, staring at the ceiling.

“It is a pretty cool ceiling”, he said and I smiled.

“Told ya”, I lay in bed beside him, to the opposite direction, our faces near each other.

“...Chelsy is dating someone new”, he said in a low voice, and in the moment I heard it I knew that was the first time he had said those words out loud. I sighed, closing my eyes.

“I’m sorry”

“We broke up in October”, he said, “We announced it in November, because I thought it’d be good to give her time to regret her decision, which she didn’t, but we broke up in October... It’s been three months now. It’s time enough for her to start dating again. It really bugs me that they still won’t leave her alone, though. They keep following her around making everything about her…”

“Did you… Rebounded?”

“Yeah”, he said, “A couple times, but that’s not what she’s doing, she’s… Dating. I mean, seriously. It’s her right. As I said it’s been long enough, I just…”

“You thought she could still change her mind?”, I asked, and he turned his head to the other side, “You thought she’d come back?”
“It’s stupid”.

“It’s not”, I said, “You were in love with her. That’s what we do when we’re in love. We expect things to turn out how we want them to”.

“Well, that’s stupid”, he said, facing me again, and we laughed weakly.

“Yeah”, I agreed, “It’s pretty stupid”.

“I just… I need them to stop putting both of us together.” His eyes were distant, his voice, low, “We’re not together anymore. But they keep writing about it and talking about it and making everything about it… I don’t- She’s someone else’s girlfriend now, but because we were engaged for a month or less, her life will never be the same. She’ll be married with kids one day and the birth will be on a social page on the news, and they’ll still be calling her ‘Prince Harry’s ex’. I hate it, it’s like I break things even when they’re not mine to break anymore. It makes me hate me.”

We let the silence fill the room, staring at his beautiful ceiling, each of us thinking of our own problems and letting the alcohol kiss our wounds better.

“You know what we need?” I asked, sitting up, “We need a dance party”. I grabbed my phone, looking for a good song.

“What?”

“It’s something I do with the girls when we’re having a bad time… Taylor saw it on Grey’s Anatomy and it really works. We just… Dance. Whenever think are bad, we put on a song and dance our problems away. It usually makes us feels better to just look at her because she’s such a terrible dancer, but it could help”.

“Sorry, Silva”, he said, “I don’t dance”.

“I’m sure I could find some YouTube videos to prove you wrong, but for now,” I hit play on Ed Sheeran’s ‘You Need Me, I Don’t Need You’, “come on, it’ll make you feel better”.

“I doubt it very much”, he said, starting to smile at my dance moves.

“Now I’m in town, break it down, thinking of making a new sound, playing a different show every night in front of a new crowd”, I made hip hop hands as I ‘rapped’ to Ed Sheeran’s voice making Harry laugh, “That’s you now, Ciao, seems that life is great now see me lose focus as I sing to you loud”.

“You’re right”, he said, “This does make me feel better”.

“See, I’m true, my songs are where my heart is I’m like glue, I stick to other artists I’m not you, now that would be disastrous”, I let the song fill me, moving my hips around the room to its rhythm, singing the words fast, looking at the building as if Hollywood’s executive producers could all see me, my voice getting slowly higher than Ed’s, “See, I’m real, I do it all, it’s all me, I’m not fake, don’t ever call me lazy, I won’t stay put, give me the chance to be free, Hollywood sadly seems to sort of suffocate me”

“Nice”, Harry says, smiling at me for changing the lyrics a bit, maybe getting a bit too caught up on it, and maybe at my dance moves, “that Tony you were nominated for”, he said, “that was for singing, right? Not dancing, clearly”.

“What do you mean-“, I asked, out of breath, “Clearly? I’m a great dancer, I have Brazilian blood,
cara”, I joked, jumping on the bed over him, from one of his sides to the other, happily making him a little bit nervous about it. “‘Cos you need me, man, I don’t need you, you need me, man, I don’t need you- sing with me, Harry!”, I screamed, and he wrapped his arms around my legs, knocking me down on the bed. I screamed, but he just got up and jumped to the floor, starting his own version of singing/raping the song, and busting some clearly not so shy dance moves.

“I sing, I write my own tune and I write my own verse, hell, Don’t need another wordsmith to make the tune sell, Call yourself a singer-writer, you’re just bluffing, Name’s on the credits and you didn’t write nothing”, I explode in laughter, kneeling on the mattress and applauding his exaggerated impersonation of a rapper, “I sing fast, I know that all my shit’s cool, I will blast and I didn’t go to BRIT School, I came fast with the way I act, right, I can’t last, if I’m smoking on a crack pipe”, I got back on the ground, going back to dancing like crazy, starting to feel a bit too hot for my sweater, and we screamed the lyrics out loud and fast, “‘Cos with the lyrics I’ll be aiming it right, I won’t stop till my name is in lights, at stadium heights with Damien Rice, on red carpets, now I’m on Arabian nights, Because I’m young I know my brother’s gonna give me advice, from day one, I’ve been prepared, with VO5 wax for my ginger hair”, he pointed at his own head, I whipped mine around not sure if Willow Smith or Beyoncé would be prouder, “I’m always doing shows if I’m not I’m in the studio, truly broke, never growing up call me Rufio, melody music maker, reading all the papers, they say I’m up-and-coming like I’m fucking in an elevator!”, we screamed the lyrics out loud, dancing our way around the room like we were in Footloose. At some point Clark opened the door, looking very concerned, and left a second later shaking his head in disbelief.

We keep dancing the song away, dancing our troubles away, eyes closed, focusing in the lyrics, jumping around and spinning like crazy. He wraps my legs again at the end, throwing us both back at the bed as Ed Sheeran finished the song. Another song came on, Wildfire, by John Mayer and Frank Ocean, a sweet slow melody calming us both down as we tried to get our breaths back.

“Fuck them”, he said, determined, his eyes pointing at the ceiling but his mind setting course somewhere else, “You really do deserve it… That movie and whatever else you want”. I smiled, breathing deeply, and took my eyes off of him to also stare at the ceiling. I wished there was a way to help him, to help him get what he moved here to find.

“We should go out to lunch sometime next week”, I said.

“Sure, text me”.

“No, like… You need a new girlfriend”, I said. He laughed, bitter, his eyes not moving.

“Are you volunteering? I’m flattered but I think I might take some time off of relationships”

“No, like, it doesn’t have to be a real girlfriend.” He blinked, his eyebrows coming together in confusion. It took him a second, but he finally looked at me.

“What?”, he asked.

“Think about it”, I sat on the bed, straightening my back, “Your problem is just like mine. It’s a media problem. They want to sell so of course they’ll make up stories to make this break up longer than it has to be, making up stories about how you’re still in love with her and stuff”, he mumbled an ‘aham’ so I’d go on, “But, if they think you have a new girlfriend, they’ll focus on the new girl instead of the old one, because that’ll sell more”.

“Yeah, but I’m not about to drag someone else into this mess and do with them as I did to Chelsy just because I can’t handle some annoying headlines”.

“That’s the beauty of Hollywood, it doesn’t have to be a real girlfriend. Happens with me and my friends all the time, we go to lunch with a friend and on the next day TMZ is saying we’re dating”.

“Hm”, he thought about it, his eyes going away again, probably considering the problems it could cause.

“I have to go, I’m giving an interview in one hour… But let me know If you decide to collect résumés, I could have lunch with you.”, I joked, grabbing my cell phone and getting up, “A few days of them thinking we’re dating and I might actually get my audition”, I walked up to the door as he sat up on the bed, his eyes still away. “Plus I don’t think they know I live here, so if you gave me a ride back home they’d think we’re sleeping together”, I laughed, “Hollywood… Crazy, right? Welcome to the States, Harry”.

“Yeah”, he said, and I still curse myself for not realizing how serious he looked, “crazy”.

Chapter End Notes

This story is also being post on tumblr, at fakeituntilyoumakeitphff.tumblr.com.
The Golden Globe Awards

Chapter Summary

Jen goes to the Golden Globe awards against her will. Taylor gives her hope in the future. We learn more about her past.

“So, tell us what you’re wearing!”, the Californian accent of the pretty over-made-up fake-blonde reached me and I had to suppress a sigh.

“I’m wearing Elie Saab!”, I said, smiling at my black couture jumpsuit, touching the lace on my chest, “and tonight is all about comfort for me, it’s a good day, I’m here with a good friend, seeing a lot of people I’ve missed, it’s a party, really!”

“I see you’re in good spirits, and so you should! You’re nominated today, is it your first Golden Globe nomination?”

“It is, I’m nominated for a participation on Game of Thrones and for The Mediator, which is pretty cool, but, you know, I really just want see my friends and have a good time”, I hoped she would stop talking about my nominations, but, of course, that was not her job.

“And you could walk out with two awards tonight, that’s a record! Who’s your hot date, who are you gonna celebrate with?”

“My hot date?” we laughed, “I’m here with my friend Taylor tonight, she’s nominated too with a song she wrote for a movie, so we’re having a blast. Her family couldn’t come, so we’re each other’s date.”

“And you deserve all the fun you can get after the year you had”, her condescending tone hit me like a brick, “we’re all rooting for you. You wanna send a shout out to your family? Are they watching?

“My family is watching in Brazil, yes”, I said, “I miss you guys, I love you… And a shout out to Spike and my friends over there at the most rad penthouse in New York City, save me some vodka!”

“Well that sounds like a party! Thanks for stopping by, good luck tonight. Jenifer Silva, everybody!”

“Thank you, have a good night”, I smiled at her, then at the camera and made my way back to the red carpet behind me, waving at the fans behind the fences, all who had their cellphones up in the air pointed at me. I recognized a few dressed up as my character in The Mediator, the TV show I had been doing for the last six years, so I changed my way in their direction.

“Honey, we’re running out of time”, Monica rushed after me in her elegant suit, her well-structured face showing her worries with the time. She was a single mother from Virginia who had been my personal assistant for the past three years, her mother was from Portugal which meant she could speak Portuguese almost as well as me, which was the biggest reason I hired her. That and her cute ten year-old boy who’s photo she had been smart enough to show me when I interviewed her three
years ago. Her job was basically dealing with whatever I didn’t want to deal with and making sure I got my job done, which in that particular night included not over-crowding the perfectly timed red carpet arrivals.

“I’ll just be a minute”, I said.

“We don’t have a minute”, she touched her Bluetooth earpiece, “We need another minute… I know, I’m sorry, it’ll be quick”.

I felt sorry for Monica; it was not easy doing this job. I would be the first to say I was not an easy person to deal with. But I couldn’t help it, especially when it came to the fans. I was too stressed at that point to admit—or to even notice, really—that I was in a point in my life when I could not handle another award season going through the buzz of ‘omg-I’m-nominated-again’ to ‘I-didn’t-win-it’s-okay-though’. I had been through it every year at one point or another since I was 16. I had been in this business since I was 12 and I was starting to realize that I was not getting where I wanted with hard work and patience. So, as I had told Harry on the day of his move, I had planned to not fly back to LA for the Golden Globe Awards.

“I was there last month for the People’s Choice, I don’t want to go again, it’s pointless”, I repeated again and again, to Harry, Taylor, Sel, and my agent, going through the whole process of eye-rolling and sighing when they told me I was being an idiot. I was decided not to come and, at the end of the day, this is what changed my mind:

It happened a couple of days after his move into my building; it had been announced by his people—his palace? I don’t know—that he would be living in Manhattan after accepting a position in the offices of one of the charities he was very passionate about: The Halo Trust, who worked to remove the debris of war from third world countries—mines and stuff-. From what Harry explained to me, his mother had worked with the organization in life, and that made him get closer to their work the year before, getting really frustrated after trying to convince governments to finance the campaigns and failing. So ever since he had tried to think of a way of helping more, and the organization popped into his head when he had decided to flee London to give his ex-fiancé some space.

The announcement of Prince Harry’s new journey, however, had the opposite reaction of the one he actually wanted: people had started talking even more about the brake of the engagement, every news outlet writing stories about how the Prince was so heartbroken that he had had to move away, and the paparazzi had begun to follow Chelsy Davi even more to try and get her to talk about it. Did she regret it? Did she ask him to leave? It was a nightmare and even I, who had been quick to call her a bitch, had to admit no one deserved the amount of persecution she was getting.

After the paparazzi followed Harry home from the Halo’s offices and, therefore, discovered where he lived, you could always count on, at least, twenty of them at our building’s doors waiting for Harry to leave for work every morning. Seeing this would happen, I started planning my day to only get out after he had left—taking the rabble of paparazzi with him.

It was, as I mentioned, a couple of days later that I got a call from the one person that would be able to change my mind about the Golden Globes: my mother.

“What is this story I hear about you being nominated for not one, but two golden globes?”, she asked, in Portuguese.

“I’m nominated for two Golden Globes”, I said. “How are things over there, mom?”

“Congratulations, Jenifer! Dad and I are so proud. And why are you not going?”, she said, “Honey
we’ll fly to Los Angeles and go with you!”

“Thanks, mom, I’m just tired of going to these things and talking about it and not winning”, I said, and in the moment the words left my mouth I realized how much I sounded like a crying child – an everlasting effect my mother had on me -. “And please don’t come, there’s no need to, you know grandma needs you more there”.

My parents had gone back to Brazil when I turned eighteen. My uncle had gotten sick and my grandparents needed someone to look after them since he was now to go to hospitals too often. I stayed behind to go to college in NYU when they left, and to keep on working with acting, and I only finished one semester before being cast in The Mediator and moving to Los Angeles.

“Are you getting tired of all of that word?”, she asked, her voice softer, “You know you can quit whenever you want, right? You can move back here, you know you don’t have to work another day in your life in we manage the money you have now well”.

“Mom”, I sighed.

“Or not, you can stay there”, she said, “But you don’t need to work on this if you don’t want to”.

“Mom”, I started, slowly, remembering it wasn’t her fault she didn’t understand my word as much as she should. “I like what I do, I’m just… Having problems deciding where to take my career now that the show is over”.

“Well, is not over yet, you have some time”.

“Is over for me, we finished shooting”, I said, smiling, at how she thought just because the last episodes hadn’t aired yet then I was probably still filming it.

“Oh, well, at least go to the Award ceremony so we can watch you from here”.

“But…”

“I don’t want to hear a but, Jenny”, she said, her mom-voice getting tougher, “You didn’t come home for the holidays, and we get it, you had to work, but we miss you. I wanna see my daughter wearing a nice fancy dress and smiling as people recognize her for the talent she is even if it has to be on the TV”.

I didn’t talk for a couple ‘seconds, instead I stared at the ground and took the phone as far from my face as my arms could reach, trying to steady my voice before talking again so she wouldn’t know about the single tear running down my cheek.

“Oh, well, at least go to the Award ceremony so we can watch you from here”.

“So, just like that, I decided to go to the Golden Globes two days before the actual ceremony. When I called my manager so she would make sure I could still RSVP, she screamed at the phone how glad she was that she hadn’t done it yet.

“They probably hate us for being so late to do it, but hey, I knew your mom would convince you”, she said.

And then there was the whole part about calling my stylist so she could get me something to wear, and calling Janine, my PR, so she would arrange the interviews at the red carpet. After that, the only other part was getting a date. Thankfully, Taylor was going too, so we just decided to be each other’s date. And so I made a bag, booked a flight and had one last meal with the British Prince
living four floors up—who swore he’d be watching.

So, that’s the thing: I wasn’t exactly thrilled about going to LA for this, so if I wanted to do something as I was there, I’d do it. And if I was going to have to go through interview after interview of people making sure I knew how happy they were that I was having something good to hold on to after the whole David thing, then I was also going to go and talk to the fans who stood there the whole the day waiting for just a glimpse of me.

“You’re getting me in trouble”, Monica mumbled as she followed me to where the fans were waiting, holding my clutch trying to make this as fast as possible.

“You’re the one who made me come”, I said, “Hey guys, how are you?”

“Hi!!!”, they chanted in response, starting to handle me things to sign.

“Oh my God, I love you so much!”, one girl squirted.

“Wow, thank you for saying that!”, I said signing one poster of season one of the show, “God, this is old”, they laughed, “Look at how young and innocent I look!”

“Jenifer, can I have a picture?”

“Sure”, I posed for a selfie as Monica told everyone that if they wanted a picture to get their cameras ready since we didn’t have much time. I went around the line smiling, saying hello and making sure everyone got a little bit of attention.

“Jen, why is the show ending?”, a girl asked.

“Oh, you know, it comes a time when we all have to move on. We thought it would be better to leave on a good note than to give you guys three more seasons of fillers, which we could have done if we wanted to. You deserve better than that, and the books do too”, I said my rehearsed lines and saw her give me a sad little smile with a ‘ok’ in response. The truth was there was a little bit more to that story.

“Hi”, a little girl, who couldn’t be more than 11 smiled at me.

“Hi, you”, I said, noticing she was dressed up in all white, “are you a ghost?”, I whispered, like the character in my show. She nodded shyly. “Well, you have got to be the cutest ghost I’ve ever seen!”.

“Jesse is cuter though”, she said, bringing up one of our characters, and I laughed along with the other fans around us.

“Don’t tell him I said this, but I still think you’re cuter”.

“She said she needed the help of a mediator”, another girl, older, said, standing behind her. “She says she wants a hug from you before moving on to the other side”, she explained, using the terms we used in the show, a sci-fi based on the series of books by Meg Cabot.

“Well, let’s take care of that”, I said, hugging her and signing her copy of the third book of the series. “Is this your favorite?”

“Yes, is when Suze kisses Jesse”, she answered.

“Yes, I know. Is my favorite too!”
“Jenifer, Tyler mentioned on his way in that he thinks you’ll both die in the finale and become mediator-ghosts,” a guy asked, referring to my costar, filming me with his cell, “what do you think?”

“He said that?”, I rolled my eyes jokingly, “I don’t know, man, I kind of just want to know if he passes that damn bio-test he’s been studying to the whole season”, they laughed. “It was nice to see you, guys, have a good night!”

“Congratulations on your nominations!”, a girl screamed before I left.

“Thank you!”

“Now we have to wait for Taylor”, Monica said, “You two have to hit the photographers at the same time”.

“Can I invade her interview?”, I asked seeing Taylor talking to the same reporter I was talking to before. “It’s gonna be fun”.

“No”, Monica said, checking something in her tablet, going on about professionalism and how she’ll lose answer time if I do, and then I stopped listening and decided to check on my phone. I had a few unread whatsapp messages, from a few friends that included Selena and Harry, who wrote:

‘Well I owe you five bucks. That was too easy, I should have known you could pull off saying ‘Spike’, ‘rad’ and ‘vodka’ on a live interview – H’.

‘Only cost me my dignity. I hate people that say ‘rad’, I feel like such a douche. And what the hell even is ‘spike’? Do I wanna know? –J’

‘Just an old nickname. Nathan bets you won’t say at least one sentence in a British accent in the next one! -H’

‘How much does Nathan bets? –J’

“Is that Sel?”, Tay asked, walking towards us after her interview was done.

“No, but she did say we look great”, I smiled. “This is just Harry and the guys from New York”.

“What-“

“Alright we have to run”, Taylor’s PR, interrupted, starting to direct us for the photos.

“Yes”, Monica agreed, “Taylor you go first for the first section of the carpet, take you solo pictures there, Jen will join you, you’ll take the joint pictures, and then you go for the second half of the carpet, and Jen will do her solo pics in the first one, and there you go until the end”.

We did as we were told, taking pictures alone, together normally, together making funny faces and weird poses and then we were finally out.

“What Harry are you talking about?”, Taylor asked once we were done and I reached out for my cellphone again.

“From England”, I said, and she gave me a face. “Not that one. The other one”.

“Do you mean Princ-“
“Yes, ssshhh”, I stopped her, nearly covering her mouth with my hand before remembering she was wearing red lipstick. “But don’t use the ‘P’ word, someone might hear you”.

“You say ‘P’ word like is a cuss word”, she whispered, as Janine started pushing us to our next interview, that we were going to do together.

“Not sure about ‘cuss’, but it’s definitely a ‘curse’”, I said, “You should see the entrance of our building, it’s a mess of paparazzi”.

“I can imagine, and how is it having him in town?”.

“Kinda fun”, I said, “I like having people to have dinner or lunch with almost everyday”.

“I’ll bet you fifty bucks by the time they find out you guys live in the same building everyone will think you’re dating”, she smiled, watching me type, “Even I’ll start to think that soon enough, what are you guys talking about so excitedly?”

“He bet me five bucks that I wouldn’t say the words ‘rad’, ‘Spike’ and ‘vodka’ in the same sentence in an interview”, I explained, “And I did, so I’m currently five bucks richer. But I’m going for another ten, his bodyguard just bet me one more idea”. She was looking at me in a mysterious way after I finished typing.

“I’m honestly not sure how to respond to that”, she said. “Isn’t that how the two of you met, betting something?”

“You could say that”, I answered. But just like the story behind the last season of my show, there was also a bit more to that story.

“We have Jenifer Silva and Taylor Swift coming next, hello girls”, Ryan Seacrest smiled at us, and we stepped up to where he was in front of two cameras with a whole bunch of light around him. We said our hellos and his assistant handed us two microphones.

“You’re both nominated tonight, what fun it must be, congratulations! Where the party at tonight?”, Tay and I giggled.

“We’ll just, you know, go see some friends we don’t really get to see that often” Tay said, “I’m on tour, Jen’s in New York, so whatever happens tonight, we’ll just go out and see some of these friends we haven’t seen in a while, it’s gonna be fun”.

“Jenifer you could walk out with two awards tonight, how does that feel?”

“Hum”, I tough of saying ‘terrifying’, as it would be the most honest answer, “It’s so flattering, you know? I understand everybody says this, but just being put in the same categories as all these amazing people whose work I love so much, it’s just unbelievable”

“Your families aren’t here tonight, so you’re each other’s dates, is that better than having a guy-date?”

“Yeah!”, Tay and I said in unison and giggled right after.

“The best part is that it doesn’t really feel like a party if you have a friend with you, you know?”, Tay started, “Cause these things can get a bit exhaustive, but when we’re together we just make it into a party, it’s great’

“Now, Taylor, you mentioned Jen lives in New York, and we found out this week Prince Harry is
living there now”, he said and Taylor looked at me with a very ironic interested expression, “That’s all everybody can talk about, is all over TMZ… I read you met the royal family last year, have you bump into him there yet? Are you gonna take him out in the city? Tell him what the best clubs are?”. I laughed, hoping with all my heart Harry was watching this and trying not to look at Taylor so I wouldn’t burst out laughing.

“Uhm, yes, I met a couple of them last year - around the time I was filming Game of Thrones, actually – they’re really cool, but you know”, and then I got my best British accent on, “I believe if there’s one person in Manhattan who does not need help to find a nice club, that would be him”. They laughed. “That was embarrassing, sorry”.

“Well I’m sure with that accent you could make him feel at home”, Ryan joked and I hid my face in my hands, giggling, embarrassed at my lame accent. “Thanks for stopping by, girls, good luck tonight!”

“Thank you!”, we said in unison, marching out towards the place where the actual ceremony would take place.

“Smooth”, Taylor commented, “I hope those ten bucks were worth the shame”.

“Shut up”, I said, suppressing a laugh, “I have to make this night count for something. I’m not in a good place with the whole Hollywood thing right now”.

“Trust me, I get it”, she said, and it was my turn to give her a face.”What?”

“Nothing, I just…”, I sighed, “I don’t think you do”, I smiled. “I’m not saying you have it easy. I know how much you struggle with all the word thinking they know more about your love life than you, but at least professionally you’re exactly where anyone could ever want to be in this business”.

“You need to stop being so pessimist about this”, she said, “You could actually win tonight, they nominated you for a reason”.

“I don’t mean this, although I’m not exactly excited about it either”, I said. “Just feels like a snowball effect, you know? I feel like one thing happened right after the other and now I just… Don’t really know where to go”.

“Okay, that’s it”, she said, grabbing my arm and pushing me towards the ladies’ room. “This is about your show ending, isn’t it? Jenifer, you need to stop blaming yourself for that.”

“I could have avoided it. And is not that the show ended, it’s that it did and I realized it’s been six years and I’m still in the exact same place”.

“How could you have avoided it?”, she asked. “It’s not your fault he fell in love with you. You can’t control how someone else feels, Jen.”

As I suppressed the knot on my throat, I remembered. About eight months before that night, I was sitting in my dressing room in Broadway, bowling my eyes out, having just seen the photos of my boyfriend David a few days before hugging and kissing his ex-wife in Hawaii, where he had gone for business. The pictures were said to have been taken the past Wednesday, our last week of performance on Broadway, and the reason I assumed they had waited to publish them was to make sure David and I were still together - which they confirmed we were on the past three days in the after show, when we went for interviews. Tyler, my costar on The Mediator and one of my best friends, was there that night. He had come to watch the last performance, and Monica brought him
backstage after the news broke. He was comforting me when David, who was a handsome, tall, grayish black haired 50 year-old man – who swore he was 45-, walked in to ‘explain himself’, which turned out to be when he assumed he wanted to wait until the show was over to brake-up with me because he thought I would refuse to do the last shows with him, and if I asked the producers to get his understudy to perform in his place “they obviously would have said yes since mine is the main character”. I was so disgusted with the whole thing that I couldn’t even breathe, let alone think of an answer, but happily Tyler was there and he made sure to punch David right in the mouth and proceed to kick him out of my dressing room. The producers did say I did not have to perform with David that night, they could call the understudy, but I was determined to be professional like David hadn’t been. And I was, I put a smile on my face, I became my character, I stepped on the stage and let him look at me, and talk to me, and sing at me, and kiss me and when the time came to slap him, I did it for real instead of pretend, and it felt good for about three seconds. And then I had to sing again. And my voice broke and I couldn’t stop thinking about it. But I did it. I sang all the words and I finished that chapter of my life and had to live through the whole drama of a public brake-up.

Tyler was there, of course. We had been in each other’s life for six years. Around 14 hours a day, six days a week for half of every year. He was one of my best friends, we had the best time on set and out. And on a Saturday on a beach in a California town called Carmel– where we shot the show-, a couple of months later, as we were walking on the sand with our shoes in our hands, with a pink-orangey sunset as background, in the middle of my ramble about the last Rick Riordan’s book’s cliffhanger, he grabbed my wrist, pulled me to him and kissed me. One gentle hand on my neck, slowly, sweet and firm, his other arm around my waist. I remember being shocked for one second at the fact that he was kissing me, not because our characters had to, but because he wanted to. To kiss me, Jenifer, the Brazilian shy, dork, awkward actress, instead of the witty, sarcastic mediator. And then I became shocked for different reasons, like how I could almost feel my stomach on my throat – on a good way -, and how his cologne and the smell of salty water somehow went great together, and how much I enjoyed having his hand on my waist. And I was certainly shocked at how I how I wanted to hold his hair between my fingers and just stay like that forever. Because that was that was the first time since the David-thing had happened that I truly felt more than just okay. I felt good. Like things would get better. When we broke the kiss, we remained embraced for a while, steadying our breaths, eyes closed. And when I decided to ask him if he wanted to take me to his house, he didn’t even let me finish the sentence before saying yes. That wasn’t the problem, really.

The problem happened afterwards, when I pretended not to hear the ‘I’m in love with you’ he whispered as he kissed my neck. The problem happened in the next morning, when I gathered my things and left before he woke up. The problem happened at work when he came to talk to me and I told him that, despite the fact that last night had been amazing, I wasn’t ready for anything serious just yet. The problem happened after we had a hiatus of the show and I went to England to shoot Game of Thrones and met a certain prince who was engaged to be married who became a good friend. The problem definitely happened a few months later, back in Los Angeles, when we started shooting the second part of our sixth season of the show, and I was called for a meeting with our executive producers and directors, where they told me that Tyler was leaving the show. Their idea was that we would kill his character which would be, of course, a big game changer for my character who loved him oh-so-dearly, and who would have to move on from that, which was what they planned to approach on the next season, that apparently had been already bought by the network—they handed me the contract that afternoon. You see, that was a big problem because I’m a bookworm. And I knew just how wrong killing that character would be and how much the fans would hate us. And so I told them if Tyler was leaving, so was I. That was followed, as usual, by offers of payment raise and numerous phone calls from my agent, my PR Janine, mother and Meg Cabot herself. But those conversations would never be more mentally exhaustive than the one I had
with Tyler when I went to ask him why the hell was he leaving?

“Jenifer”, he said, staring at the ground, one hand scratching his curly black locks, the other on his hips, “I’m in love with you”.

“I, uhm-“, I tried to respond, failing miserably. “But…”

“I’ve been in love with you for a couple of years now”, he said, on a soft tone, looking at me now, and I was so shocked in such a different way than how I felt on the beach that I couldn’t make myself look away, even though I felt I should. “And, I mean, I get it, you’re in a bad place right now, and you don’t want a relationship, and I should have known this was a bad idea, because we work together, and you’re my best friend, but… I couldn’t help it. It’s like you didn’t give me any other choice but to fall in love with you. Just by being this amazing girl you are”.

“I don’t”, I sighed, “I don’t- I don’t know how to respond to this”.

“I know”, he smiled, “Which is why I have to stay away from you. It’s just… I just love you a lot. It kind of feels unhealthy, you know? I need to get you out of my system, you know?”, we stared at each other for a few seconds. “Did you really tell them you’re leaving too?”, I nodded, and he sighed, looking out the window, at the rhythm of our crew working, the people we had called family for the last six years. “I didn’t want this to happen. I didn’t want the show to stop, I didn’t want this to end.”

“I know”, I said. “It’s okay though.”, I smiled, “maybe it’s the right time”.

“Maybe… But If the fans knew why this is happening though, they’d freak the crap out”, we laughed.

And so, at the bathroom of the Golden Globes, it was hard not to blame myself for the end of the show, which led to the biggest existential crisis I ever went through in my short almost 23 years.

“It makes sense, though”, I said, reapplying lipstick, “I trusted David. I choose the wrong rebound. I choose to leave the show. And now I don’t know where my career is going and I don’t know what to do to make it go my way, I could perfectly blame myself”. Taylor sighed, closing her eyes. I finished what I was doing and returned my lipstick to my Stella McCartney clutch.

“Oh”, she said. “Let’s go? We should find our seats”.

“No more Taylor Swift wise words of wisdom?”, I asked, suspicious.

“It’s just hard to make you believe if you don’t want to”, she said, turning around and leaving the bathroom.

“Believe what?”, I asked, following her.

“I don’t know, everything? That it’ll be okay. That life goes on. That you’ll find your prince charming when you least expect it and it’ll be magical. That your talent will be enough. That the world will see you someday. That you’ll make all your dreams come truth”, she stopped walking and turned to me, “I believe it. And maybe you’re right, maybe it’s easier for me to talk. Because I’m not you and I’m not going through what you are as you are, but I don’t think it’s easier for me because I made it, whatever that means. I think it’s easier for me because I’ve been there. I’ve lived it. And I know it’s hard to believe it, but I know how it feels. And I know you”, she sighed again, “and I know you’ll be just fine”. We stared at each other for a few seconds.

“Thanks-“, I said, unprepared for how small my voice came out, so I coughed. “Thanks for saying
“You have something in your eye”.

“What?” I asked, looking around for some mirrored wall.

“A tear”, she answered with a little smirk on her face.

“Ugh, shut up”, I rolled my eyes, leading the way to our seats, discreetly swiping away a tear.

“Bitch”, she laughed.

By the time we finally reached the tables, we didn’t have much time to go around saying hi to friends, so we had to be selective. Taylor ran downstairs to say hello to the cast and producers of the movie her song was nominated for. The TV show nominees stayed in the upstairs tables, so I stopped really quick to say hello to the Game of Thrones table, taking a selfie with Emilia Clarke and Kit Harrington –the love of my life- with our fingers crossed for Instagram. It was the one time in my life I allowed myself to demonstrate nerves about an award show.

The Mediator table wasn’t very far from the GoT one, and when I got there I immediately felt at home. I said hello to the producers and their wife and husband, and to the whole cast present.

“This might be the last we’re gonna do this”, Meg Cabot said to me as we hugged.

“In all fairness, we said the same think last year”, I said, making her laugh.

“And we’ll always have the Teen Choice awards later this year”, Tyler’s voice came to me, two seats away. “Get your ass over here, Jen, you’re seated next to me, as usual”.

“Hi you”, I smiled, hugging him, feeling a bit awkward as it had been since everything happened.

“Did you hear they’re opening a best kiss category for TV shows this year? I wonder if we’ll be nominated”.

“Are they really?”, Crissa, another cast mate, asked from beside Tyler. “Totally copying the MTV Movie Awards. If they do though you just know the fans will give it to you”.

“And then you’ll have to kiss when you accept it, it’s the tradition isn’t it?”, Meg asked.

“Well,” I looked at Ty, seeing Taylor from afar, coming to join us, “I’ve had worst things happen to me”. He laughed.

The ceremony started as every award ceremony starts. The host makes a monologue, with jokes mentioning some of the big names present, and then leaves the stage welcoming a couple of famous people to read the nominees and announce the winner of the night’s first category with some lame joke that I’m sure sounded funnier when the team of writers thought of it.

Categories came and went, we applauded and talked and laughed and drank and when the time came for Taylor’s category, she lost to Adele. We applauded either way, it was a good song. The night was going not so bad as I had expected, I was even having a little bit of fun, and when the time came for my category, I was mentally prepared: it started right at the end of one of the breaks, as everybody was getting back to their seats after going around saying hi to friends, I noticed the camera guy standing across the table pointing right at me, which is how I knew my turn was next. When they introduce a category, right before the announcement of the winner, there’s a close up in all of the nominees so you can see their reaction. So when the lights changed, the music started and they announced Zooey Deschanel to the stage to announce, I knew it was my turn.
“So here are the nominees for Best TV Actress on a Supporting Role: Drama”, she said, and we saw the video with the short clips with the nominees. I couldn’t help but notice they had written my name wrong as usual: with two ‘N’s like, the American spelling of Jenifer. I looked around to check where the other ones were sitting so I knew what to do when the result came. It was an art, really, knowing exactly how to react when you lose an award. But I think there are different approaches. In my case, I liked to keep it simple: just smile, applaud and look around so you can see who won. The important part is to not say a word until they get the came away from you, so nobody knows what you really have to say about it. “And the Golden Globe goes to…”, Zooey’s sweet voice ringed through the microphone, as she opened the envelope and prepared to announce the winner.

I ignored Taylor’s eyes on me, and her smile. And when Zooey Deschanel announced the result, I clapped along with our very excited table and the rest of the audience, smiling sympathetically and looking around for the winner as I had planned. I couldn’t find anyone, though. No one was getting up. Everybody was looking at me. As I looked back to my table, I realized Meg and our producers and cast were all standing and smiling like crazy. Taylor had her biggest smile on as she threw her arms around my neck and hugged me.

“I told you!”, she said.

“What the-?”, I reacted, looking at Tyler now.

“You won!”, he said, “Jen, you won!”.
Once Upon a Time There Was a Very Bad Idea

Chapter Summary

Jen becomes an adorable internet sensation. Harry has a terrible idea. They have tea with a real life Princess.

If you were watching from home, here’s how it looked like: Zooey Deschanel was wearing a light pink dress when she opened the envelope and said, with a big smile on her face:

“And the Golden Globe goes to… Jenifer Silva!”

At this point, the image changed to me. I was sitting on my table with Taylor Swift by one side and Tyler Alvin by the other, looking calm and normal when I started clapping with the others, looking around to find the winner and to let the word see my modest smile that meant ‘I-didn’t-win-but-it’s-okay-I’m-happy-for-the-winner’. The problem was, I was so focused in doing the right reaction to losing that I didn’t bother preparing for a win. I didn’t even hear it when my name was said. I only realized something was wrong –or should I say right?- when Taylor hugged me and Tyler started saying I had won. And then, if you were watching the transmission this is what it looked like: I looked around, unexcitedly, and then looked confused around me, and then was hugged by Taylor, and then when I understood what was happening the only word that came out of my mouth was: “What?!”, my mouth was wide open in shock and when I looked back at the screen to make sure Tyler and the others in our table weren’t just messing with me and saw the close up on my surprised face – I kid you not – I started laughing with nerves. My eyes widened. I covered my mouth with my hands and felt tears on my eyes. You would think I had just won an Oscar or a hundred million dollars or a part in a Harry Potter movie. I only noticed it later on, but at this point everyone noticed that I didn’t realize I had actually won, and then of course, everyone started laughing. At me.

And then I was pulled up from my seat by both Taylor and Tyler and they both hugged me at the same time.

“I won”, I whispered to Taylor, trying to stop the tears from falling. “What do I- I don’t really know what to do.”

“Just get over there”, she said, with a big smile in her face, pushing me out, “Quick!”.

I started making my way to the stage, mouthing ‘yes, I should go there, that’s good’ and about three steps later I realized I was taking the wrong direction. If I went that way I was going to have to walk around the whole place so I stopped, looked around – seeing Sofia Vergara’s smiley face laughing at me – and made my way back hearing the laughter intensify.

“That’s the long way”, I explained as I passed for my table again. When I watched the video on youtube later on I realized how much I looked like a lost, over-excited child. As I reached the steps for the first floor of tables, Monica was there. I thought of hugging her but all she did was put a piece of paper in my hands and push me in the direction of the stage. I kept seeing famous’ people’s faces and thinking how I wish I could stop and say hi and ask for a picture but I couldn’t because I was on my way to accepting my Golden Globe Award. I was almost in the stage when

I made my way up the stairs focusing way too much on not tripping. And then I walked to Zooey who was holding the golden award. I started laughing again, my hands covering the biggest smile that’s ever been in my lips, and when I reached Zooey she hugged me like we were old friends.

“Congratulations!” she sounded really honest and excited and all I could do was mouth a ‘thank you’ between my laughter.

I walked to the microphone. That’s when I was able to see the whole audience. All of the tables in the first and second floor with Hollywood’s biggest movie stars and TV stars, talk show hosts, directors, writers and producers. I was sweating so much at this point I was sure I was gonna ruin everything I was wearing – all of the almost 35 thousand dollars in the Elie Saab jumpsuit, Gucci shoes and jewelry. I stopped once I stepped in front of the mike and looked around thinking of what to do next. ‘God this is heavy’, I made the mental note in my mind, looking at the award on my hands. I looked back at the audience and took a deep breath. ‘Who do I thank? Mom, Dad, yes. And the people from the Mediator, but I won for Game of Thrones, I should thank some of them’. This is when, if you were watching, you saw this scared, pale faced girl stand quiet in front of all of those people for seven seconds. Not kidding, I counted on the video later on. Seven whole seconds with my mouth open, looking at the award and then at the audience and then at the award again and never saying a word. When I remembered it was a live show, I let another giggle out of my mouth – this is all levels of embarrassing, what was I doing?! – and then everybody started laughing again.

“I need you to know”, I started, not recognizing my own shaky voice in the microphone, “I have no idea what I’m supposed to do here”. And I started laughing again at the end of that line. And then a strange thing happened. I started crying - again. But not just surprised tears this time, actual crying. “Uhm-“ I started again, trying to keep it together and failing, but determined to make my speech. That’s when I remembered of the paper Janine gave me, which, for my luck, was a list of the people I couldn’t forget to thank. “I have the best assistant in the world, Monica, she gave me this in the way here… I have to thank David Benioff and Weiss, of course”, I remembered who I was talking about as I read and started adding my own words into it, “for trusting me with this character and for believing I could improve my terrible fake English accent, I’m sorry I failed you”, people laughed, “All of the cast of Game of Thrones for welcoming me with open arms and hearts, you’re all surprisingly nice for such an adult show”, more laughter and this time I joined in, noticing I was kind of doing good. “Uhm… Also, I want to dedicate this to George R. R. Martin and all of the writers out there in this business for bringing such amazing stories to our otherwise boring lives”, pause for the applause that erupted from the audience, which I enjoyed to take another look at my cheat paper. “Yes, right, I want to thank Phil Salazar and Margaret Sherman and Meg Cabot and all of our amazing crew and production and writing teams in The Mediator for being such a family to me for the last six years, you guys are the best. And I also wanna thank one of the best men I know and one of my best friends, Tyler Alvin for just being great”, more applause, but I had a feeling my time was almost up so I just started talking before they kicked me out. “I also have to thank my friends Alessa McKenna,” I mentioned one of my only high school friends who I had gone to college with for one semester in New York, and who I still was great friends with, “Taylor Swift and Selena Gomez for always being there for me, and my beautiful family in Brazil who are going to be so mad I told them not to come since I was probably not going to win anyway”, pause for laughter, “I love you guys so much, and I miss you daily, and I’m so thankful for your continuous support and love even when I was wrong. Thank you so much!”, pause for me to keep myself together and not succumb to the tears, “Uhm…”, I heard the music start, which meant they wanted me to wrap up, “And last but definitely not least, to all of the fans, the Game of Thrones ones and The Mediator ones and the Marvel ones and everyone who just
keeps being so nice to me, I’ll never be able to make you understand how much this means. I love you. Thank you so much! And… I guess I’m done. I should- Uhm- go. Good night”, I laughed again, nervously, and turned around to find Zooey and the girl who was supposed to tell us in which direction to leave the stage.

After this, it was all a blur. Zooey hugged me as we were leaving the stage.

“I’m so nervous, I have no idea what I just said”, I told her.

“Oh, you were adorable, don’t worry!”, she said. I wasn’t sure ‘adorable’ is the impression I wanted, but I couldn’t think of it then.

She gave me the envelope with my name on it – Jennifer, with two ‘N’s -, we took pictures backstage. Every single person that crossed my way was saying ‘congratulations’. I stopped in front of a huge white panel to take official pictures with my award and the first 50 poses must have variations of my best shock face. And then my freaking out face. Monica showed up as I was doing this, and this time I hugged her like I wanted to.

“Can you believe it?!”, I squealed in her ear.

“Oh my God”, she said, “Max just called me a minute ago, he was so excited that you said my name during the speech!”. Max was her 13 year-old son.

“Was my speech okay? I feel like I just vomited a bunch of words”.

“It was great”, she laughed, “You were adorable!”.

Again, I wasn’t sure ‘adorable’ is what I was going for, but I’d take it for now. Monica was able to call me down enough to take some normal photos with the award. After that was over, I was taken to the official press conference for the winners, which was just a room full of reporters with a microphone where I was supposed to answer questions about how I felt winning the award and things like that.

I went back to my seat after this, during a break, and received hugs and more applause from the people in my table and everyone from Game of Thrones. The night went by really fast, I lost the other category I was nominated for, and before I could notice, we were out the door heading to some after party. Selena met us there, along with other good friends and we drank and laughed and danced the night away on a fashion I don’t really remember doing in quite a while.

It was much after 3 when I took a cab home to my house in West Hollywood, making the girls promise we would meet again before Tay and I had to live California.

My house in California was a 2 bedrooms, 2,600 square feet property in Cole Crest Drive in West Hollywood. I had bought it about three years ago after being done with sleeping in hotels every time I came to LA from Carmel. It was placed in a hill and the pool was right in front of the most amazing view of almost all of Los Angeles. And when I got home that night - my feet sore, my head dizzy, a golden heavy piece in my hand – I went straight to it.

I put my clutch in the couch by the pool and the award in the coffee table near it and I can’t help the smile in my lips as I just stare at it for a second. I take my shoes off, and then my bracelets, earrings and reach for the zipper on the back of my jumpsuit. I leave it all on the couch – my almost 35 grand in fashion that didn’t exactly belong to me – and, in my underwear, I walk to the pool and dive in head first. It was a little bizarre to think that it was just two days ago I was in snow-covered Manhattan wearing jackets and boots and now, in the middle of winter, I was taking
a 3-AM-swim. ‘California’s really wonderful’, I thought as I reached the side edge of the pool, taking in all of the lights of the city. I thought of calling Harry but it was about 6:30AM in Manhattan and remembering he would have to wake up for work in about two hours I decided to let him sleep.

I remembered how Tyler was today, we were both being a bit awkward around each other since everything had happened, but today we laughed and hugged as we celebrated together as if things were how they used to be. If we hadn’t made the mistake of sleeping together he would be the one I’d be thinking of calling by now, but because things were different, I had another friend in my mind. It was funny to think how quickly Harry had become such a big part of my recovery.

It had happened in September last, in England, where I was for a month shooting Game of Thrones. Well, technically, I was in Scotland. But I met Harry in London. I don’t think I would have met him if it wasn’t for two things: the first being a charity from the States I had been helping since I was sixteen. The Mia Foundation was an organization that helped puppies that were born with birth defects and that otherwise would have been euthanized without even having a chance of recovery and a normal life. I had been working with them since they were really small – just a lady with 10 puppies in her house small -, and now they were expanding for Europe, opening their first office in London. As a new charity there, they had been invited for a fundraising ball being organized by The Prince’s Trust – from Harry’s father. I had told people from their offices that I was in the country for the month and if they needed any help they could count on me, and that’s how I got to the ball. I was representing The Mia Foundation in the United Kingdom. The second thing that had to happen in order for me and Harry to meet was this: The British ambassador from Denmark had suddenly died the day before the ball, meaning the Prince of Wales had been chosen to represent her majesty the Queen in his funeral, and therefore couldn’t attend the ball, having named his youngest son to replace him. That’s how Harry got there, he was representing his father who was busy representing the Queen at a funeral.

The ball was a black tie affair, casino themed and happening at Kensington Palace. I had many days off from shooting, since my character had a small arc and the show had such a big cast her appearance was very splattered. The weekends were some of the days I had off, so that Saturday I took a train from Stirling, in Scotland, to the King’s Cross Station in London. I took a cab – being way too busy to try and learn how to drive on their hand -, and found the purple long dress, Bergdorf shoes and Marchesa clutch my stylist had sent from LA a couple of days before. A few hours later I was gambling donations with other millionaires, high society upper-classers and aristocrats for charity in a room that almost smelled like money and couture and pompous everything.

I was also really mentally tired from an interview that had aired that week in which David –yes, that one- talked about the events in which he had cheated on me –his 29 years younger girlfriend- with his ex-wife and failed to tell me until photos had surfaced on the day of our last performance on Broadway in fear that I would ask the producers to take him off the show. So I had to take a break from all of the smiling and asking for money to go hit the bar at some point, my game chips resting by the side of my champagne flute as I reached my cellphone to finally answer an e-mail from Janine, that claimed we could not let him get away with being the first one to talk about the break-up, when I saw the guy who was standing next to me stand up to leave and take my chips with him.

“Excuse me, sir”, I asked, half-walking, half-running after him, with my most outraged tone, “I believe that’s mine”. He turned to look at me, his orange hair not escaping my perception, and then he stared at the chips on his hand and then back at the counter of the bar where we just were, seeing another little pile of chips.
“Oh”, he said, “Yes, I believe it is”. He placed them in my hand. “I’m so sorry, I took them by mistake”.

“Yeah, I’m sure you did”, I mumbled, walking back to my seat.

“What’s that?”, he asked, following me to recover his actual chips.

“Nothing.”

“I don’t know how I could have mistaken a pile for the other”, he started, “Since mine’s clearly bigger than yours”.

I stared at him for a few seconds, mentally deciding if a response was worth my time. Going for ‘no’, I went back to my cellphone to finish that e-mail.

“Boy trouble?”, he asked and I looked at him again, trying to figure out why this stranger –famous stranger, yes, but still a stranger -, thought I would just talk to him about my life. “The girl who just ran after the party host accusing him of stealing doesn’t seem like someone who would not answer a tease, so it has to be something important that you’re doing in that cellphone. Some guy hasn’t called you yet?”.

“If you must know”, I said, “My forty-five years old ex-boyfriend, whom I was tremendously in love with, recently gave an interview to Larry King basically saying I was nothing but his mid-life crisis.” He was speechless. “You see, I don’t have your usual ‘boy trouble’. Don’t assume that you know me, I’m sure you of all people would know how irritating that is”. He smiled, sighing.

“You’re right”.

“I’m sorry”, I put my phone down, “I know it doesn’t seem like it, but I really didn’t mean to be rude”.

“No, you’re right. I’m sorry. Let me try again”, he put out his hand, “Hello, I’m Harry.”

“Jenifer Silva”, I smiled at the prince, still a little embarrassed but not enough to care.

“So, Ms. Silva,”, he said, “how old are you?”. I stared at him, my head doing an involuntary move to the side. “I mean –I’m sorry I feel like I’m breaking all of the rules on how to talk to a woman in this conversation.” I laughed.

“I’m 22”.

“Right”

“Go ahead, tell me I’m way too young to be this concerned about love”.

“Oh I wouldn’t dream of it”, he said.

“Really?”

“I found my love at 20, who am I to talk?”.

I looked at him again, paying attention this time. He was really tall, had disturbingly blue eyes, and looked comfortable in the tuxedo he was wearing, and I somehow knew he was being honest, which made me feel a lot lighter.

“Well, yours ended pretty well”.

“Yeah, well, I was lucky”. He said. “I’m not saying what you felt wasn’t love, I’m just saying maybe it wasn’t what he felt. But it doesn’t mean you’re never going to feel it again. Maybe better”.

“You know, for a guy you’re not so bad at dating advice”. He chuckled.

“And also maybe you need a rebound”

“Aaaand you’re done”. We laughed. “Back to just being a guy”.

“Ok, forget the rebound. How about just some alcohol?”, he pointed at my champagne, “You don’t heal a heartbreak with that… Excuse me, she’ll have a vodka-soda”, he ordered for me. “Vodka is step number one to numb life’s pains”.

He took a seat by my side, and that’s how it went. A few drinks later, we were talking like childhood friends who had just met for the first time in some bar. If it wasn’t for the expensive drinks and clothes, we could have been.

“Tell me about your girl”.

“She’s blonde”, he said, in a loose, alcoholic way, and I laughed, “No seriously, she is. She is beautiful. And that’s not all”.

“Reaaally?”, I asked, in my own loose, alcoholic way.

“Yep”, he snapped his lips at the ‘p’ sound, “She’s smart. Not just clever-smart, although that too, she’s intelligent-smart. Maybe I should be worried about that”, he stared at the wall, dead-serious for a second or two, and then broke into a laugh again, “Nah, she looooves me”.

“Reeally?”, I said again, resting my chin on my hand, my elbow on the counter, “I kinda hate you”. He chuckled.

“What can I say? I’m adorable”. His shoulders went up for a second, as if he was saying ‘well, do what?’.

“You kind of are”, I admitted, “It’s the accent”.

“And the hair”

“I kind of hate you even more”.

“I have to confess something to you, Ms. Silva”, he sighed.

“Please, do, Mr-”, I tried to remember his last name, realizing he hadn’t mentioned one, “Prince? Mr. Prince?”, he arrowed his eyes, not enjoying the sound of that, and then broke into a laugh. “I don’t know your last name, do you even have one?”.

“Mountbatten-Widsor”, he said, on a solemn tone.

“Yeah, I’m not saying that.”, I said, “I’ll just call you Mr. Prince instead, it’ll definitely be less embarrassing than that mouthful of a last name… BURN”. And we laughed.

Thinking back now, I might have been drunk, I don’t know. The details are a little foggy.

“As I was saying, I need to confess something”.
“Go ahead I’m not stopping you”.

“I didn’t come to talk to you just because you looked pathetic and sad seating here all by yourself”.

“Really?”.

“I want to make an invitation”, he said, “Will you come to polo and cheer for my team so my charity Sentebale will raise some money?”

“Is this how you’re supposed to ask this?”

“Like this, like that, what’s really the difference, Jenifer?” he looked serious as he put his arm around my shoulders, “Life is like the wind, why should we dance around the valley when all we want is to move forwards to the hills anyway?”.

Thinking back now, he might have been drunk, I don’t know.

“I’m not sure I follow that metaphor”, I said, “but it’s disturbingly beautiful”, I whispered, and he nodded. “What were you asking?”

“I started this charity for kids orphaned because of AIDS in Lesotho when I was young”, he said, taking another drink of his whiskey, “So there’s this charity polo match in two weeks where we raise money and awareness about the organization and stuff like that. You know how it goes, kind of like this”. He finished, looking at me.

“And your point is…?”

“You’re famous, you get attention. Kind of what you’re doing here, so… Wanna come?”.

“Hm”, I started, “I’ll tell what we’re going to do… Earlier today you said your pile of chips was bigger than mine”.

“I’m afraid I did”.

“Okay. So you were implying you’re better than me at… Say, poker?”

“Well, my pile was bigger than yours”.

“Okay”, I said, “Wanna bet?”

“What?”

“Are you so confident you’re better than me at poker you’re willing to bet on it? Say… A charity participation? We’re gonna go over there and we’re gonna play poker. If you win, I’ll go to your game.”

“Match”.

“Whatever, but if you lose, then you come to the Mia Foundation and do that there.” He seemed to consider my offer for about two seconds.

“Okay”. Then we gathered our chips, and we played.

Needless to say, I was definitely drunk. Because I’m terrible at poker. I don’t even know how it works. So, obviously, I lost. The thing was, I was not about to go to some polo match and look pretty in a dress surrounded by pompous posh rich people without any kind of fun, so when I woke
up the next day – with a headache and light sickness – I found his number on a napkin in my clutch and called to let him know if he wanted me there, he’d have to let me play. Thinking back now, I might still have been drunk at that point, because I had never played polo in my whole entire life. But thinking ‘I can ride a horse, how hard can it be?’, I went for it. Of course Harry wouldn’t have it, he said there was no way he’d let me play without at least trying to learn beforehand, so we met on a Sunday some place in the country and he taught me some rules of the game. We practiced swinging the stick and trying to hit the ball and not being afraid of falling of the horse (or polo pony, as I learned), and not being afraid of the other horses coming with everything for me.

When it came to it, he put me in the Number 4 position, which is known as the weakest player – a defense position – and the next day there were stories in the news all around with pictures of me wearing white pants, riding a horse with my hair flying around looking great. I didn’t even have to actually touch the ball, but I rode my horse around and the pictures turned out fine and, I mean, no one really knows how to play polo in the US so I figured they’d never know. And I took special pleasure in walking around the place meeting investors of Harry’s charity and making new contacts wearing the white pants and polo boots instead of a dress like all the other women there.

I don’t think I would have actually befriended Harry, though, if it wasn’t for what happened about two weeks after that, right before I went back do the States. It was the official launch of The Mia Foundation’s new offices in London and His Royal Highness Prince Harry of Wales decided to show up for an unofficial visit – that had just as much press coverage as an official one. He lost the damn bet and still gave me his charity participation. I knew then he was a nice guy.

I never got to meet Chelsy Davy since she was away visiting her family that period, but about a month after I left Europe, the news broke that “the engagement between His Royal Highness Prince Harry of Wales and Ms. Chelsy Davy has been canceled by agreement of the couple, who part as friends”. It was all people could talk about. On Christmas, Harry didn’t join his family in the walk to church at Sandringham, which made him feel better at the time, but only made people talk even more. And now he was in Manhattan, running away from paparazzi to try and protect the girl that broke his heart and that I was about 78% sure he was still in love with. When I told him I was coming to LA for the Globes he told me he was going away for the weekend too. A friend of his had a house in the Hamptons (about 93% sure it’s a mansion) he said he could use and, in Harry’s words he “needed a yard, to run in some grass, get a break from the paparazzi”. Poor guy, one week in Manhattan and he needed a break already. I could totally relate.

I breathed in and out one more time in my pool before diving back to the stairs out of it. I could feel the alcohol and all the dancing starting to weigh on me. I grabbed my clothes, jewelry and the award and made my way straight to my bedroom. The house had only one floor, the only stairs leading do the entrance hall from the street, and I was glad I didn’t need to climb anything else before falling asleep. I laid down my belongings at the small sofa at the end of my bed and my wet underwear in the bathroom sink, putting my hair up in a towel before heading to the closet, where I grabbed some new panties and a shirt before going back to bed, where I threw myself, the last thought in my head being that I should really take my make up off.

I stayed in Los Angeles for two days after the Golden Globes, for what I called “the award effect”: the wave of people who suddenly want an interview with you after you get recognized in national television for something you did. On the right next day after the award, when Taylor and Selena came to my house for lunch, they helped me do something to let the fans know how happy I was: we shot a fifteen seconds video for Instagram where the image went from my award to me, doing my craziest dance possible to no music at all. When I posted it, all I wrote was “This is my happy dance! #goldenglobes”. That got me a lot of likes…
The call I got from Harry that day took me to a different part of the internet.

“Congratulations on becoming an internet sensation!”, he said.

“Thank- wait, what?”

“Have you been on the internet at all since last night?”, he asked, “Because there’s pictures of you all around from the moment right before you started your speech, you know, when you looked to the sides, to your award, and then up, and said ‘I have no idea what I’m supposed to be doing here’”.

“So…”

“You’re being photoshopped in all kinds of crazy different photos, they made you a new meme!”

A quick look at 9gag confirmed what he was saying. The original photos were composed of four shots of me looking to my right, left, up and then the saying ‘I have no idea what I’m supposed to be doing here’ written underneath in big caps-locked white letters, but that was quickly being replaced for me, being photoshopped into scenes of different movies with same subtitle. And then there were people who took photos of other people failing to use any kind of equipment properly, or who were caught reading books upside down and things like that and put my photo right under it, with the damn line I said. It was so surreal and bizarre – and frankly, a little creepy - I didn’t wanna keep looking at it, but it was weirdly addicting. After a few hours of it, trying to see it all, I closed my notebook and didn’t go back to the internet until the time came to catch a fly back to New York, when I tweeted a quick goodbye to Los Angeles.

When I opened the door of my Manhattan apartment, I screamed for a combination of two things: First was the fact that the first thing I saw was Alessa running to me with her arms up saying ‘you’re home!’. That wasn’t a surprise, she had a key. The problem was I could barely see her since the apartment was so dark, and it took me not long to realize why: My walls, floor, furnishings, ceiling and windows were all partially covered in paper. And not just any paper, but a whole bunch of copies of the damn picture of me doing my speech with the letters ‘I have no idea what I’m supposed to be doing here’ printed underneath. And then, of course, the variations: me in Mordor, popping out of the Tardis (that one was kind of cool), and things like that.

“Oh. My God.”, I said, slowly walking in, “I am going to murder you”.

“What?”, she asked, looking around, “You think I did this? Hell to the no, sister, it was like this when I got here”.

“What?!”, I said, deciding leaving my bag at the door was easier for now, since when I tried to bring it in with me it started reaping out the paper from the floor. “Oh”, it hit me, “Harry. I am going to murder him”.

“Please, don’t. He’s so hot”, Ally said, “And by the way, now that he’s leaving in the city, you have to introduce me, please, Jenny, I’ve never asked you for anything, please introduce me to him!”.

“Well, there’ll be nothing to introduce you to after I’m done with him”, I said, turning on a light so I could actually see around. “Are you sure this wasn’t you?”

“Do you think I have time for this?”, she asked, reaping some of the paper of the couch so she could seat down. “I’m taking a French literature class this semester, sweetheart, and my professor might be the devil. I almost don’t have time to eat”.

I met Alessa in high school, right after I was done with Disney and my parents said I could only keep acting if I attended a normal high school and got good grades – and even so, they made sure I only got projects I could work with around school breaks. A Brazilian ex-Disney minor star in a private school in California was not exactly in-crowd material, so I spent my whole freshman year taking on jokes about Mickey Mouse, Hannah Montana and ‘being so immature’. Alessa was the nerd that seated right beside me in English class, her long light brown hair was a mess of curls that she never bothered trying to straighten up as a silent act of rebellion against the popular girls who bullied her almost as bad as they did with me.

“I don’t care”, she told me at the end of a class on our first month. A girl who was leaving the class pushed a book out of her table on her way out and I picked it up for her, telling her to just ignore it. “One day I’ll be out of here, leaving in a big city and studying with the brightest minds this country has to offer, and I’ll have problems so much more interesting than this that I’ll miss the days a kid in high school was all I had to worry about”. We’ve been best friends ever since.

When we came back for junior year, a movie I had done with Leonardo DiCaprio had premiered and done quite well, so suddenly, of course, I seemed a lot cooler than before. It’s easy when there’s pictures of you with a bunch of really famous people going around and even an interview in The Ellen Show. Slowly, the popular girls’ tone was nicer, and they seemed intrigued to why was I not eating lunch at their table. And ‘OMG-where-did-I-get-these-cute-sandals’. And they wanted to know how did Leonardo DiCaprio smelled up close. I remember it was around this time I read Harry Potter for the first time and one day, when I was seating on the floor of a hallway with Ally, three of these girls passed by us and invited me to a party on their house on a Saturday. They handed me this invitation and one of them took a long look at Ally and said:

“The invitation’s for one person only, non-extendable. Sorry”.

I heard Dumbledore’s words very clearly in my mind: ‘We must all face the choice between what is right and what is easy’, took a deep breath, put my best smile on my face, and said:

“Sorry, I can’t make it. Leo invited my friend”, I looked at Ally, “and me for a dinner party in his house”.

“Leo?”, one of them asked.

“Yes, you know. DiCaprio”, I said as if it was no big deal, “He has this to-die-for mansion in Calabasas and he told me he’s hired this French Chef to cook for us. Just a little get-together for friends, you know how it goes… But have a good party”.

After they left, looking very disturbed, Alessa turned to me.

“I thought we were going to marathon Doctor Who this Saturday”, she said. I looked at her for a while, her crazy hair falling by her delicate features, realizing this is why I loved her so much. She didn’t ask if we were really going to Leonardo DiCaprio’s house, she was just sad to hear our geek plans might have been canceled.

“They don’t need to know that”, I answered, smiling. And she joined me with a laugh.

By the time we graduated, my parents were heading back to Brazil with my brother – we had moved to California when my father got a job offer when I was 10 – and I decided to stay and go to college in New York with Ally. My parents were so happy I was going to an actual college they almost didn’t mind leaving me behind.

The New York University was amazing, of course, and the whole feeling that came with it was
even better: sharing a dorm room with my best friend, going around in the city, taking whatever classes I wanted, going to parties where people didn’t care about all the famous people I had met and loved Alessa’s hair even more than me. Of course, the whole thing didn’t last more than a semester. I remember reading somewhere that if you could live without acting, you should. And I tried. And I failed. Before that first semester in college was over, I had been offered the main part in a new TV show that would be produced in Los Angeles based on the book series by Meg Cabot, The Mediator.

My parents knew they couldn’t stop me from going, since I was eighteen I could already control the money I had made with my work – not that I ever denied them whatever they needed and more. I knew it made them sad I wasn’t finishing my education, and even sadder I was playing a girl that talked to ghosts and the spiritual word (the whole family is Christian), but I hoped one day they’d understand how sad it made me that they didn’t understand my passion, or respected my decisions.

The worst part was saying goodbye to Ally, though. Not that she was mad that I was going back to the one city she swore to never go back to, but knowing she was okay with it. Knowing she was going to be okay, that she didn’t need me anymore. That she was her own star now, and that maybe this was the part of the story that one day I’d be telling my kids followed by the sentenced ‘and we never spoke after that’. But thankfully, that wasn’t the case.

Because I was always going back to New York for work. And I took her with me for holydays away whenever she was off of school. And we never drifted apart. Not even when I met Taylor on the set of the show, where she came for a special participation, and we became best friends. Not even when I ran into Selena –whom I already knew from my Disney days- on a Teen Choice Awards and reconnected with her. It never happened. I would always go back to New York for a shoot, an interview, a movie premiere, New York Con, fashion week and, of course, Broadway. Alessa was there on opening night. And she was there making sure David didn’t come back after Tyler punched him. And she was definitely there now.

“I mean, don’t get me wrong”, she said, “I’d love to take credit for it, because it’s fucking hilarious”. I sighed, thinking about how was I supposed to take all of that down. “And hey! Congratulations on winning!” She jumped her way to me and gave me a tight hug. “I love that you thanked me on your adorable internet-meme speech, you’re very welcome, by the way”.

“Thank you so much!”, I hugged her back, “And what’s with everyone thinking I’m adorable?”. “Well, I’d love to stay and discuss that with you, but I only came to congratulate you in person, I have to go. I’m gonna meet some friends in a bar and I have to get ready… I don’t suppose you wanna come?”

“Sorry, I’m exhausted”, I admitted. “And I have to go upstairs and kick some royal ass. By the way, how did you know when to come?”. “You tweeted you were leaving LA, I counted the hours of the flight. Oh, Jenifer”, her voice went back to being as if it belonged to an eight year old. “Pretty, pretty, plieeease introduce me to Prince Harry! Not today, though, I’m not looking well enough, but promise you’ll do it one of these days!!!”

“Okay, sure”, I said, “As long as you promise not to fangirl too hard on hi- Actually, never mind. Do it. Annoy the crap out of him for me. I have to think of a way to get him back for this”.

“I’m not gonna annoy him”, she said, sounding outraged and heading to the door already, “how is he supposed to fall in love with me if he’s annoyed?”, she turned and winked at me. “See ya”.
She grabbed her purse and her keys by the door and made her way out. I gave Alessa a pair of keys when I bought the apartment last year before I had to come here for some months to do Broadway again. I knew how college life could be overwhelming, and I told her whenever she needed a break from her roommate, or just to be alone for a while she could always drop by and lock herself in the guest bedroom, and I wouldn’t bother her if she didn’t want me too. Now that I was thinking about it, it had probably been a bad idea to do the same thing with Harry.

I was looking around, trying to decide what to do, when I headed to my bedroom… Just to find out the scene there was exactly the same. I had to give it to the guy, he really put some effort into this. I panicked for a second, wondering if the entire apartment was like that, but a quick step into the closet proved no: it was only the living room and bedroom, which was already too much. I decided I’d never give him the satisfaction of knowing I cleaned all of that up myself so I just decided to call the cleaning lady tomorrow and let her deal with it –making a mental note to tell her to keep all of it so I could drop it off at Harry’s place later on. Deciding it was time to pay the ginger prankster a visit, I grabbed my cellphone, my Golden Globe and made my way to the elevator.

I don’t know exactly when the idea came to me, but as soon as it did, I knew it would be funny, so right after I opened the door to his apartment and made my way up the stairs in the foyer, right before I finished climbing the last steps into the living room, I pressed play in ‘We Are The Champions’ by Queen, right at the time of the chorus, of course. Making my way up the final steps, I raised my award up in the air and pretended to run in slow motion, eyes closed and everything. It would have been pretty epic if it wasn’t for the moment when I opened my eyes and found, not Harry, not Nathan or Clark or Thomas or Eddy (the other bodyguard they hired here in Manhattan to guide the other two around the city), but a young woman staring right at me, wide eyed and looking a mixture of confused and concerned (for my sanity maybe?). I immediately left my slow-Mo pose and quickly paused the song, feeling mortified, and putting the award behind my back as fast as I could.

“Hi”, I said, pretending absolutely nothing out of ordinary had just happened.

“Hello”, she said, smiling now. She had tanned skin, dark thick hair and the most amazing blue eyes I had ever seen –maybe not better than Harry’s, but still pretty amazing. “You must be Jenifer”, she said.

“Uhm-“, my face must have showed my surprise that she knew who I was, but I’m pretty sure it quickly turned to concern. Should I know who she was? “I must be”, we smiled at each other.

“Jen!”, Harry showed up, coming from the kitchen with two cups of tea. “You’re back already, welcome!”

He was being too nice, and the prank came back to me.

“Thank you”, I said, “I got your welcome back gift, my apartment looks beeeaaauuutiful”, I said in an affected tone at the end, looking at him very sarcastically, but not knowing if I should bring it up in case this was a business meeting I had just invaded. He laughed.

“Awn, you got her a welcome back gift?”, the girl asked, in a tone that immediately alerted all my danger senses, “No wonder you were so quick to win her over, you’re a great boyfriend!”.

My eyes widened. I looked at Harry, who was nervously laughing. Harry looked at me.

“I’m sorry. Jen, love, this is Madeleine. Madd, this is Jenifer,”, he pointed at me and Madd, stood up, “my girlfriend”.
I gasped for air, looking between the two of them very quickly. I covered it with a cough, and walked closer to shake Madd’s hand.

“Nice to meet you”, I said, silencing all of the ‘what-the-fuck-is-going-on’ thoughts.

“Harry said so much about you”, Madeleine said, sounding honest and very polite, “all good things, of course.”

“I wish I could say the same”, I said, giving Harry my best ‘I’m-going-to-kill-you’ look.

“Excuse, us, Madd”, Harry said, “Let me go get Jen a cuppa and find her a place to put her Golden Globe that I see she brought for me to see”.

“Oh, yes, congratulations for that”, Madeleine said. “Chris and I were watching the ceremony Sunday night, your speech was adorable”.

That was it, I was done with Madd. I smiled and was about to make my reply when Harry pulled me to the kitchen with him, closing the door behind us.

“I swear I have an explanation for that”, he started. I raised a hand to silence him.

“Don’t worry, I got it”.

“You got it?”

“Yes.”, I said, “But you’re lucky I’m an actress, you know, exhibit A”, I raised the Golden Globe in the air, “Because I could have used a warning and you could have definitely used me not barging in to ‘we are the champions’ in slow-Mo. But I got it, happens to the best of us”.

“I don’t think you got it”.

“Her’s your ex”.

“…No”. I narrowed my eyes.

“No?”.

“No. Why would you even think that?”

“You told her I’m your girlfriend. That’s what we do when exes come back from the dead, we tell them ‘yeah, sure, life’s great, I’m seeing someone’”.

“She’s not my ex-girlfriend, Jen”, he said, going to make me a cappuccino – he knew I hated tea. Not accepted, just knew.

“Oh, a friend of Chelsy’s! And you wanna impress her because you know she’s gonna tell-”.

“No”, he said, “why would I be having tea with a friend of my ex-fiancé?”

“Then who the hell is she?” He sighed.

“You wanna seat down?”

“Not really”, I looked at him in confusion. “Harry, who the hell is she?”

“She is Princess Madeleine of Sweden”, he said, “She’s the third in line to the Swedish throne”.
“…Oh”. I thought about it, crossing my arms in my chest, still holding my award, trying not to look too impressed, “That explains why she’s so pretty. Damn you European aristocrats and your good genes”. Harry gave me a nervous smile, staring at the wall. “That still doesn’t explain the girlfriend thing though”.

“Okay”, he said, “You’re gonna be mad at me”.

“I’m sure I will. But it’ll be worst if the next words that come out of your mouth are still not an explanation”. He took a deep breath.

“I told her you’re my girlfriend”, he paused, his hands doing their own little dance all around, letting me know he was nervous, probably making up the words as he went, “because I had an idea. Well, you gave me the idea, really. So technically it was your idea. And I’ve been thinking about it ever since, wondering if it would be really, uhm- If we could pull it off, and if it was worth the risks. Not you, of course, you can do it I’m sure. You’re an actress, after all. Exhibit A, right?”, he laughed nervously, pointing at the award. I stared at him without moving, dead-cold. “And I decided the best way to find out was to try it out. So, Madd came today because we’re talking about both our charity works, she’s been living here for a while doing this kind of thing so she’s been very helpful, lots of tips, and she even-”

“Harry, I swear to God, if you don’t explain what the hell you’re talking about-“

“We should pretend you’re my girlfriend!”, he spitted out, “That’s what I’m talking about. Like you said the day I moved in, after we were dancing in my bedroom”. He gave some time after this, so I could process every word he was saying in my own sweet little time”.

“You mean when I had drank half a bottle of vodka and said we could go out to lunch and let the paparazzi see us coming back home together and not explain that I live here so they’d think I was coming to your house? That’s like, a week thing. How did you go from that, to having to actually act it out for people we do know?"

“Because, think about it. I moved across the fucking ocean and they’re still talking about her”, he exasperated. “It’ll take more than a misunderstanding to take them off her trail. We need to go big or go home. It’d be good for everybody. You’re huge right now, because of the meme thing. And you’re- what, 24?”

“I turn 23 in two months”.

“You- seriously?”, I narrowed my eyes. “Even better! Think about it. You’re quite younger than me, and you’re an actress, which mean you basically kiss other guys for a living”, I noticed how he made it sound like I was a prostitute, “You live here, which will make everyone wonder if there’s a chance you’d convince me to move here permanently, especially because we both live here and they would just assume we are living together, and you’re not British nor American, which would make them all wonder about the rules of royals marrying foreigners. Don’t be scared, they just always go to the wedding part, my point is”, he paused, taking a deep breath, “we are the perfect wrong couple. The media would be so excited they’d forget all about Chelsy, and all about David! We could just go out for a walk in Central Park holding hands and they’d make us to be the new it couple.”, he paused, “And I don’t like it that I know that term… And you! They would start photoshoping tiaras in your pictures faster than you can spell Golden Globe. I believe that would be attention enough to get you that part you wanted”. He finished his ramble and crossed his arms in his chest, probably realizing how much he had been waving them around.
“Where’s Thomas?”, I asked.

“What?”.

“Hill, you’re aide”, I explained, “The guy who’s job is to let you know when you have a bad idea”.

“It is not a bad idea, I Googled it”

“You have got to be kidding me”.

“Jenifer,” he said, “your friend, Taylor Swift, they say she did this with the One Direction guy. And it went on for months and after that they were bigger than ever”.

“One month and a half”, I said, “and they did nothing, it was a real relationship, this rumor is just a conspiracy theory”.

“Okay, but it is a good theory”, I could not believe his words, “Think about it, just think about it before you make any kind of decision, ok?”

“You’re insane!”, I walked around in the kitchen, running my fingers through my hair, “We could never pull this off, this would never work!”.

“It already did!”, he said, “Madd bought it”

“Yeah”, I laughed, angrily, “and by the way, don’t you think this little conversation should have happened before the tea party over there?”

“Well”, he sighed, “I was just seeing if I could do it, I didn’t plan on you showing up here”.

“Oh yeah? Well, I didn’t plan on my apartment being covered floor to ceiling with my face when I got home but I guess you don’t always get what you want”. I made my way out of the kitchen, finding the Princess of Sweden still on the couch looking at her cellphone. She smiled up at me when she saw me coming back. Her smile was so kind and nice I couldn’t really be mad at her.

“Sorry, I have to go”, I said, trying to smile, “but it was nice meeting you”.

I made my way back to the stairs, hearing Harry say something to her and following me to the door in the foyer.

“Listen”, he said, in a low tone so Madeleine wouldn’t hear us, blocking my way, “Jen, listen to me”

“Harry”, I took a deep breath, calming myself, “this idea… Is cray-cray”.

“Just think about it”, he said, “It could get us both what we want. The opportunity to do our jobs without the shades of mistakes we made in the past. Deep down you know is a good idea and you know I have a point. Just think about it for a while, okay? I won’t do anything else, I’ll give you time. But just… Think about it. We could do it.”

“How long have you been thinking about this?”

“Ever since that night, when I moved in”

“And all the times I came here for lunch or dinner…”, I started, “whenever we spoke on the phone, or when we were texting during the Globes, all this time you had this idea on your head, you were planning the whole thing and instead of talking to me about it, you went around telling people I
was your girlfriend?"

"Is not like that…"

"Harry, come on.", I said, "It’s like you’ve been lying to me this whole time. Is your name even Harry?”, I pushed him out of the way, opening the door and stepping out.

"You do know my name is Henry, right?”, I slammed the door on his face, and made my way back to the elevator, missing the days a kid in high school was all I had to worry about.
They Want a Fairytale? Let's Give them a Fairytale.

There were a lot of things about Harry that drove me mad, but ironically enough, none of them were his bat-shit-crazy idea of pulling a publicity stunt. I was mad at him for telling his Princess friend Madeleine that I was his girlfriend without talking to me first; I was mad at him for texting me non-stop since then asking if I had thought about it already; I was mad at him for never bringing the subject up in person when he kept showing up at my house every night since then with takeout for dinner - his bodyguard making his round and then leaving us alone to watch some TV show.

I was mad at him when I ran into Madeleine at the New York Fashion Week and she told me she didn’t mind the way I abruptly left after we met because Harry had explained that I had “gotten nervous upon realizing he had called me his girlfriend when we still hadn’t figured out the actual status of the ‘relationship’”.

That. Little. Shit.

I was especially mad at him because I had taken Alessa to the fashion week with me – she fangirled all over Madeleine although I’m still not sure how she even knows who that is since she doesn’t really get as much media coverage as Harry – and she overheard Madeleine saying that and has since then not stop bugging me to explain what she meant - my ‘it’s a long story’ doesn’t seems to be a good enough explanation. I should just give her Harry’s number and let him deal with it.

I got a little bit of release from all the tension after Rosa, my cleaning lady, gathered all the paper he had covered my walls with and I managed to sneak into his room one day and just throw it in all over the place. My own especial touch was to put a few in between his clothes in the drawers of his closet, not the ones with his winter clothes that he’s using now, the ones with the fresh summer ones, so he’ll find months from now. His only response was a text: ‘well played, Silva’. I ran into Thomas on the elevator one day who thanked me for it, because apparently they had bet that if I would get him back or not.

But yeah, other than that, I was really mad at him for a whole bunch of things. Yet none of it was the actual idea he had. Because the truth I was not ready to admit was he was right: it was not a bad idea. Stupid? Yes. Bound to end badly if we did it? Definitely. But not bad. It was actually really smart and I had come to learn a thing or two about marketing and media in the ten years I had been in this business, so I knew it made sense. The point was, could it work? And was I desperate enough to say ‘yes’? And if I did, would that make me a bad person?

‘Yes’ was the first answer that popped in my mind as I sat on the restaurant, thinking about all of this, as Richard Artchet ordered his wine. Richard was a six foot tall man on his mid-forties, with big shoulders, a fake Californian tan and a lot of really dark hair –implant- and he was a nice enough man once you got used to him, and I had had six years to do it, because that was how long he had been my manager. He was in town in business and had invited me for a lunch-meeting with my Publicist, Janine, which is how I knew I was in trouble. These two did not like each other much and if Richard was spending one of his few days in the city with her I just knew something was up. And I knew it had to be about me since I was the only link between the two of them.

Janine was looking extremely pissed as she stared at Richard who was looking at the wine menu. It had been about five minutes since the maître had come to get our orders and Richard was known to never rush his love of wine. Me and Janine, who had already ordered other drinks, could really do nothing but wait. Janine was wearing a white blouse underneath a beige blazer and I really respected her guts to wear such clear tones in Manhattan and still look very calm and comfortable in it. A few days earlier on the NYFW when I had worn a white dress I felt extremely self-conscious about it the whole time. I told this to Janine to try and distract her so she wouldn’t start yelling at
Richard in the middle of the restaurant. She chuckled.

“Is that why you’re wearing black today?”, she joked, “Are you detoxing from the panic?”

“Yes, I always feel more comfortable in black”, I admitted, looking at my black pants, black Louboutin boots and black leather jacket that I took out once we got inside the warm restaurant, because was very uncomfortable despite looking amazing. “I can only handle so much of that jacket, though. I wish it wasn’t so tight”

“You clearly can handle a lot of that beanie”, Richard commented after he was finished talking to the waiter. “I’m not an expert, but something tells me it doesn’t go with the place”, it was a lie, he was a very fashionable man. Richard was an expert in many things. A very fashionable man who clearly wanted me to at least try and pretend I had been told we were going to a fancy restaurant.

“It goes with me”, I said, contradicting him to Janine’s amusement. Knowing her, I knew she probably would also like me to take the beanie off, at least as long as we were in there, but I also knew she’d rather make Richard mad, so she wouldn’t say it. So I ignored it. I was wearing Louboutins, I had a Burberry bag with me, and my earrings alone were worth about 18 grand – an old present from David that I was still deciding if it was worth it to smash. As far as I could see, I was fancy enough for that stupid restaurant and my beanie was staying exactly where it was: hiding my messy, oily, unwashed hair. And besides, that was a Jigsaw Chunky beanie and it had cost me 80 dollars, so I believe even my beanie was fancy enough for that place.

“So, mom, dad”, I started after they brought us our drinks, “what have I done this time?”

“What are you talking about?”, Janine asked, “Can’t a management team just want to catch up with a lovely client?”

“It’s about the Thompson movie”, Richard said.

“Artchet!”, Janine sighed, “What happened to subtly bringing the subject up after we had a few drinks?”

“Guys”, I stopped Richard before he could reply, “We’ve known each other for a while, I know you’ve tried to protect me from a lot because I was eighteen when we started doing this, but I guess it’s fair to say I’m not a kid anymore”. They exchanged a look. “22 is not much, I know. But after all the shit we went through last year I think you both owe me some more credit than this”.

“I told her you were tough”, Rich said, and Janine rolled her eyes, “but I’m afraid the news are not the best”.

“So they didn’t like me?”, I asked.

The Thompson movie had been announced a couple of months before and from the moment I read it, I knew I wanted to be on it. It was the story of a family who lost their 4 years-old baby to cancer after a two years battle and it was dramatic, beautifully sad and it brought me to tears as I read the book – it was a real life story, which made it so much worst. And the bonus part was: it had ‘award season’ written all over it and it was about time I upgraded my career to a more serious level, which was something I had been talking to Richard and Janine ever since we announced the show was ending. Easier said than done, actually, since most actors – hell, all actors – take years to pull a career change like that. It involved mostly disassociating my image from immature projects – such as Disney, where I started, and the show, which was known for having a mostly teen fan base – and associating to more mature projects – such as my Bafta nomination at 16, my experience in Broadway, that included a Tony nomination at 17 and the pursuit of an Academy Award
nomination. As I said, it was easier said than done.

“Of course they liked you!”, said Janine.

“Yes, what’s not to like?”, Richard took a sip of his wine.

“But…?”. They exchanged a look in half a second that I didn’t miss.

When Harry had moved in, I remember mentioning it to him that getting an audition was extremely difficult due to the amount of people supervising the movie. The directors controlled the casting process, but the ultimate decision was made alongside with the producers and the people from the studio – who were more interested in how famous the person chosen for the main part was, since she’d bring more media coverage to the film when it was done. That was exactly why Janine had started subtly talking to me about things like nude pics, and an MTV offer to film a mini-documentary about getting over David to attract more media attention which would enlarge my chances at getting cast.

“But they also liked another two actresses that auditioned”, Richard explained, “My sources wouldn’t tell me their names, but apparently one of them has a SAG nomination on their résumé”. I sighed.

“Well, we tried, right?”, I said. “I guess it will really take longer than I thought.”

“Sweetie, we’re not here to just tell you we’re giving up on it”, Janine said.

“Yeah, what are you talking about?”, Rich intervened, “So we have competition, big deal. It’s only a sign the movie is really going to be as good as we thought. Doesn’t mean we’re giving up on it”.

“Okay”, I said, “What do you suggest?”

“We’re enlarging your number of interviews”, Jan started, “The more we get you on the news, the bigger are your chances”. Harry’s voice came to mind: ‘They would start photoshopping tiaras in your pictures faster than you can spell Golden Globe. I believe that would be attention enough to get you that part you wanted’.

“The meme thing was a hit”, Rich said, “We should definitely use that as much as we still can”.

Yes, the meme thing. The stupid picture of me at the Golden Globes looking like a lost puppy with the caption ‘I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT I’M SUPPOSED TO BE DOING HERE’. Yes, that was a hit. And the bajillion other versions with me photoshopped in different scenarios from movies and TV shows were an ever bigger hit. And I couldn’t even get an audition to the damn Thompson movie before it happened. Well, Janine and Richard believe it was because of the meme thing that I got the audition, I like to think it had something to do with the Golden freaking Globe I won. I hadn’t told Harry that I had landed the audition, though. But the fact that I did – totally on my own – was the biggest reason I kept telling myself I did not need to appeal to a publicity stunt to get what I wanted with my career.

“And”, Janine started, looking apprehensive. She paused when the waiter got there with our food, prolonging the feeling that I got that I was still about to hear the really bad news. “Oh, that looks good”, she said about my food after the waiter left.

“What were you saying?”

“That…”, she looked at Richard, “we’ve been talking about Once Upon a Time”. 
“What about it?” I was supposed to fly to Canada soon enough to shoot one episode for the show, playing The Swan Princess, and I was ridiculously excited about it.

“Oh, we were just wondering…” Richard answered, “If that would be a smart move to make at this point… Considering we are trying to change your career from television to movies”.

“I’m not canceling Once Upon a Time”, I said, in a harsh tone, “If that’s what the two of you are expecting”.

“Yes, that’s what I told him”, Janine mumbled, not low enough.

“Oh, you have got to be kidding me”, Richard started, “When did you ever…“ and their arguing took long enough for me to focus on my eating for a little while.

I decided to allow my mind to flow back to Harry’s stupid idea once more. After all, it wasn’t just a matter of saying yes to him. What he proposed was bigger than just going out for lunch together, it involved manipulating a lot of people around the world. I had taken the time to Google him and his family after he talked to me about this. They were a bigger deal than I had thought, especially after his brother got married. And especially after same brother announced the baby they were expecting and especially after the Vegas thing. Definitely after the Vegas thing. But I didn’t read anything about Harry, or any other royal now that I think about it, dating a celebrity before. I mean, other than Grace Kelly – of course. But even that was so long ago. It would involve being seen together, but looking like we didn’t want to be seen together, which could be tricky. It would involve just the right amount of cryptic social media sharing. And maybe a trip or two together. Would we go as far as attending some kind of event together? Stop for pictures in a red carpet? But for how long could we do this for, how far could we go? Who could we tell and to whom would we have to pretend? And what would happen if any of us decided we wanted to date someone for real? I was not about to let Harry be seen with someone else and go through another public betrayal – even if the betrayal wasn’t real, since we wouldn’t actually date, just pretend to for media purposes, the rest of the world would think so and the media coverage on it would be just as insulting as it was the first time around and I did not want to go through that again. I couldn’t.

“…Or have you forgotten about Vegas?!” Richard was saying, their argument going louder and louder.

“Oh, don’t you dare bring fucking Vegas back your-“

“Hey, Jan”, I interrupted.

“…Yes, sweetie?”, her tone went back to normal, and Richard returned to his meal, taking in deep breaths.

“I have a question from a friend”, I started, being very cautious with the way I said it.

“What can I help you with?”, she said.

“Publicity stunts”, I said. “Alessa was asking the other day about the rumors of Taylor’s relationship with Harry Styles being all a lie and I explained it wasn’t. But she asked if it was even possible, you know? To maintain a relationship – not just going out for lunch with somebody, or hug someone in public – an actual, months long relationship just for the publicity”.

“If the person was enough of a bitch-“, Richard said.

“No, I mean, with both people in on it”, I explained, “In agreement, like they both had something to win from it”.
“Well”, Janine seemed to think of it for a while, as she chewed her food, “If both parts were really determined to make it work and if they were smart… Possibly, yes. But, there’d be a lot involved, you know”.

“Such as?”, I asked.

“Such as not getting caught” interrupted Richard, “Get caught pulling a stunt like this and the media would fall so hard on your ass you’d be more made fun of than Justin Bieber”.

“Yes, there’d have to be a very selective number of people who could be told. And I mean very selective” she took a sip of her drink, “Most people couldn’t keep something like that from their mom, for example, and that’s when things get complicated, because mommy always has that one aunt they think they can share things with and then ‘boom’, that’s it. It’s over”.

“Yeah, or friends”, said Richard, “Oh I’m just gonna let this one know the truth”, he mimed a girls voice, “And of course that one always has another one she just has to share the big news with and then that’s it. Game over. Next”.

“Why do you think the girl would be the one to tell someone?”, Janine asked.

“What?”

“You did a girl voice”, Jan said, “Are you implying all women like to gossip and therefore the woman would be the one that’d ruin everything?”

Richard’s answer brought their argument back in full on force, so I just used my time ponder over everything she had just said. And it all made sense. Not the mother part so much, after all, my family was far away and I’m sure I could lie to them as long as it didn’t involve having to look into their eyes. Harry’s mother was dead, but he was dangerously forced to inform his family of everything he did.

A fan stopped by to ask for a picture, interrupting Jan and Rich’s discussion, so, after I took the picture they were quick to go into other subjects as to avoid going back to the confrontation. We talked some more about what was to come in my schedule, such as other interviews about the Golden Globe, a magazine cover I had to shoot, and the press I’d do for Once Upon a Time. We also still had one last round of fan conferences for the show that’d happen during summer around the time of Comic Con, where we’d also have a sort of goodbye panel.

“It feels like the goodbyes are never over”, I commented. “It’s so depressing”.

“The fans need time to cope”, Jan said, matter-of-factly.

“Screw coping”, said Richard, by the time we were paying and getting ready to leave, “the fastest we separate you from that show the fastest we get to start associating you with serious work”.

“Ugh, how can you be so insensitive?”, Jan asked. “You do realize she was in an actual musical about women not being taken seriously, right?”

“It’s my job, you should try it”, he answered. “If she tells me she wants to not be seen as ‘former Disney, teen show star’ Jenifer Silva, I have to tell her how to do so, which is what I’m doing”.

“Okay. I got it”, I stopped them, not wanting to say goodbye in the middle of a fight. “Get on the news. Get the part. Get the award season”.

“That’s my girl”, Rich said, kissing my cheek. “See you next time”.
“Send my best to the kids”, I said. He didn’t bother saying goodbye to Janine, and made his way out of the restaurant.

“So, wanna share a cab?”, Jan asked, “Where are you going now?”

“Sorry, I’ll walk. I could use the thinking”.

“Your choice, your heels”, she smiled, “Call me”. We said goodbye, and parted ways.

And I did my thinking, taking the long way through Central Park, feeling the cold winter wind get inside me through my nose, noticing how the snow had melted and how little was left.

I was making my way through the strawberry fields when Alessa called – again.

“Hollaa”, she said in a high pitched voice, “guess who just finished a paper for extra credit?”

“Nice”, I said, cautious, not buying her sudden forgetfulness over the one topic she had been bothering me about ever since the NYFW. “What was it about?”.

“This British author Doris Lessing”, she said, the word ‘British’ echoing in my mind, “She wrote this book in the fifties that’s always been praised as feminist, but there’s a lot of discussion over it…”

“Aham”, I said, “Cool. Listen, I’m going to Canada soon. Let me know if you have any days off of school so you can come with”.

“Don’t change the subject, Silva”, her tone dropped. “Speaking of British…”

“There you are”, I stopped walking, deciding to wait until the talk was over, realizing it had been a terrible idea to try and walk with the heels I was wearing, “You just won’t let it go”.

“Just tell me the truth”, she said, “You would tell me if there was something happening between you and Prince Harry, right?”

“There’s nothing-“

“Oh, come on!”, she shouted, “Jen, Madeleine said-“

“You still haven’t explained how you’ve heard of her-“

“Do not change the subject!”, I heard as I looked around Central Park, “God, Jenifer, just tell me, what happened between you two?”.

I don’t know exactly what happened in my mind when I said it, I just kept hearing Harry’s vice over and over ‘I just wanted to know if I could do it… I believe it would be enough attention to get you that part you wanted’.

“Fine!”, I took a deep breath, thinking ‘what are you doing? Don’t do this’, “Look, is not a big deal, we’re just sort of… Getting to know each other”. There was silence.

“You’re not serious…”, she said in a playful tone. I thought about it, the actress side of my brain taking over. If it was truth, how would I respond to this? Would I just insist that I was telling the truth?

“Yeah, I’m not”, I said.
“Oh, my God, you’re serious aren’t you?!”, she half-squealed, half-laughed, “Oh, my God”. I smiled at myself, looking down and realizing my boots were almost ruined with snow.

“Look, it’s not a big deal”, I said.

“You gotta be kidding, it’s a huge deal!”, she shouted, “You could be queen of the United Kingdom!”. I laughed really loudly, this old lady looked at me weird.

“My God, I didn’t hear that”.

“No, I mean it”, Ally said, “I mean, sure, the chances are small, there’s almost three people in front of him, but if a couple of them died and someone abdicated, could happen. It’s certainly a bigger chance than anyone else in the world”.

“God, Alessa”

“I’m serious”, we laughed, “Jesus, Jenifer, when did this happen?”

“I, uhm-“, I thought about it, “It’s very recent”.

“But, how?!””, she went on, “Like, did he ask you out? Did he just kiss you out of a sudden? Did you guys get drunk and slept togeth- Oh my, tell me he’s good in bed”. I laughed again, not believing how easy that whole thing was. “Tell me!”

“Look, I’m not having this conversation over the phone, ok?”.

“Fine, I’m coming over”.

“No!”, I said, “I mean, you can come, but I don’t have time for this today. I have stuff to do and I gotta go see Harry…”

“Oh my God, I cannot believe this is happening”, she whispered, excitedly, “Wait until the fandom hears about this!”

“The what?”.

“Nothing”.

“Alessa, you can’t tell anyone about this. No one!”

“I know”, she said, “Fine.”

“You know, you haven’t told me how you knew who Madeleine was…” She said nothing, “Alessa, what fandom were you just talking about?”

“Look”, she started, “Fine. It’s a… Tumblr thing”. ‘Oh, not Tumblr’, I thought. Tumblr was the number one on the list of sites every celebrity should absolutely ignore unless they wanted to lose their minds. “I have this blog. And there’s this… Fandom.”

“I know how Tumblr works”, I said, “The show’s whole fan base is in there”.

“Okay, yes, so…”, she sighed, “There’s the Mediators, and there’s the Royal Fandom”.

“What?”

“The Fandom of people who like royals”.
“You’re not serious”, I said in disbelief.

“Fine, I’m not”, she said and that’s how I knew she was. “But they’re gonna freak the crap out when they find out, you know. ANd the Mediators too! And they’re going to. You’re famous, Harry’s famous. At some point someone’s gotta find out”.

Yes, and that was the whole point. Alessa went on for a while longer, about how crazy some people were, and how they’d comment every single thing that they could get their eyes on, from any bad quality cellphone pictures, to paparazzi pictures, to official pictures. And Harry was right, she mentioned photoshop and tiaras and how they were really severe about royals working and how they loved whenever they had proof that they were also human, and that they loved just like love it’s supposed to be.

“At the end of the day”, Alessa said, “That’s the whole thing. They’re supposed to be real life fairytales, you know?”.

I bid Alessa goodbye, promising myself I could still convince her later on that I was just pranking her, but by the time I reached my building’s elevator, I didn’t press the button to my floor. Instead, I pressed the button to four floors higher: the penthouse.

“Hello, Ms. Silva”, Thomas said upon seeing me. He was seating in the desk near the windows, looking very busy on his computer. Across the room, Nathan and Clark were watching TV.

“Hey, Jen”, said Clark, “Guess which show we’re binge-watching?”, I looked at the television, my own face splattered across it, looking very disturbed and sad – my character did that a lot.

“Oh, guys... Well, at least you have good taste”. They laughed. “Is Harry in his room?”, they nodded and I made my way down the familiar hallway, when I noticed one of the walls were different than the last time I had been there.

It had been filled with these polaroids of what it looked like the move here from the UK, there was a picture of Harry sitting in a bedroom floor – not his one here, though, one I didn’t recognize – with a huge bag opened. There was a couple of him with Nathan and Thomas in the kitchen – all laughing and clearly not cooking very properly. And there was one of me and Harry dancing in his room the day he got here. Harry’s pose was hilarious, the picture had captured him in the middle of a move, and I was in the back swinging. It was a fun picture and I had no idea it even existed. The whole thing was very much just splattered around, no pattern, no identification, no order, just a few pictures on an otherwise clean wall. Nearer Harry’s room’s door, there were four bigger pictures – A4 bigger – it was the meme, my meme. The original one, with scene from the ceremony, the Doctor Who variation, with me photoshopped in a scene, the half up of my body coming out of the Tardis with the letters ‘I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT I’M SUPPOSED TO BE DOING HERE’ written in white at the bottom. There was one of a Harry Potter movie – the third one, I noticed, the scene with Harry, Ron and Hermione –and, in this version, me – hiding behind huge pumpkins near Hagrid’s cabin. There was a couple more variations, but what really caught my eye was the polaroids near it: of Harry and the others in my apartment covering up my living room windows with these things; and my bed; and my couch; and my floor; All looking like they were having the time of their life. Another picture was of Harry’s room, or, of how it looked after I was done with it. Despite the fact that I felt like I was walking to the scene of my life’s movie where things start to go really wrong and everything is a bad idea but the only one who can’t see this is the main character –moi-, I couldn’t help but smile. They were good guys, and Harry was a good guy, and Harry deserved to have peace.

When I walked into his room, he was on the phone with somebody. Talking about invitations and prices and transfers and a couple more terms that told me it was a business call. He signed for me
to seat, though.

“Yeah, I know. I’ll e-mail him in three days or so and check if anything’s changed”, he was saying, “But whatever happens, we’ll still have the gala, I think it’s a good start. Yes, definitely. Alright, listen, I have to go, but I’ll call you back at night to see if you got a response from the governor. Okay, let me know. Bye”. He looked at me, and I gave him my most impressed expression.

“The governor, hun?”, I asked and he smiled.

“Just this gala we’re throwing”, he explained, “To open a photography exposition with pieces from the places where the Halo has done work. To, you know, raise awareness for the cause, and hopefully some money”. I nodded. He left his cellphone on his desk and came to sit down by my side on the bed. I sighed.

“You okay?”, he asked. And I thought about it.

Between the emotional rollercoaster of the Golden Globe Awards, the internet meme thing, knowing I had to be better than two other girls, saying goodbye to a character that had been a huge part of my life for the last six, almost seven years – and everybody I had worked closely with for the same amount of time and that had become such a huge family to me – and not knowing what to do from there -and even if I did know where to go, not knowing if the dear fans that had been around so far would follow me there, not seeing my family since the end of last summer and all of the questions Harry’s idea had put in my mind about principles and lying. Losing Tyler. Losing David – I hated myself for still being bad about it, but I knew I was. Wanting to know why he did the things he did, and not being able to ask. Wanting to know if he meant it all the times he said he loved me. Wanting to know if we actually did have something, and a future, or if it was just me throwing myself in too soon. The pattern of bad relationships I seemed to have... And I missed my dogs, who my parents had taken with them back to Brazil. Between all of it, I wasn’t sure how I felt.

“Did you know my brother is getting married?”, I asked. Harry looked confuse, and I realize my answer didn’t exactly made sense to the question he had asked.

“Uhm, yes, I think I read something about it when I read the report Thomas did on you”, he said, and I remembered his people had had to get information about me before he moved here. I stood up and walked to his window – his floor to ceiling windows with its breath-taking view of the city. “Do you like her?”, he asked after I remained silent, and then again, on an uncertain tone: “Him?”

“Her. Yes, I love her”, I said, “I always wanted a sister.”

“Nice”, he said, “That’s good. Me too, you know. It’s good getting one, after so long having to take the same annoying older brother, is good having a sister all of a sudden. It’s, uhm, different. Like a new toy.” We laughed. It was strangely exactly how I felt about it.

“Does Kate Middleton make you feel like your brother is an idiot with how amazing she is?”, I asked, “Cause my brother’s fiancé makes me feel that way”. He chuckled.

“Oh, boy, how do I start?”, he sighed, still with a smiled on his lips, “Yes, I feel like my brother is an idiot, but then again that’s very easy”, I chuckled. “And it’s just Kate now”, he corrected, “Not Middleton.”

“Right”.

“Well, technically, it’s Her Royal Highness Catherine, The Duchess of Cambridge, but let’s just go
with Kate”. I smiled.

“Right. There’s a problem I won’t have with my sister. She’ll just be Livia Silva. Well, Livia Toledo Silva, I guess she’s keeping her name as well.”

“When’s the wedding?”, he asked.

“A few months”. He nodded. “I’m a bridesmaid”, he smiled, “Well, in Brazil we just call it ‘wedding godparents’, did you know that? The function is the same, though”. He nodded again.

“Jen”, he said, sounding cautious, “are you okay?”. I nodded, negatively, fighting a sudden urge to cry.

“I feel like I keep losing people” I said, staring at the many little square windows from the buildings nearby. “...And things. And I don’t know how to stop it... And I- I kind of feel like I can barely remember the person I was a year ago. Or five years ago. Or seven. But I remember it felt easier... And right. And I just wish I could be that girl again, but I don’t know how. And I can’t, because things are so different and I know I have to be different now, but I don’t want to”. I looked away from the window, back at him, “Does this make any sense?”, I chuckled, my voice breaking.

He had his elbows on his knees, and he was looking at the carpet, very serious, so I knew somehow, he got it. He got me. “Why do you want to do this with me, Harry?” I asked, “Like, why specifically me?”

“You mean, the fake-dating thing?”, I nodded and he took a few seconds before answering, “Well,” he said, “Most importantly, you’re my friend and I trust you. And I know I don’t have to worry about you having a meltdown with the paparazzi following you around, because you already have to deal with it, anyway. And you chose it yourself, you know? This life... It must be really reassuring knowing you didn’t throw someone into this for once”, he seemed to be talking out of personal experience, and I paid special attention to the words ‘must be’, because he clearly didn’t know the feeling. Because every time he ever dated someone that person’s life was changed, if not forever, for a long, long time. It probably felt like a curse. “I know you have something to gain from it too, which is good, because I know I won’t just be using you... And I really do think you deserve to have everything you want, you know?”, he looked me right in the eyes. “But mostly you’re really hot so I guess I’ll just get some major street cred if people thought we were dating”. I laughed, walking back and seating next to him in the bed again. He made a funny voice. "Did you hear? Prince Harry is dating that hot actress!", we laughed.

“You’re not my type, you know?”, his head snapped in my direction, he looked very offended.

“Excuse me? How dare you?” I laughed again.

“I’m sorry, I just- I mean, sure, you’re tall”, I said, “And you have broad shoulders. And your eyes are pretty great, but other than that? I mean... I just don’t get the whole hype about you... Sorry.”

“I’m about five years older than you”, he said, “I thought you had a thing for older guys”, I chuckled.

“You’re six years older and, please, that’s barely any age difference”.

“I mean, some people would disagree-“, he was mumbling when I interrupted him.

“Let’s do it”, I said.

“What?”, I looked at him.
“It’ll take time for me to feel like this is okay, to not feel guilty about wanting bigger things and doing this to get it. It will take time, but deep down I know that I deserve this. And I know that a lot of people deserve it, and I know this business is ridiculous and I know that I need to do something with my life in order not to lose my mind”. He was still staring at me, and it occurred to me maybe he really just didn’t hear what I had said. “I wanna do it, I wanna pretend I’m you girlfriend. I think we should do it”.

“Oh”. To say he was surprised would be a minor understatement. “Oh, I was about to apologize for even suggesting it. Are you sure you’re in a good place right now to make this decision?”

“Yes”, I said, “I’m afraid it doesn’t get much better than this, at least not without some time, and you won’t be staying in Manhattan forever, so we need to get started”.

“Oh”, he sounded a bit more excited, “Wow, are we really doing this?”

“No turning back now, Mr. Prince. Not now that I’ve said yes”.

“Wouldn’t dream of it”, he smiled, “Alright, so what? Should we go out? We could go out right now”.

“Calm your tits, your grace”, I said, not remembering the tittle he had just used for his sister-in-law, and just using whatever came to mind. “It’s a process”.

“Wait, your grace?”, he asked, “What century are you from?”

“It’s how they call royalty in Game Of Thrones.”, I explained.

“That’s just- that’s not- that’s really bad”, he stuttered. “If you’re going to date a prince you should know at least this much, my tittle is ‘Your Royal Highness’.”, he explained, “But you can call me sir after the first time”, he winked at me.

“I’m serious, Harry”, I tried not to laugh at the thought of anyone calling him ‘sir’, even though now that I think about it, that’s how they were treating him at the gala where we met, “If we are going to do this, we’re gonna need to take it seriously. The repercussion if anyone found out would be disastrous!”

“Trust me, I’m aware”, he said. The whole thing did not feel like we were plotting to troll the entire world at all. In fact, I just felt like an amateur. Like we were joking around and it wasn’t gonna go anywhere, so I tried to make things serious.

“If we’re gonna do it, we’re gonna need rules. We need to know how far we’re both willing to go”

“Oh”, he said and then stayed quiet, waiting for me to go on. “Alright, ma-am”, he said, “Which are the rules…?”.

“Give me some time, I’m thinking” I tried to remember everything Janine had said earlier, but most importantly, it was Alessa that made do this the way I ended up doing it: I remembered how she mentioned Tumblr, and a whole fandom of people who just wanted a real life royal fairytale and I decided that’s what we needed. I went into acting mode and pretended I was Ally, logging into my blog and finding out His Royal Highness over there was dating some American actress. But how would they know? People would need pictures.

“Am I gonna need paper and pen to remember it all?”
“First of all”, I started, “The rules. Nobody can know. And I mean nobody, Harry. Not Thomas, nor the guys, not your best friend from back home, and definitely not your family”.

“Oh, so you’re telling me you’re not gonna tell Selena and Taylor?”, he said in disbelief.

“Damn right I’m not”, I said, and he gave me a face, “What? I’m serious. I can lie to them. I’m an actress”.

“What about your management team? They know everything about your life”.

“Nobody can know”, I said again, slowly, “This is serious, this is where mistakes are made. When too much people know, there’s always a bigger risk of liability”.

“I’m not gonna tell anyone.”, he said, “But I doubt Taylor and Selena are not gonna figure it out”.

“Let me deal with that”, I got up and started walking up and down the room, “Second rule, the less people that know we’re dating, the better. So, this is gonna be the status of the relationship: we’re getting to know each other. It’s casual and fun, so there’s no meeting family, no holiday trip with friends and stuff like that. We can fake it to the paparazzi because it doesn’t take much, just being seen, but the least we have to pretend in person to whomever it is, the better.”

“Agreed”, he said, “But you know we’ll have to pretend for the guys, right?”

Yes, I knew. It was the very first problem, after all. Because, we couldn’t just make ourselves be seen and have Thomas and the boys go ‘you guys are dating? When did that happen?’ So we needed them to know first. But how?

“Oh, I think I got it”, I said, “After I’m gone, you’re gonna go over there and you’ll tell them we’re going out on a date.”

“A date?” he asked, “Where would people like us go on a date without being seen?”

“Dinner in my place, I’m cooking”.

“Well,” he thought about it, “Could work. You know, there is a bet going on…”

“That does not surprise me at all”, I sighed, “What’s with you British people and all the betting?” he laughed.

“They think I don’t know, but I overheard them one day”, he explained, “I don’t think they believe a guy and a girl can be just friends”.

“Well, I never thought I’d say this, but it’s a good thing they don’t”.

“Okay, but what about the rest? What about the actual victims, the paparazzi?”.

“We need to start slowly on that, give very subtle hints… Hints that no one will understand at first, but afterwards, when we let them know, they’ll look back and connect the dots…”, Harry was looking at me with a very vague expression, “Of course I’m talking about me… You, without an Instagram account, is completely useless”.  

“Well, thank you”.

“Now come here, lay on the bed”, I proceeded to take a picture of the two of us, but showing only our legs – mine between his, with the Manhattan view on the back. “Now, which will be our song?”.
“Our song?”, he asked, “Why do we need one?”

“Our song is what people will write over our faces when they make montages with the paparazzi pictures they’ll get”, I explained, remembering that’s what the fans did with my character on the show. “I’ll put a lyric in the caption of the photo, and they’ll get it at some point… Think about it, it needs to be a good, romantic song”.

“Well, technically our song is You Need Me I Don’t Need You, by Ed Sheeran”.

“Oh, that’s right”, I smiled, “That’s the first one we danced to… But that won’t work.”

We thought about it for a while, trying one million different approaches, from enlisting our favorite songs, to randomly picking something on our cellphones. We either hated the artist the other picked or hated the song. Until at some point, I turned on the music at random and Harry started jumping to the next one over and over.

“No… No… Definitely not… Why do you even have this? Nope- Oh, look, Ed Sheeran”, he said. “We should use one of his songs since we can’t use our actual song”.

We let the song play, as I edited the picture for Instagram, four legs intertwined in an unmade bed with Manhattan on the back and some filter covering any details that could lead them to Harry. The hipsters were gonna love it. The song got to the line ‘I was told to put my job in front of you, but it won’t hold me like you do’, and something just… Clicked.

“I like it”, I said, “We should use it”.

Harry didn’t have much of an opinion on it, but he didn’t hate it, so we just went with it. I prepared the photo, and wrote the caption – the chosen line plus a hashtag-Manhattan– and looked at Harry.

“Any ideas for hashtags?”, I asked, he thought about it.


“Hashtag-where’s-my-tiara-at, hashtag-my-boo-is-better-than-yours,” he cracked up, “hashtag-I’m-gonna-be-queen”.

We went on for a while, finally deciding with just hashtag Manhattan. The moment I pressed ‘post’, it was like we could hear it: our lives changing forever.
Planning a publicity stunt wasn’t easy, it required extreme attention to details, a back-up plan in case everything back fired, and as few people on it as possible, which is why Harry and I decided we would be the only ones to know about it. There were many ways this could have gone. Harry’s favorite was to just go out holding hands and let the paps see us, but that was stupid, which I made sure to let him know. We could still just show up one day at a red carpet together and pose for pictures, or we could allow for a very subtle rumor to start and slowly give it fuel, or, my favorite, we could make the paparazzi think they’ve caught us trying really hard to hide our ‘relationship’. That also had many ways in which it could happen: we could go to some club and make out and let people take pictures, or we could be caught somewhere else. I was trying to not have to make out with Harry just for the publicity – and for the sake of my principles - even though we had talked about it being inevitable at some point or another, but either way I was frenetically trying to think of some other way.

Meanwhile, back at Harry’s penthouse, a couple of hours after I left, Harry changed into some more fancy clothes and made his way to his living room, where his two bodyguards – or, as he kept correcting me, protection officers – were watching television with Thomas, his assistant aide. This part of the plan was called ‘Backstory’, creating a consistent past for our fake relationship – just like I did with the Instagram picture. Something people could look back on and think ‘oh, that’s right, they were together even then, we just didn’t know’. Now, I wasn’t there, so I can’t know for sure how accurate this is, but according to Harry, here’s how it happened:

“Are we going out?”, asked Clark, bringing everyone’s attention to Harry.

“I am”, he said, “I’m going out to Jen’s”.

They stayed quiet after this, looking at each other, until Nathan spoke up – Nate was working with Harry for longer than the other two.

“Looking fancy just to go four floors down, aren’t you?”, he asked, “And is that… Cologne?”

“I can clean up nice”, Harry joked, “When I have a date”, and made his way to the kitchen, hoping the boys would bite the bait.

“Wait, date with who?” asked Thomas, and Harry heard as the three of them followed him.

“With Jen”, he said, as if it wasn’t a big deal, “She’s cooking”. This was followed by another silence, shorter this time, and, apparently, Harry dropped a glass when Nathan and Clark started
shouting at each other at the same time.

“No! No! We did not mean- Those were not the ter-

“I knew it! I told you, don’t give me this crap, that’s exactly what we talked about!”

“Hey, hey, hey, what is going on?”, Harry asked, as if he didn’t already know.

“They made a bet you two would be dating within one or two months after the move”, Thomas explained, picking up a shovel and a broomstick to clean up the mess Harry had made.

“Yes, and the first month mark is gone, so he already lost.”, said Clark, “But the two months mark hasn’t, and you’re going on a date, which means I won!”

“They’re going on one date”, said Nathan, ”One. It could not be serious, it could not happen at all. Who’s to say is really a date? They have dinner all the time, why is this time different?”

“Oh, please”, Clark objected, “He’s wearing cologne! And he’s calling it a date.”

“What if he thinks it’s a date and she doesn’t? Could happen. Has happened to me.”

“Is it serious, though?”, asked Thomas, ”You two dating?”

“They’re not dating, guys!”, Nathan complained, “One date does not justify the term ‘dating’”

“After that”, Harry said, half an hour later, seating at the ground of my living room, telling the story of how the boys took it to know we were ‘dating’, “They started this discussion of what exactly means to be ‘dating’ and I slipped out”. I laughed.

“Awesome,” I said, smiling, “So they bought it?”

“I believe so, yes”.

“Great”, I got up, going to my bedroom and bringing back to the living room my cork notice board, very recently completely rearranged to showcase our plans.

“Wait”, Harry said, upon realizing what that was, “You only left my house like, two hours ago, how did you have time to change and do all that?”

“I might be a bit OCD”, I admitted, looking at the very organized mess in the board: there were screen shots of internet pages, twitter, forums and news sites, even some of Tumblr, and pictures of Canada and beach resorts, and many paparazzi pictures of some random celebrity couples – I picked even pictures of Harry’s brother, William, back when he was only dating his current wife. ”I call this The Board of Doom”

“I have no idea how any of these things relate to each other… Or to us, for that matter”, Harry observed, “No, wait, I see William and Kate. But that’s it”.

“Well, see, that’s the difference between a great idea and a great plan”, I said, “Usually I’d go to Janine or Monica for this, or even Richard, but since it’s only us, we’re gonna have to improvise. I was serious when I said if we’re gonna do this, we’re gonna do it right. I’m not gonna have us being the laughingstock of the world’s media because I didn’t plan things well enough”.

“Fine, than explain this board of doom to me.”

“Well, now that your team knows we’re getting together, they won’t find it strange when we
initiate the next part of the plan, which is being caught”.

“You mean by the paparazzi?”

“Yes”, I said, “Now, this is very important. It’s sort of the first impression we’ll be causing as a couple, you know? The first pictures anyone gets will be all over the news the right next day, so we need them to be good pictures, but we can’t just go outside and do it, because…?”, I gave him a chance of an answer.

“I have no idea, as far as I’m concerned we could just go out right now”. I sighed.

“Harry”, I said, “Think of the paparazzi, of the media, as this really perverted, really sexist frat boy. He’s a player, and he wants to get the girl, every girl, but he wants to chase them. If they’re too easy, he’ll still bang them, but it’ll be over in a minute, because he’ll be bored. Now, if the girl plays hard to get, it makes things interesting and it keeps him around for longer.”

He looked at me with a very intrigued expression on his face.

“Aham?”, he said, uncertain, for me to go on.

“The girls on this metaphor are us. We’re the targets”, I explained, “If we’re seen around easily, they’ll snap the pics and they’ll sell them either way. But, if the pics are hard to get, and if they can see we’ve been trying really hard to hide this from them, then the pictures will be worth more, and there’ll be more paparazzi at our doors, which will mean more publicity for us, which is what we want. Right?”

“Right. God, did you ever think you’d one day be wanting more paparazzi after you?”, he asked.

“Don’t even open that door. If I start thinking about it too much I’ll call my mom crying saying Hollywood broke me”, he laughed, “And I don’t think she can handle any more of that.”

“Wait, what?”, he asked, and I went on.

“So basically the trick here is to let the paparazzi catch us, but looking like we were trying not to be caught. Now, I have-“

“Jen”, he stopped me, “When did you call your mother crying saying Hollywood broke you?”. I sighed.

“Last year”, I said, trying to explain it really quick realizing he just wouldn’t let it go, “After the whole thing with David... It wasn’t just finishing the last performance, you know? There were interviews and stuff, all in the same night. And then I had to go to his place and pick up all of my stuff and bring it back here, all with, like, thirty paparazzi following my every move... It all just... Broke my heart. After that, I just kind of stayed here for days. Drinking Vodka, eating pizza, and watching TV. So when I realized I had to do something, I called my mom and told her that. She told me to come home, which I did. I think I stayed there for almost two weeks seriously considering retiring before I realized I just... Wanted to work. So I came back. Come to think about it, that was probably the closest thing I’ve had of a vacation for the last, I don’t know, ten years”.

“Wait, what?!!”, he sounded even more astonished than before, “What do you mean with that?”.

“Oh, you know, I just never really had any vacations after I started acting. And I started acting when I was twelve. After that it was either working or studying really hard to make up for lost time working”, I said, “I’ve had days off, two or three, tops, like Christmas and New Year’s, and then it
was back to work.”

“That’s absurd. How do you do it? This can’t be healthy”.

“I got used to it. I had to, there’s always a photo-shoot, an interview, one last scene that we need to film again… There are days that are less busy and I can just sleep in, or go to bed early, or not do much, but there's always something”, I shrugged, “And there’s always caffeine addiction. Now moving on!”

“That’s-“, he still seemed concerned, but I decided to just keep talking and hope he’d let it go.

“So, that being said, I think we should be seen in a romantic getaway together. Now, a resort on the beach is the usual choice, so I Googled a few, which are these pictures you see here. There’s some in Africa, because I know you love it there, however… Are you listening?”

“Yes”, he shook his head, “Africa. Beach resort. Got it.”

“Yes, however,“, I said, “pictures in bikinis are tricky, you never know how they’ll turn up, and, most importantly, I don’t have time to fly to Africa anytime soon. This weekend I have to go to California again for the Oscars, I have to show my face around, Janine’s orders, and then next week I fly back here because I closed some brand deals and I have to go to some more fashion week events, then I fly to California again because there’s Paley Fest coming up, and from there I fly straight to Canada, so this is my idea-“

“Wait, hold on! What’s Paley Fest?”, he asked.

“It’s this… Event, where TV shows’ casts and creative teams make panels about the upcoming episodes and stuff like that, they answer fan questions and all. It’s like Comic Con, but more… Business-like, you know?”, he nodded, “So, my idea is this. Right after Paley Fest I’ll fly straight to Canada to shoot Once Upon a Time, I’m playing the Swan Princess, perfect timing, right?”, I made the side note, “I’ll be shooting that until that week’s Friday, so I think you should fly to Canada then, and we’ll meet somewhere chilly and everyone will think you flew to meet me there for a romantic weekend because you missed me”. I finished, realizing how fast I had been speaking, noticing way too late the ramble I usually started when I was in business mode. Harry crossed his arms in his chest, took a deep breath looking at the ceiling. He took so long to start and speak again, I just went on. “So I Googled some places and I think we could meet-“

“No.”

I looked back at him, “No?”

“No”. I stared at him, waiting for an elaboration that never came.

“No what?”. 

“No, just no”, he said, making no sense to me, “You can’t just spend the ten most difficult years of a person’s development, with the whole hormones crap and boyfriends and figuring out who you are, working or studying nonstop. That’s unhealthy. That’s why you’re such a…”, he signed at me with his hands.

“I’m such a what?”

“Such a neurotic, anxious, control-obsessive, OCD-y, vodka-caffeine addicted, workaholic.”

“What?! That’s!- I’m not- I just told you, I had like, three weeks off last year when I went to
“Yes, after David”, he contested, “Those three weeks were probably more mentally exhaustive than your actual work”.

“Well, that’s bullshit. A break is a break. And as I said, it is not like I have a choice”.

“You do now”, he stood up, walking to the board of doom, “Right after you’re done in Canada you’re gonna catch a flight and you’re gonna meet me in one of these beach resorts. I know some nice ones in Africa”.

“I can’t-“

“I don’t wanna hear it”, he said, “If we have to be caught in a break, we’re taking a break, an actual one, not a fake one. Two days on a beach sun bathing away from your cellphone won’t kill you.”.

“But I-“

“I’m serious, Jen” he interrupted, “I know what happens next, ok? The reporters following you up and down, shoving cameras in your face, the websites and tabloids writing stories and making up lies… I know how this goes, and right after that happens, you’ll turn into- Well, in what you are right now. So before we dive in head first into all of this, you’re gonna take a break and rest and breath in peace and you’re going to relax if it’s the last thing I do. So let’s think about it” He pointed at my board, “this one has this great hiking trek we could go to, but this one-“

“Okay, fine, I’ll do it”, I surrendered. A break actually sounded quite good, not just for me, I realized, but also for him. We could really use some time to plan things better. However, I knew the desperation on my mind wouldn’t leave. The desperation of knowing I should be doing something else with my time. “But I can’t let you plan it, you’re terrible at it”. I made my way back to the sofa and picked up my notebook.

“What do you mean? I didn’t even do anything”

“Exactly.” I took a deep breath, “The paparazzi that are used to following you know you like those resorts, so as soon as they follow you to the airport, that’s one of the places they’ll start looking. We can go to Africa, because it’ll make sense. If we’re dating you’d want to take me there. But we need a new place, because you’d also want privacy. So we need somewhere in Africa people wouldn’t think of looking”. He was staring at me with a blank expression. “There’s a website I like to go to whenever I have a couple hours to kill, it’s called GeoGuessr.com”.

“And what does it do?”, he asked.

“It gives you the Google street view image of a random street from anywhere in the world, and a little map on the side, and you have to guess on the map where you are. You can walk up and down the street and try to find a plank so you can see the language and stuff like that. Let’s just jump from place to place until we find a pretty and deserted one in Africa”.

“You know, you’re actually so good at this, this just might be the first time I succeed at keeping a secret relationship with someone”, he joked, and I laughed.

“Yeah, just what we want, a totally secret relationship”

This part of the plan it’s called ‘destiny’. Because the first place GeoGuessr took us to was a beautiful pavement street in a hill, with nice houses around us and a beach far down. When we took the image until there, we found a little hotel called ‘Morgan Bay Hotel’, which, with a little help
from Google, told us that was South Africa.

“Well, that’s pretty much it then”, Harry said, “I guess we’re going to the Morgan Bay Hotel”.

“Great, I’ll book my flight in about a week, and uh- How exactly does your traveling works?”

“Oh, I have to take the guys”, he said, “At least Nate and Clark, and we're hiring an extra PO from here, so he'll probably come too. Thomas only if he wants to come, but he’s the one who books my trips for me”.

“Well, than wait about a week to tell him about it”, I said, “We’ll keep doing the dinners and lunch dates thing, so it won’t seem much strange when we want to go away together”.

“Oh, okay”, he lied down on the couch, “Now, I’m starving. What did you cook?”

“Cook?”, I asked, “I haven’t cooked since I was 18”.

“I thought you said you were cooking tonight”.

“No, I told you to tell the guys I was gonna cook”, I grabbed my cellphone, “We are going to order take out, as any normal New Yorker would”

After I was done ordering food from my delivery app, I took the board of doom back to my room, keeping it out of sight.

“Oh, by the way”, I said, “The guest room is ready for you”.

“For what?”

“You’re going to sleep here”, I explained, “We’re on a date, right?”

“Oh, and you think I’m sleeping with you on the first date?”, he joked, “What kind of guy do you think I am, Ms. Silva?”

We ate and watched TV till late – Harry didn’t understand how I hadn’t caught up with Doctor Who even though I had started watching it in High School, but the truth was I barely had any time, so I was still on season 4 – and before we left for our rooms, he sent Thomas a text to let him know he would be sleeping here.

“He won’t respond”, Harry said, “He’ll wait until I’m back home in the morning to tease me about it”.

It was about three weeks later that I took a flight from Canada to Cape Town, and from there another one to the East London Airport. There, I rented a car and drove very slowly the 76km to Morgan Bay following the very specific orientations of the GPS according to the coordinates found on the hotel’s website. I drove slowly because South Africa drives on the left side of the road, something I hadn’t thought about before that very day.

I had never been in South Africa before, and the first impression was beautiful: The bluest sky, the green hills, if I ignored the fact that I was driving in the wrong side of the road it could actually feel like I was driving home in Brazil. Even the weather helped. It was 23°C when I landed; 73°F, sun shining, little wind, the summer was going away already, but it was still a warm beautiful day, enough to pretend we were there running away from the freezing Manhattan winter.
To say Monica, my assistant, was surprised when I asked her to book me a flight to South Africa for the Friday afternoon I was done shooting Once Upon a Time in Canada, was a big understatement.

“South Africa? What for?”, she asked.

“I’m going there for the weekend, as a holyday, you know... a break”.

“A break?”, she sounded worried, “You don’t take breaks”.

“I know, right?”, I pondered, “Anyway, I’m going with some friends. Be back Monday.”

I knew I had to be just evasive enough with Monica, enough so she’d do what I said, and enough so she’d call Janine or Richard to talk about it. In the past six years I was working with them the only break I ever took was when I was so heartbroken I had to go home in Brazil for my mom, so I knew they’d be worried, which unfortunately, for the wellbeing of our plan, was something I could only ease after we had been caught.

I stopped the car when the road started heading down, about 4km right after leaving the R349. Suddenly, I had seen this long blue line on the horizon, a darker blue than the sky, a blue that wasn’t there before. Driving in a different country was one of the things that was sort of normal to me until the right second I had to actually do it, when I panicked before going into game mode and just did what I had to do. But beforehand it never stopped any plans I made, it never scared me, I knew that it was part of my life and when it came to it, I’d just roll with it. But being there, right there in an empty road in the middle of South Africa, where there was no huge mountain anywhere near, and just small hills magnifying even more the vast blue sky above me, right there I had to stop and look around. I hopped off the car and looked at the ocean blue line in the horizon, thinking of how strange it was, how foreign it was for me, to know I had about twenty-three complicated e-mails in my inbox I had to reply, and instead I had gotten into a plane and gone to South Africa to pretend I was somebody’s girlfriend in the hopes that people would be interested enough on the story to have paparazzi following us around everywhere so that people would stop talking about my ex, or Harry’s ex, and start talking about us and about how crazy it was that we were together so that would give us a better chance to do our jobs in the way we wanted to do them. So maybe I’d have to respond to Janine and Richard and Monica about not doing what I should when I should do it, but I’d know. Deep down I’d know that little trip, those little two unscheduled days would be doing more for my career than any opportunity in those e-mails. And that scared the hell out of me.

I grabbed my phone from my purse, and called my mom, thanking God I had enough money to pay the roaming taxes.

“Oi, filha”, she said, the Portuguese sounding so rough in my English-accustomed ears, “how are
you?”

“Oi, mãe, eu to bem”, I said, smiling unconsciously, “Just calling to let you know I’m on a quick
trip with some friends, so I’ll only be back to Manhattan on Monday”.

“Oh, okay”, she said, “Have fun. Where are you? Is everything alright?”

“Yes, I just-“, I started. I knew she would not be happy finding out I was dating someone on tabloid covers, so I knew I had to ease her mind in advance. “I’m on South Africa, a little beach called Morgan Bay. A friend invited me… So I came”. The Portuguese word for friend had a specific termination for gender, so I knew I didn’t have to say much more to let her know what kind of friend I was talking about.
“Oh.”, she said, “Oh. That’s good! Wow, and that’s far. I thought you meant Vermont or Miami. So, who’s this friend? Someone special?”

“Oh-“. Think, Jenifer, think, I told myself, If you were actually dating a real life prince and trying to not let people know, how would you explain this to you mother? “I don’t know, too soon to tell, I guess. Just a friend”.

“A friend who’s taking you to South freaking Africa”, she said.

“Mom, I just- you know how my life is, I want to take things slow”.

“And going to Africa with this guy is your way of doing that?”

“Well”, I said “Yes”.

“Jenifer”.

“People can’t see us here, mom, that’s the point “. She remained quiet for a while, and somehow, I just knew what was coming next. I was even surprised it hadn’t come earlier.

“How old is he?”, she asked, and I sighed really loud so she’d hear me.

“Mom”

“It’s a fair question, Jenifer, I just want to know because you know your father is gonna ask when I tell him”. I pretended to believe her.

“He’s twenty-eight”. I said.

“So five years older than you?”, she said, “Considering you turn twenty-three soon. Wait, when is his birthday?”

“He’s six years older, mom”, I said, partly because I knew that’s what she wanted to know, partly because she was gonna find out anyway, but mostly because I had no idea when was Harry’s birthday, “He turns twenty-nine this year”. I heard her sigh. “Listen, remember what I said ok? He’s just a friend. We’re just getting to know each other, it not serious. The one thing I don’t want now is serious, you know that, right?”

“Okay, just… Be careful then, not to give him the wrong impression. Going with someone to Africa does not exactly translate into ‘let’s take things slow’ in my book, let alone in a man’s”.

“Well, I just want you to keep that in my mind, no matter what you hear. You know how tabloids are… Whatever you hear, or read, we’re still just good friends getting to know each other, so I don’t want you, or dad, to worry. Okay? Remember that”.

“O-kay?”, she said, uncertain, and I realized maybe I had over-comforted her.

“Anyway, gotta go. Call you back Monday, when I’m back in Manhattan. Give everybody a kiss for me, alright?”

“Alright”, she sighed, “Maybe then we can talk about your bridesmaid dress, Livia is going crazy about it, you’re the only one who hasn’t confirmed it yet”. I instantly felt guilty to the mention of my soon-to-be sister-in-law, knowing about five of my twenty-three unanswered emails were probably from her, wanting to know my decision about my bridesmaid dress.

“Right”, I said, “I’ll call her Monday too, don’t worry. Bye mom, gotta go”.
I threw my phone in the passenger’s seat, trying to not think of how worried my parents would be upon realizing the first guy I ever date after David is a real life freaking prince. I turned on Pink on the car’s radio, forgetting the shuffle and finding Good Old Days on my iPod, hoping it would bring me back to game mode.

I started driving again, focusing on remaining on the right side of the road – or on the left side, in this case, I mean, I don’t know – noticing some simple, small houses nearby. As I got downer and downer the road, and the sea got closer, the houses got bigger and fancier. I passed a small lake, some horses and a couple of earth roads to my left – but I kept on the pavement one. After a while, there were a lot of houses, and I could see the sand, and after a turn, I saw myself in the exact same spot GeoGuessr had taken me and Harry to weeks prior. I smiled at the thought, the crazy thought of being somewhere I had only seen in my computer before, a thought I was also almost used to after so many years traveling to so many places for work. I drove and drove some more and after another turn, I found myself in Beach Road, where, to my surprise, some changes had been made since the last update on the Street View images. The hotel we were staying in had been renovated and had a bit of a fancier, more modern, look about it, more… Urban. My first thought was ‘well, shit’, because, of course, a fancier, bigger hotel means it would be easier for paparazzi to find us, but then I remembered that was a good thing, that’s what we wanted after all.

I parked in the small parking lot in the street, put my hat and my sunglasses on – the ultimate celebrity disguise -, grabbed my Valentino purse, picked my bag and made my way inside, looking around trying to see if there were already paparazzi around. Guess not.

I checked in, telling the receptionist I was room 30-A’s plus one, after taking the disguise off, in the hopes maybe she’d recognize me and call the paparazzi.

“Mr. Wales is on the beach with his friends from room 25-A”, she said, handing me a key. Oh, so Harry had used his actual name. Good.

A worker helped me take my bag to the room, where I found Harry had made himself very comfortable, his stuff was all around the place like a hurricane had been there. It was almost two on the afternoon when I took my flats off and lied on the bed, the monster flight finally taking its toll on me. I was tired, jet legged, hungry, and that just from the monster flight there from Vancouver. Added all of my life’s worries I really don’t know how I managed to get up and fish my bikini from my bag.

When I reached the beach, it was pretty easy to find Harry and the other guys. There wasn’t many people there, I guessed the high season was almost over by March. The guys were playing football when they saw me coming. I prayed Harry would remember that we were supposed to be dating and would greet me accordingly – we had planned on telling the guys I was very shy, and very much against PDA, so a big hug and a kiss on the cheek was what we had planned. Of course, what I forgot was we hadn’t seen each other in more than a week since I had been in LA and then Canada. Luckily, Harry remembered.

“Hi, love”, he screamed leaving the guys behind to come meet me half way as a good boyfriend who hasn’t seen his girlfriend in more than a week would. He hugged me, spinning me in the air when he reached me, making me laugh; the guys were watching us with smiles on their faces, so I threw my arms around Harry’s neck when he put me down and gave him a long kiss on the cheek.

“Is everything on track?”, I asked, lowly, when he put his arms around my shoulders and started guiding me to where the guys were.

“Yep”, he said, “Did you leave any hints around?”
“Just didn’t really wear the glasses all the time”, I said, putting my arm around his waist, “I think the guy that took my bag up to the room recognized me. What a gigantic mess you did there, by the way. How did you ménage to do all that in less than a day? Hello boys”, we reached the place where they were, “How dull has Morgan Bay treated you without me here?”, I joked.

“So dull, Miss Silva”, said Clark.

“I told you, Clark, it’s just Jen”, I said.

“Did you have problems finding the way?”, Harry asked.

“I had bigger problems”, I said, laying down my own beach towel, and proceeding to take off my dress, “Like driving in the stupid left side of the road, for example”, they laughed, and for a moment I noticed Harry’s prying eyes on my body. Nathan noticed it too, and the little smirk on his face was very satisfying to watch.

“Is it your first time in South Africa?”

“Yes, and I love it already”, I said, getting my sun block out of my bag. The boys went back to play football a little further on the sand and Harry sat down by my side, spreading sun block on my back like a good boyfriend would. “The road here from the East London Airport looked just like some roads in Brazil, with all those beautiful green hills.”

“Jenifer, you’re Brazilian”, said Nathan, “Do you play football?”

“Oh, sorry”, I said, laughing, “Not really. But good luck with that”

“She does calls it football, though”, Harry said, “Which for someone living in the States for so long it’s a victory in my book”, we laughed.

“Hey, take a picture”, I said, after the guys had gone to play further down the sand, giving him my phone, “I’ll post it on Instagram so people will connect the dots after we’ve been caught”. “Fine”, he said, as I posed with my hat and my sunglasses, moving his hand so that the angle would be the one I wanted, “But after this I’m confiscating you cellphone. I told you, no technology”.

“Well, I’m sorry, but I’m gonna need to go online and find myself a dress”, I said, taking the phone after he was done, “my mom tells me Livia is going mad because I haven’t confirmed what I’m wearing yet”.

“When did you talk to your mom?”

“About an hour ago”, I said, considering to tell him about our conversation, “When I told her about us”.

“What?! What about rule number one?”, he asked.

“I didn’t tell her that”, I explained, “Just said I was traveling with a guy friend, which is better than later on having to deal with how mad she was going to get upon finding out I was dating someone new on a magazine cover… Again”

“Wait, David?”, he asked, “Your mother found out you were dating a 30 years older guy on a magazine cover?”, I blushed.
“I was young and innocent”, he laughed, “I didn’t know better”.

“Jenifer, I-“

“What?”. He sighed, looking at the sea. He was seating up now, by my side, as I had my eyes closed tanning my back. Every time he stopped talking for more than three seconds I could feel the sleepiness taking over, the exhaustion of the trip and the jet leg getting the best of me.

“I just… Want to ask you something”.

“Go ahead”.

“It’s personal, so you really don’t have to answer if you don’t want to”.

“Just ask, Mr. Prince”.

“Why David?”, he said, and I frowned.

“What?”

“Why did you date him? What made you like him?”, he asked, “I mean, you’re- you’re hot”, he blushed, “And I saw him in the pictures, he’s… He’s just- He’s old, Jenifer. I’m sure he’s very talented and all, he had to have some qualities for you to fall for him, I was just wondering… Which were they”.

I sighed, resting my chin on my hands and staring into the sand right in front of me. I thought about what pictures he could have seen. I knew which ones were the first to show up on a Google Image Search – I had done it so many times before, and even after the break up, when I wanted to remember if we had really been happy or if it was just an invention of my brokenhearted mind. It was a mixture of red carpet and paparazzi pictures, with some of us on stage on Broadway and yes, we looked smiley and happy in all of them.

“He was sweet”, I said, finally, after a few seconds, “He had these really intense green eyes that always made me feel like he was meaning something more than what he was saying, you know?”, Harry didn’t answer, “And he could dance, he loved to dance. Well, we were on music theater so I guess that makes sense. But, it was just, how mature he was about things, I don’t know… I flirted with him once, during rehearsal, right after our kiss scene when I have to slap him. The director told me I wasn’t being convincing enough on the slap, so after he was gone David told me ‘It’s okay, just slap the hell out of me, she’s supposed to be outraged’, to which I said ‘well maybe I’m not’, and I smiled and walked back to my position and he legit stayed there for about 10 seconds just looking at me like trying to figure out what I had meant. I knew he had been divorced for years by then. I knew his age. I knew he had a daughter my age. And I knew I didn’t care. So he walked me home once and I kissed him goodnight. I don’t know what else to tell you, he just- he was just really kind to me. He made me feel secure”.

“Secure?”

“Confident”, I said, turning around to lay on my back, “He made me feel confident, like I was the best thing that had graced the universe in a million years”. Harry was looking at me now. “A girl shouldn’t need a guy to feel that”.

“So you just… Started dating him and never told your family?”

“I got scared”, I shrugged, “I knew what they were going to say. I knew I was 21 and he was 50, even though he tells people he’s 45, which he can totally pull off.”
“You were 21?!”

“OH, get over it”, I said.

“No, I’m serious. Jenifer you were barely legal. How did that guy dated you?”

“Barely legal?”, I sat up, “Harry, sexual majority is 17 in New York-“

“I don’t care”, he said, “You couldn’t have been drinking alcohol for more than a year when you started dating. That’s just… Wrong”.

“Well”, I lied down again, “My mom thinks you’re too old for me”.

“Of course she does”, he said, “You’ve traumatized her for life”. We laughed.

“Everybody told me I was crazy”, I said, once the laughter had died, “Everybody. Not just the ones who didn’t even know me, you know. Not just the tabloids and the fans. I mean, the tabloids were actually worst in the sense that they didn’t just talked about how it certainly wouldn’t last, they put David on a pedestal for dating someone so much younger and they put me in a position where I- I was just someone’s trophy, you know?”

“Bastards”, he mumbled.

“But the worst was after the break up, having to talk to my parents about it. And having to talk to the girls, and Richard, Monica and Janine. They all didn’t give me one lecture. Not one. They didn’t judge or said ‘I told you so’, they just cussed David and hugged me and said things would get better. That was the actual worst. Knowing I deserved the ‘I told you so’ and never getting it”.

“I’m sorry, who’s Richard?”, he asked.

“What?”

“I know Janine is your Public Relations, and Monica is you assistant. Who’s Richard?”

“Oh, he’s my manager”, I said, “He’s been working with me since I was 18 or 19, or something”.

“Okay, so let me get this on my language”, he laid down, “What do they do?”

“He’s the one who gets me jobs, basically”, I explained, “He talks to people from the business and gets me auditions and contracts, he plans my career. Janine’s job is to let people know that I got these jobs, so she gets me interviews and stuff. Monica’s job is to just, basically, deal with whatever it is I don’t want to deal with”. He laughed.

“Okay, I got it”, he said, “I think Thomas would be my Monica”, I laughed, “that sounded just… Wrong. And I think Janine would be Edward-“

“Who’s Edward?”

“He’s my private secretary”, he said, “He stayed in the UK, he’s married and has a baby, I thought there was no need to take him away from that”.

“That’s nice of you”.

“Well, I’m a nice person, Silva”, I smiled, “and then Richard would be my advisor”.

“Well, I doubt your advisor is cooler than mine”.
“Not another ‘my pile is bigger than yours’ bet”, he said, and giggled.

“Why don’t you want it? You won the last one”

“I did indeed”, he said, “But you’re probably right this time. My advisor is a pretty nice guy, but he’s no Hollywood power business man”. I laughed… Hysterically. “What?”

“Nothing, just-“, I sighed, “Richard is a very good manager, he started low and made his way up and now he owns the freaking company, you know? But… He just doesn’t fit the image of a Hollywood power business man. At least not after you’ve seen him with his kids”.

“Why do you say that?”

“Okay, let me tell you the tale of Richard Artchet”, I turned to him, “Once upon a time there was Richard Artchet, who was a man who had mastered the art of many things – fashion; wine; management, which was his job – and having kids was just another one: he has four kids from three previous relationships.”

“Four kids in three relationships?””, Harry asked and I nodded.

“Sh, don’t interrupt the story. Richard was an ambitious guy from the start, he got a job in management at 22 and only moved up since then, until he finally opened his own firm. Back at 22, when he first got the job, his high school girlfriend, who he was still with, got pregnant and Richard, who grew up with two brothers and one sister, was happy out of his mind. He’s not a bad man, you see. He’s just a little pompous sometimes. But he loves kids, and so he married his girlfriend and they named their first baby boy ‘Hunter Artchet’”

“Hunter?”

“Honey, you’ve heard nothing yet. By the time baby Hunter was almost two, they were pregnant with the second one, that they called Asher Artchet. Yes, I know. But the time passed and life made them different people and when baby Asher was about to turn two, they had grown different then the people they had fallen in love with – or so tells me Rich-, and got divorced. His ex wanted to go back to school and get a master's degree, so Richard told her to go, that he’d look after the boys, and so it was decided. To this day, she still sees her boys at every school brake and big holydays, but she lives in Chicago now, and Rich raised the boys”

“That sucks”

“Oh, the boys had a good upbringing. They were always happy. At this point, Richard was making more money, so he was able to afford nannies for them, but he still looked after them as much as he could without losing his job.

“About two years after the divorce, after dedicating himself exclusively to his career and his boys, Richard started to try and date again, which proved unsuccessful until a trip he made with friends to Vegas. There, he met a model called Alessandra who was 23 years old and they got drunk and they got married and when they woke up the next day, they realized they had actually enjoyed each other and did not want an annulment. So he moved her to California and-“

“Oh this has bad move written all over it”, Harry said, and I laughed.

“Well, she became quite the stepmother for the boys – which was probably due to the fact that she was still very much a kid herself, which Richard started to soon realize. About two months into the relationship, however, they found out she was pregnant, and just like he did the first time, Richard was determined to make this relationship work, even that just for the sake of giving the baby a
chance of a real family. Richard’s first girl was named Payton – I know, right? To this day the name of all his children still makes me cringe a little bit - and she had light brown hair just like her mother. However, it was clear for Richard Alessandra was not ready to be a mother, and when they got divorced, when baby Payton was three - and Hunter was 10 and Asher was 8 -, and she wanted to go back to modeling, he encouraged her to do so, so he raised Pay.

“When I met him six or seven years ago, he was 37, had raised three kids pretty much all by himself while still being a superstar at his full time job, and he had been married for a year to his third wife. A year later, she was expecting, and they named Richard’s third son Aiden Artchet”

“Whyyyy?”

“Aiden is now the cutest five year old boy, who’s also big time hyperactive. He was three and a half when his parents got divorced – his mother cheated on Richard, who proved it in court and assured to keep the kid”

“That’s-“, Harry sighed, “That’s a really sad story”.

“It’s not, it’s a happy one!”, I said, “I mean, sure, it’s different, and I’m sure it would be better if the kids could have both their parents together. But, Harry, you should see them. Richard and his boys and his little girl when they’re all together. It’s such a loud, loving family environment, you know? Hunter’s now a twenty years old handsome Dartmouth student about to graduate. He is getting a double major in business and communications, just like his dad. And just like his dad, he has broad shoulders and thick black hair. He has his mother’s green eyes and he’s the quarterback of the Dartmouth ‘Big Green’ football team. As if he wasn’t perfect enough, he somehow finds the time to be a male model. His manager, of course, is big old daddy”.

“How is his brother?”

“Asher’s about to turn eighteen, he’s blonde like his mother, a senior in High School, mastered the arts of surfing and skateboarding (and snowboarding whenever he can get himself in somewhere colder than Cali) and has even won a few championships, and he has no intention at all of going to college, let alone Ivy League, which drives his dad mad. He started a YouTube channel when he was fifteen, with videos about skating, which got very popular, especially after he started to also daily vlog, and now he’s even making a really big income with that. Like, five digits a year big. That, of course, has been driving his father even more mad, because he know he won’t control the money forever, and at some point after Ash turns 18, he can simply do whatever he wants, be it college or not, which has Richard running against the clock to have the boy falling for the idea of continuing his education, just for the sake of it, because even he would admit Ash doesn’t have to worry about getting a job to pay the bills.

“Out of all of his kids, however, the one that really worries Richard is his only girl Payton. She has grown up to be a beautiful thirteen year old. Pay started piano lessons when she was five, Richard’s idea, and she has only gotten better with time. So as she grew up, she picked up a string-guitar, violin, started singing lessons, and at thirteen is more talented than many people I have worked with. Payton says there’s nothing she wants more than to make her own music, and sing to full stadiums when she is older, which, of course, drives her father mad. He’s seen this business and how brutal it is. He has seen young beautiful girls sell themselves short for a chance at it, and how many really talented people never really will make it. And he knows Pay is way too good for this industry, but it’s not like he can help it, you know? She’s just too good to stop. She wants a YouTube account, just like her brother, to put music online, which so far Richard has been successful to forbid. For how long, God only knows. Payton is a hopeless romantic dreamer who composes and writes her own songs about whatever it is she is living: beautiful music about feeling
in the shadow of her brothers, about being over protected, about older boys from school who don’t notice her, about love and if it ever really lasts. In a way, she reminds me a lot of Taylor”

Harry was looking at some random spot in the horizon, but it seemed that he was actually looking more inside.

“Sometimes I wonder that myself”, he said after a while. “If love ever really lasts. For anyone. If anyone actually meets someone and just has it simple and easy and normal, you know? In the right time, without fuss or mess or complications”, I thought of how sad this was.

The guy I had met in London about six months before, talking about how he’d never dare to doubt my feelings because I was young because he had found the love of his life also at a young age was now doubting the whole love thing altogether.

“What about you brother and sister in law?”

“Told them ten years”, he said, sounding miserable, “Ten years of insecurity and self-doubt and concern for each other and a horrible break up… Seriously, Jenifer, does love ever really lasts?”

“Well, take my brother and Livia then”, I said. “Well, technically they broke up a couple of years back when she went to Europe. It crushed him. Yeah, never mind. Good question though”. He laughed.

“There’s a couple a few meters to my right”, he said, “Don’t look, but I think they’re getting ready to take a photo of us with their phone”

“You’re good at this”, I joked, sitting up and getting closer to him in the most natural way I could, preparing myself for the close up of a life-time.

“I have to be”, he said, too serious, but calm. And then he looked at me and smiled. “So what do you say, Silva?” his tone changed to a lighter one, and he raised a hand to fix my hair behind my right ear, “Let’s put on a show?”. I smiled at him, getting even closer.

“No turning back now”, I said.

“Wouldn’t dream of it”, he said in a whisper, right before I felt his breath on my skin and his lips on mine when he kissed me. It was a little awkward and embarrassing despite all the time we had taken to talk about it, so the kiss was simple and slow and I don’t remember how long it lasted. All I remember is Harry’s lips moving, framing itself on mine and then a football hitting us on our feet. We broke the kiss, seeing Clark move towards us to pick up the ball with a mixture of guilt and tease written all over his face. I risked a glance at the couple to our right, seeing them looking excitedly at their cellphones.

“Sorry, guys”, Clark said once he picked the ball, “Just thought you’d like to know the couple to your right had their phones up to your direction. Looked like the guy was taking a photo of his girlfriend, but I guess we all know better, right?”, he sounded really sorry for us, and it almost made me want to let him know the truth, that that was what we actually wanted, but I couldn’t.

“We’ll be careful”, said Harry, “Thanks Clark”, after he was gone again, I lied back down and Harry lied by my side.

“I think we did it”, I said.

“I believe so, yes”, he looked at me, “Ready to take over the world, Jenifer Silva?”, I laughed.
“I was born ready, Mr. Prince”. 
The Four Questions

Chapter Summary

Jen gets a new name. She and Harry play a game of 4 questions and start to deal with the aftermath of the publicity stunt.

I’ve been called many things in my life. Many things. The name I use now is not even my real name. Well, not really. I learned from a very young age that your name doesn’t matter when people are determined to call you something else.

My full name is Rosangela Jenifer Ferreira – I was named after my grandmother -, but since not Rosangela nor Ferreira would be easily pronounceable by English speakers, when I got my first part at age 12 and had to choose a name to go by, my parents and my manager at the time thought I needed a new one. Jenifer being my middle name was the obvious choice for an artistic first name, and as for Silva, it was my mother’s maiden name. So ever since I was a kid I knew I should get used to not being called my actual name, especially because my parents decided to keep on calling me Jenifer so it wouldn’t confuse me. But that was not when it started.

If my reaction to winning the Golden Globe wasn’t a good enough indication for you, I cry very easily. I’d cry seeing my parents fight. Seeing my brother scream he missed home when we moved to the States. Seeing sad movies. Seeing stray dogs on the street. Seeing people’s dreams come true. Seeing children being cute. Nothing in the world is as easy as making me cry so that’s how I earned my family nickname: melted butter - It makes more sense in Portuguese - the worst part? It was my father who gave it to me. He stopped calling me that –in public- when we moved to the States and someone told him it could have different meanings there. But at home, whenever I tried to make a point, or whenever I cried for whatever reason, I was melted butter.

It started a long time before that, when they’d call me four eyes in third grade, still in Brazil, because I needed reading glasses.

In school, in California, I was alien, because I wasn’t American. Or Carla Mendez – my character from Disney. In freshman year in high school, I was a couple of times called Latin monkey – I don’t wanna talk about it.

It wasn’t all bad, though. After the Bafta nomination at sixteen, I was called 'revelation', 'young actress to watch', and ‘scene stealer’ by the press. In the one semester I spent in college, at NYU, I earned the nickname 'Squid'. It’s a long story, but to put is simple: we were at a Cuba-themed party, there was a dance challenge, I asked for them to play me a Brazilian samba and started dancing. The rest is history. Apparently they thought my legs moved so fast I looked like a squid with many legs. Don’t judge us, there was a lot of tequila involved.

In the set of The Mediator my character was called Suze, so after the series premiere party on our first year, they started calling me Booze. As you might have guessed, I got really drunk in said party.

There were still, of course, the other things I was called, the good ones, and the cute ones. Like 'Tony Award nominee', and ‘Golden Globe winner'. Or like how my father always called me 'parakeet' when he hugged me, or how my brother to this day still called me 'Ro’ –from Rosangela,
which was also still how my grandparents called me. Or my brother’s girlfriend who would always call me ‘Gata’, which means cat, which is Brazilian slang for ‘cute looking girl’. Or how my mother always called me simply ‘filha’ – daughter.

I knew labels were a big part of working in Hollywood, so although I never liked some of mine, I forced myself to get used to them, own them, use them in my favor. I forced myself to not get upset, and to understand that being a girl who had to change her own name so it would sound more American, I should own even the latin monkey, and alien, because deep down I always felt I deserved it.

Still, no matter how bad I always felt about my little labels, nothing would ever have prepared me for the new ones I got on the Monday I arrived back in New York City. The ones printed in every newspaper, tabloid, and magazine covers. The ones stamped in every web page even remotely related to celebrities, pop culture, royalty or high society. In Brazil, they talked about it the news. Like, the actual news, the ones that should have been covering wars and stuff like that. Because that morning, for the entire world, I had become something entirely new: I was ‘Prince Harry’s girlfriend’. The New Princess. Princess Jenifer. The New Grace Kelly. My name was on Twitter’s trending topics for 2 days. Everyone had an opinion on the new it-couple. ‘He’s too old for her; she’s in over her head again; I’m sure the Queen’s not happy, she’s an actress; he shouldn’t date someone who has modeled lingerie...’

It all felt like it had happened so fast I could feel myself suffocating. I needed to remind myself of the process to make sure I was still in control of my own life. So I remembered, I remembered every conversation and every plan Harry and I had made before that very Monday. And this is the story of how my life went crazy.

From everyone else’s point of view, what happened was this: On a Friday Prince Harry was seen heading to an airport in Manhattan and everyone thought he was going home to London. They wondered if he was going back for good, but then Kensington Palace said he had gone on a weekend-long private holiday with friends. Not that as many people cared at that point, but at the same time I was seen in a Canadian airport leaving the country after finishing to shoot my participation on Once Upon a Time, and upon seeing the photos, the fans just assumed I was going back home to LA or NY. On Saturday, I posted in Instagram a picture of myself on a beach, and the fans assumed I was in LA. On Saturday night, a lawyer from Scotland posted a picture she had her boyfriend take of herself with another couple on the background. Her face was cut in a half, and the couple behind them was kissing at the time so their faces weren’t completely visible, but the caption said: ‘sharing a beach in Morgan Bay with Prince Harry and the I-have-no-idea-what-I’m-supposed-to-be-doing-here meme girl! Are we famous or what?’ Harry’s hair was visible, so everyone knew it could be true. The picture was re-tweeted many times until it reached, not only forums and Tumblr, but media headquarters who ordered their paparazzi to go and find out if that was really the third in line to the throne of the United Kingdom and the Hollywood actress in the picture and if they were dating or not. The first paparazzi arrived in Morgan Bay on Sunday afternoon, and managed to sneak a few pictures of Harry and me on the beach, hugging and laughing together in the water, talking and laughing excitedly laying on the sand, with Harry using my floppy hat to cover his head from the sun and me laying on my sides so I could look at him and teasingly slapping his bare chest. We didn’t notice the paparazzi until there were more of them, which made it harder for them to hide, and by the time that happened, they had also already taken photos of us horseback riding up and down Morgan Bay’s hills. We headed home as soon as we could after realizing we had company and arrived in Manhattan a day later, when all the covers on newstands were of the two of us. A long time before that happened, the internet pages of the same news’ sites and magazines were all already displaying the pictures and breaking the story of Prince Harry’s new girlfriend: 22 year old actress Jenifer Silva.
From our point of view, things were pretty calm on the Saturday in March I arrived in Morgan Bay, In South Africa, and allowed, very awkwardly, for Harry to kiss me when we realized there was a couple taking pictures of us with their cellphones, things went very normal for the rest of that evening. We left the beach when the sun went down. We had a lovely dinner discussing the things the boys thought were the most different between London and Manhattan, and I added my opinions on the things I hadn’t even started to understand in 10 years living is the States. Then I went to bed early, finally giving up trying to resist the jet leg.

I needed to remind myself of my normal life – or at least as normal as it could be for someone like me – before everything went crazy. I needed to keep on telling myself: It’s okay, everything it’s crazy, but it’s good crazy, you made it crazy, you wanted crazy, you control crazy. I need to keep on telling myself I was in control of all of it. Like the discussion Harry and I had to have on Saturday night, deciding who would sleep on the couch since we had to stay on the same room. At the end of it, we decided we were both responsible adults who could share a king size bed as friends without it being awkward. Of course, it was still awkward at first, before I completely blacked out with tiredness.

Waking up late on Sunday, Harry had waited for me so we could go to lunch at the Hotel’s restaurant with the guys. This was the last meal we had before we noticed things were positively different, and I remember that whole conversation because of it. But the most important part is probably what happened when we were talking about acting:

“There are many different processes through which an actor can get to develop a character better”, I found myself explaining to the table, “My favorite is writing. I always write a few pages on the character’s point of view to get to know her better, you know, answering questions I think are important so that I can define her personality, who she is as a person, what makes her scared, and excited, things I need to know before I actually become her”.

“So is like getting to know someone”, said Nate, and I nodded. He had just talked about how weird it must be being an actress. Trying to portray a completely different person without showing any of your own characteristics in order not to betray the part you’re playing – he and Clark had been binge-watching The Mediator since they had come to Manhattan and had just admitted to me they kept expecting me to start talking like my character at any minute.

“Yes, I ask the character a series of questions in order to know how to make her react to whatever happens in the show”.

“Four”, said Harry.

“Four what?”, I asked.

“Four questions it’s all it takes to get to know someone”, he said, “to really get to know someone. At least, to get to know what’s really important”.

“Really?”, I asked, teasingly, putting down my fork and turning completely to his direction in the hotel’s restaurant. “You wanna bet me on this?”

“Damn right I do”, he said, not even looking at me, completely focused on his crab, “I always ask these questions on first dates”. He stopped eating, realizing his mistake. He gave the guys a quick look and then looked at me. “The only reason I didn’t ask you them in our first date is, of course…” he seemed to think, “Because I already knew the answers since we had been friends for so long before we started dating”.

“Good save”, said Clark, clearly not understanding exactly how good a save that had been.
“So you think you know all there’s to know about me?”

“Well, not all of it”, he said, “Just the most important stuff”, I kept staring at him, and then he looked at me, “Okay, maybe three out of four”.

“Are you willing to bet on it?”, Nate asked, smiling. “’Cause I bet you definitely cannot make three out of four”.

“I’ll bet you five bucks he gets zero”, said Clark.

“Make it ten”, said Harry, still looking at me.

“If I’m gonna have to answer these questions”, I looked at the guys, “than you all better answer them as well. And you”, I looked at Harry, “have to say all your bets first, and at the end I’ll say what you got wrong”, the boys nodded.

“You mean if”, Harry said, “If I got anything wrong”

“Okay, Mr. Prince”, I said, ignoring the little smirks of delight on Nathan and Clark’s faces, “You’re on”. He let down the crab he was eating, turning completely to me.

“Question one: the happiest day of your life”, he said and paused for a few seconds giving us all time to think about our answers, “Winning the Golden Globe. Boys?”

“Mine was when I was 17”, Nathan said, “I had always asked my parents for a dog but they never let me have one, and at Christmas when I was 17 they gave me one”. I smiled at the thought of this tall, grumpy-looking man having a childhood puppy as his best memory.

“When my baby brother graduated college”, Clark said, “I could swear I’d have to be bailing him out of jail after he grew up, but the kid did okay”, we giggled.

“Second question”, Harry went on, “the worst day of your life”. The guys groaned, and we all made faces.

“Last year’s Easter”, said Nathan, “When I found out my father was smoking again after almost 10 years. He’s gonna get himself killed”.

“Seventh grade”, said Clark, looking at some distant point in the ceiling, “I got sent to the principal’s office for fighting this other kid, and then his mom died two days later. I could never bring myself to go and tell him I was sorry”. I had to admit, at least to myself, Harry was right: these question were revealing. I was starting to see Nathan and Clark at a whole new light.

“Yours was”, Harry started, “The last performance of your Broadway show last year”. I was so glad he hadn’t just said ‘David’. “Third question: The thing you wish the most. In your case, I’d say…”, he stared at me, thinking, “…An Oscar”, and I smiled, quickly looking at the guys for their answers, genuinely interested.

“Renovating my father’s old 1970 mustang”, said Clark, dreamy, “Oh, she’s a beauty”. And we laughed.

“Seeing England win a World Cup”, Nathan said, quickly high-fiving the other two.

“The last question is the trickiest”, Harry went on, “Because is the one people usually lie about, so
be honest. Your biggest fear”

“My pop dying before he should”, said Nathan. And we looked at Clark, who still took some time before speaking.

“I can’t think of anything”.

“Oohh Mr. I’m-not-scared-of-anything”, Nathan teased, for our amusement.

“It’s not that,”, Clark said, “I’m sure I’m scared of something, I just can’t think of anything right now”.

“It’s okay, that happens”, Harry said, looking back at me, “Now, Ms. Silva, as for you… I haven’t made up my mind yet”.

“What do you mean?”

“I can’t decide if you’re the most scared of our little secret being made public”, he winked, the guys probably thinking he was talking about our relationship, and not being entirely wrong, “Or never getting the chance to change your career the way you want to”.

“You can only pick one for the bet”, Clark warned him. We remained silent, waiting for Harry’s answer.

“Career change”, he said, at last. “Yes, I’ll go with career change”

“Alright, Jen”, Nathan said, “How did he go?”

“Sorry guys”, I said, “I guess you both owe him some money”. Harry fists went up in the air.

“What?!”, Nate and Clark said.

“Hey, we have been friends for about six months now. And now we’re dating”, I said, “I guess I underestimated our relationship”.

“You tend to do that”, Harry joked, smiling at me while the guys fished ten bucks in their wallets and we decided to go to the beach after this.

“Don’t forget”, I told Harry as we made our way down the brick stairs to the sand, the guys way ahead of us, “If someone yesterday posted something on any social media about us being here, there’s bound to be paps here now, so don’t forget to be, you know, coupley-wopley”.

“Coupley-Wopley?”, he asked, “Never thought I’d say this but you need to slow down on the Doctor Who binge-watching.”

“You know what I mean, be a couple”, I said, “Just hug me and stuff”.

We went to the water for a swim, and played around with Clark and Nathan, laughing a lot with Harry always hugging me and throwing me around and hugging me again. When we went back to the sand, the guys sat a few meters away from us, to give us space I guess, and Harry lied down by my side.

“So, tell me”, he said, “How many did I actually get right?”

“How-What?”
“The four questions”, he said, picking up my floppy hat to cover his face from the sun as I spread sun block on my arms, “I didn’t actually get everything right, did I? You just said that so they’d think we’re that good a couple”. I smiled.

“Two. You got two out of four”.

“Damn it”, he said, “Nathan wins… Wait, which are the ones I got wrong?”

“Well”, I started, “Happiest day it’s definitely the Golden Globes. But that’s recent, before that I’d say the day I got into college”.

“Really?”, he said. “Well, I did not see this one coming”.

“Worst day? Definitely David”, I said, “But you got the other two wrong, what I want and fear the most”. I lay down by his side.

“Can you tell me?”, he said, taking the hat off his eyes so he could look at me.

“I’m really paranoid about not getting my career change, or our little secret going public”, I said, “but I don’t think that’s what I fear the most. I-“, I sighed, “I know being paranoid about it, being scared, it’s what’s gonna help me not mess it up and achieve what I want, but there’s something grander I fear more, something way more into the future”, I looked at him, “I don’t wanna be a cliché”.

“What do you mean?”

“A Hollywood cliché”, I explained, “An old actress with two ex-husbands, a couple of children who hate me and having to remind people of the movies I was in”.

“You’re afraid of being forgotten?”

“I’m afraid of failing at love”, I said, looking back up and closing my eyes, both because of the sun and because I didn’t want to see the look on his face. “I’m afraid of having Richard on my mind next time I’m in a relationship and want to say ‘I love you’. I’m afraid of being a divorced actress who doesn’t know what love is anymore…”, I sighed, “You know that song from Cinderella, So This Is Love? There’s a verse that says ‘my heart has wings and I can fly’. I want to find this one big love who’s gonna make me feel that way. Like my heart has wings and I can fly”, we stayed silent for a few seconds, “I never felt that, not even with David. He made me feel like I was amazing just because I was so much younger, but I never felt like my heart had wings and I could fly”.

“Can you keep a secret?”, I looked at him, “Stupid question, of course you can, look at us”, we smiled, “My biggest fear is succumbing to pressure. Taking so long to find a person I love enough and who’ll love me enough to marry me that my family, my… Advisors will tell me I need to settle down and I’ll end up marrying the first girl to say yes”. I didn’t know what to say to this, so I said nothing, but I never liked Harry more than in that moment, when he just seemed to want the same things as me. “And I don’t want to make my parents’ mistakes”.

“You won’t”, I said, after a break. “I know you won’t”. He smiled.

“What about the thing you want the most?”

“Oh, I don’t have just one”, I said, noticing the conversation taking a turn into a lighter mood, “I have a whole bucket list, I could never pick just one thing that I want the most”.
“Like what?”

“Well”, I started, lying on the side of my body and supporting my head with my arm to look at him properly, “I want to make more serious movies, like I already told you, the kind that gets nominated to all the big awards… And I want to voice over a Disney movie character, could be Pixar too, I’m not greedy. I want to go back to Broadway, for at least one more show. I want to make Doctor Who, it doesn’t have to be as a season-long companion, just a special part… Even just for a Christmas Special. And I want to be in a movie based on a book. I have so many favorites book I wish I could turn into movies myself… Maybe if I can convince some of the directors I know to direct it I can adapt one of my favorite books and act as an executive producer… Yes, I wanna write a script for a movie.”

“What about the notebook on your bag?”

“What?!”

“I’m sorry”, he said, “I was grabbing your cellphone to hide it in my stuff so you wouldn’t peak, I found this notebook. In all fairness, it was open. And I saw the drawing inside-“

“You looked in my stuff?!!”

“It was in the nightstand!”, he said, “It’s not like I was going through your bag or anything. I grabbed your phone and noticed it was on top of an open notebook and there were some really nice drawings of dresses and stuff. What’s that?” I sighed.

“It’s just… Nothing”, I said, “It’s just something I do when I need to take my mind off things. I like to draw. Draw dresses. I like dresses”, I shrugged, “I don’t know, when I was younger I used to think when I was really famous I could start my own fashion brand, you know?”

“That’s awesome”, he said, sounding very genuine, “From the little I saw you’re good at it. How’s that not on your bucket list?”. I smiled.

“It is”, I admitted, “Just like having my name on a perfume, modeling for the Victoria’s Secret Fashion Show and being the face of some really famous fashion brand. I was just not going to talk about it”.

“Well, good”. He laughed.

We let the conversation die for a bit, enjoying the silence and the sound of the waves, but then I realized I didn’t know the rest of his answers for the four questions thing.

“Hey”, I said, “You didn’t finish talking about the four questions. What are your other three answers?”

“Wanna see if you can guess mine?”

“Hm, you already told me your worst fear”, I said, “So three left, I win if I get two out of three?”

“Yes”, he said, “Here’s a tip, one of them is really easy”.

“Okay, I’ll start with what you wish the most”, I said, “And I think your answer would be… For the paparazzi to die and leave you alone”. He laughed. “No, wait”.

“Is that your final answer?”
“I said wait”, he laughed more, “Okay. No, not that.” I thought about what he had said, about fearing not finding the right girl in time. “What you wish the most is to have a family of your own. Having kids and a happy marriage and maybe traveling the world with them”. He didn’t answer.

“What about the worst day of my life?”

“When Chelsy broke up with you”. He gave the sky a sad smile, my hat still covering his eyes. “And the best day was…” I thought. And thought. And thought. And at the end I had no idea. “I don’t know, when you found out you were going to be an uncle?”

“Well, you tried”, he said, “But you only got one out of three. What I wish the most”, I smiled. “Having kids?”, he nodded. A happy family of his own, a chance to do it all right, seemed to me like a good thing to wish the most. “Well, still, one out of three, that’s not bad. What are the right answers?”

“Happiest day of my life”, he said, “I’m really happy to be an uncle, but I’d have to say the happiest day of my life was back in 1997. My parents had gotten divorced in August 96, and my mother died a year later. That was one of the worst years ever. My parents were better apart, you know, but I still heard about it. About them and all the problems they had. I’d overhear my teachers talking, and my father, and I’d always overhear mom crying at night”, he paused, before moving on, “And after she died, everything was so much worst. But there was this one day in 1997, we were at home in Kensington with her, me and Wills, and we baked cookies and watched cartoons on the telly. Something had happened to Will at school, I don’t remember what, and he was talking about it and mom was making jokes with us. And we played and tickled each other, you know? I don’t know how to explain, it was just- Just a happy day. Before the storm hit us and everything went downhill for a long, long time. It was like the last day of summer”. He went on after I didn’t say anything for several seconds, “And Chelsy, I mean, it really did suck when she broke up the engagement, but, you know. It still wasn’t worse than losing my mother, so I’d have to say that was the worst day of my life”.

“Oh”, I said, “Of course. God, now I feel horrible, how didn’t I think of that?”, he laughed.

“It’s okay”, he said, “I beat you, I got two rights, you only got one”.

“Always with the betting”, I teased, “That’s not a very healthy way of living, Mr. Prince”.

“It’s the only way I know, Silva”.

“You know when you started talking about four questions that told you the most important things you needed to know about someone, I legit thought you meant, like, what’s your favorite song or who’s your favorite doctor, something like that”. He laughed.

“That’s… Important too, I guess. What is your favorite song?”

“Oh, the answer for this question is way too long”, I started, “I’m an over-thinker, you know? There’s hardly any question in the world I have a simple answer for, and this just might be the worst-“

“It’s not hard. Best song you ever heard. Go”.

“No, I can’t. It’s impossible. I couldn’t just name one song out of all of the awesome songs I’ve heard… Could you?”

“Knocking on Heaven’s Door”, he said, at once, “Go on”.
“I told you, it’s a long answer…”

“We have all day”, he said, “And if I have to convince people I’m in love with you I have to know these things”.

“Fine”, I took a deep breath, “Here’s the thing: I can’t pick one, mainly because I can’t choose a favorite band or singer. So I have a top 3 bands or singers, and a top 3 favorite songs of each of them, with the third position always being a tie between two songs or two artists”.

“Wow, you-“, he started, and sighed, “You really do have some sort of OCD, don’t you?”

“I can’t help it”, I said, “Everything seems relative and complicated to me. Not one, I tell you, not one simple answer in the world”.

“One plus one?”, he tried.

“If we’re talking math, than two”, I said, “If we’re talking people, one plus one very often equals three or more. You’re gonna be an uncle, you should know this”.

“Okay”, he took the hat off his eyes and looked at me, “Do you love your mother?”.

“I do”, I said, “But it’s complicated”.

“How could that question possibly be complicated?”

“Every time my mom or dad tell me they love me and I say I love them too”, I started, “Their answer is always ‘then why don’t you come live with us?’. I love them, but do I love them enough to give them the one thing they want the most, me going back to Brazil? No. My life is in the States now, either they understand it or not”. He sighed. “I told you, it’s complicated. I just… Think too much I guess”.

“Jenifer”, he said, covering his face with my hat again, “Just tell me your favorite song…s”.

“Top 3 favorite artists in no particular order”, I started, “Plain White T’s, Mariana’s Trench and McFLY-“

“Hey, they’re British!”

“I’m aware of that”, I said, “Third place tied with Taylor Swift-“

“You can’t say that”, he objected, “She’s your best friend, that’s biased”.

“Yeah, well, I’m biased. Sue me. She’s awesome and her lyrics are awesome, now quick interrupting me”, I took a deep breath, and I could swear I overheard him mumbling something like ‘such a control-freak’ under my hat, “Top 3 song from Plain White T’s. Hey There Delilah, Big Bad World and Cirque Dans La Rue tied with Write You a Song. Top 3 Mariana Trench’s songs. Acadia, Cross My Heart Acoustic and Masterpiece Theater III tied with Good To You. Top 3 Taylor Songs. You’re Not Sorry, Mary’s Song and Jump Then Fall tied with Innocent. God, Innocent is amazing.”

“You were right”, he said when I stopped for breath, “This is a long answer”.

“Sshh”, I said, “And, finally, top 3 McFLY songs. Bubble Wrap, Sorry’s Not Good Enough and Falling in Love tied with Transylvania”.

“Wait, that’s a song?”, he asked, skeptical, “Transylvania?”
“Do not mock it”, I said, “It’s a brilliant lyric based on the story of Anne Boleyn who was the second wife of Henry VIII and who basically was-“

“Oh, yeah, good old Anne”, he said, “One of the shadiest parts of my genealogic three”.

I’m ashamed to say this, but I don’t know how long it took me to realize what he was talking about. When I finally did, I don’t think I’ve ever gasped that loudly.

“Oh my God!!!”, I said, sitting up and looking down at him, “Oh, my God!!!”

“Please tell me you didn’t just realize Anny Boleyn is kind of part of my family in a distant weird way”. 

“Oh, my God!!!”, I covered my mouth with one hand, and touched his bare chest with the other

“You did, didn’t you?”

“I am touching a descendent of Anne Boleyn”.

“Well, not really”, he said, still laying down with my hat over his head, “She only had one daughter who had no descendants. So technically I’m only related to Henry VIII”.

“Oh, my God!!!”

“You don’t care, do you?”

“Oh, my- How did I never realized you’re practically a history book with legs?!”

“I don’t really know that much about history-“

“I mean, your family is huge! I don’t know how I just didn’t connect you to them, probably because I just got so used to you, I forgot you could trace your ancestry back thousands of years… That’s so weird… AH!”, I gasped again, remembering something else.

“Now what?”

“Doctor Who!”, I slapped his chest euphorically, “On that episode in third season with Queen Victoria, you’re related to her, aren’t you?!” , he smiled.

“I was wondering when you were going to get to that episode”, he said.

“Oh, my God, of course!”, I went on.

“Say it! Come on, Silva, I’ve been waiting for this!“.

“You’re a werewolf!”, he laughed.

“Yes!”, he took my hat and threw it in the air picking up when it fell back down, “You got it. Best thing about being royal, I’m practically in the cast of Doctor Who. And I’m a werewolf, so… Fear me”.

“You son of a bitch”, I said, cracking up, “Even you are in Doctor Who and I’m not… Sort of”.

It was a fun day, of a fun weekend. It was a few hours later when the boys joined us again so we could go horseback riding up a hill around the beach. I had laid in the sand, feeling the sun deliciously burn up my skin as Harry and I talked and talked on a slow lazy pace all afternoon,
asking questions we had never really asked each other before. After a quick trip to our rooms to change clothes, we spent a few hours riding up and down and around getting to know the place. The view from the hills we reached by horse were unbelievable, and we kept falling in love with the place more and more. I managed to forget the whole reason why we were there for a little before we finally started riding back to the hotel, when we saw them. Little groups of three or four people scattered around distant streets and hills, all pointing at us with their cameras up.

“We have company”, said Nathan, “We should hurry”. I shared a look with Harry, that meant both ‘we did it’, ‘I’m scared’ and ‘so it begins’, and we exchanged nervous smiles before speaking, getting our acting modes on.

“Damn it”, he sounded so pissed it was hard to believe he wasn’t an actor, “Damn it!”

“How did they find us?”, I asked, trying my hardest to sound sad and confused.

“One person, it’s all it takes’, Clark said. “What do you guys want to do?”

“Let’s just go back to the room for now and think about what to do”, Harry said and so we did.

We decided to leave straight away, since it would look as if we were more upset for having been discovered, and since it was almost night, it made sense, so we just packed our bags and Harry called Thomas to have him prepare his jet – he said he usually flied private, that snob. It was only at this point he gave me my cellphone back, and I realized I had a lot of unread messages and my inbox had twice as much e-mails.

“Okay, so the girls are going crazy”, I told him, “Tay wrote ‘saw a picture of you in South Africa with Prince Harry. What’s the story?’ . Selena wrote ‘Please tell me you’d have told me if you were dating Prince Harry’, and at least five new e-mails are from my family…”

“Someone’s in trouble”, Harry joked.

“Yeah, joke ahead, but is true. Oh God, there’s like seven texts from Alessa’.

“That’s your old high school friend right?”, he asked.

“Yes, the one who told me about your fandom and Tumblr and the only one I actually told about us dating before coming here”.

“I talked to Thomas”, he said, “He said he’s been trying to call me for hours but I left my cell here so I couldn’t have picked up. He said the first pictures showed up yesterday night, must have been what attracted the paparazzi, probably from the couple on the beach”.

“Did he mention if I look good? Oh never mind, first text from Ally in all caps: ‘OH MY GOD JUST SAW SOME PICS OF YOU AND HARRY ON THE BEACH YOU LOOK SO GORG’”.

“Gorg?”, he asked and I sighed.

“Gorgeous”, I said. “You know what? I’m not dealing with this until we’re safely back in Manhattan”.

“Nice!”, he said, “Good for you! See? A couple of days off and you’re already relaxed and ready for the craziness that awaits us”.

“Yeah, either that or I’m just too scared and in denial”.
This is how things happened after that: we checked out of the hotel that night and made our way back to the East London Airport in our two rented cars, Nathan and Clark in the one they rented with Harry when they arrived on Friday, and Harry with me on mine – he drove because honestly, I was taking none of that left side of the road shit. The situation was so different it would almost be hilarious if it wasn’t scary. The place was almost deserted on Saturday, and now, on Sunday night, as the world was wondering what was going on between Prince Harry and that actress from The Mediator and Game of Thrones, the small Beach Road was taken over by a group of around 17 paparazzi trying to get the scoop. My guess is if we had waited to leave in the morning it would have been a lot more crowded.

I had a bit of a meltdown moment when we were in the plane, crossing the Atlantic Ocean, while me and Harry sat away from the boys.

“This is crazy”, I said, reliving the crazy amount of paparazzi outside the hotel and the group that photographed us inside the car as we got to the airport and were boarding the plane. “This is just bat-shit crazy”.

“Take a deep breath, we can do this”

“This is crazy, Harry”, I said, “What are we thinking? We’re gonna have to lie to our families and friends and all the people that knows us well. We’re gonna lie to reporters and fans and media and every single person on the planet. Why are we doing this?!”

“Jenifer”, he grabbed my hand, “Calm down. Be practical about this. Now that we’ve started, now that they’ve seen us, there’s nothing we can do anymore. Now we have to go with it. Can you do it?”

I took deep breaths, a headache pill, and didn’t let go of his hands until I fell asleep. By the time we arrived in Manhattan on the next day, Harry made his way to the car waiting to take him back to our building and I got into another plane straight to California because I had the last round of auditions for the Thompson movie, this time with the guy they had casted to play the character’s husband, and a few interviews about the series finale of my show. This worked perfectly because as we were still trying to play it like we didn’t want people to know we were together, it would be weird arriving together in our building knowing they’d be there.

It was late at night when I got to LAX, and I was really thankful that I remembered to ask Monica to go meet me with a car, because the place was crowded with paparazzi. Now, don’t get me wrong here. I had problems with paparazzi many times in my life, but before that very moment, I never had to be escorted out thought the doors with the airport security’s help, and that’s what happened. I had to be the douche celebrity wearing sun-glasses at night and looking at the ground, ignoring the shouts and rude questions trying to make my way to my car without falling since I couldn’t see a thing because of the flashes.

HOW’S HARRY JENIFER? JENIFER ARE YOU DATING PRINCE HARRY? JENIFER DID YOU HAVE FUN IN AFRICA? JENIFER HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN DATING PRINCE HARRY? JENIFER IS HARRY WITH YOU? JENIFER HAVE YOU MET THE QUEEN?

“Why haven’t you answered my calls?!”, said Monica once the car had left the paparazzi behind and I could breathe again. Sort of.

“Sorry, mom”, I joked, “my phone has been off since South Africa, I needed a break”.

“Well, I hope you had as good a time as you look like you did in the pictures”, she said and I almost smiled. “I’ve been trying to call you since the first ones emerged on the web. Thankfully it
took some time for people to be sure it was you in the picture, which I guess it’s what bought you some time—“

“That was buying me time? God. I wonder what would have happened if they knew right away.”

“I mean”, she sighed, “your mom called me, Jenifer”, Monica said and I groaned.

“I called her Saturday. I told her not to believe anything she read. She should be used to this by now…”

“And what exactly is this?”, she asked, “Since when are you and Prince Harry dating?”

“We’re not”, I said, “We’re just… Getting to know each other. We didn’t want anyone to know”.

“And how’s that working out for you?”, she asked and I sighed, knowing I’d have to repeat that explanation many times to come. “You should really call your mother”.

“Damn it, I told her I’d call on Monday”, I remembered, “But I forgot I’d be flying all day”.

“Well, time to turn your cellphone up”, she said.

But I waited more, I waited until I was back at my LA house, with my bags at my feet, while Monica closet my curtains – because there were choppers flying around and we were almost 100% positive they were filled with paparazzi.

I phoned Harry right then, with Monica watching, calling him ‘sweetie’, and saying I only called to let him know I got home alright, to know if he had any problems and to wish him a good night. And then I took a shower and ate the dinner Monica had made knowing I’d be coming home that evening – bless her heart - and by the time I laid down in my bed, I counted the time zones as I was so used to doing, realizing it was early morning in Brazil, so I turned my cellphone up.

Alessa’s messages consisted of her reactions in real time as things were happening. There were a lot of caps lock involved, and on the latest texts, she sent me the photoshopped version of the pictures that were taken of me on the Golden Globe’s red carpet. People had photoshopped freaking tiaras in my head – I hated how right Harry had been about the how the whole reaction would go down.

I ignored my e-mails once more, being too tired to start thinking about work again, I cleaned all of the notifications of missed calls and texts – knowing exactly who I had to call or text – and dialed my parent’s house number.

“Oi?”, I heard my father’s voice, closing my eyes in frustration. I was hoping it would be my mother to pick up, knowing she’d be more merciful on me.

“Oi, dad”, I said, feeling like a child talking in Portuguese again, “how are things?”

“Hi, parakeet”, he said, “What is this story I hear about you being in some beach with some guy?”

“What?”

“You. On a beach. With a new boyfriend, you don’t think that’s a bit too soon? When did that happen? Don’t you think me and mom deserved to know right away? When were you planning to tell us?”

“Dad”, I started, sighing, and the conversation went on like that and it only grew worst. I tried to
reassure him of the same things I had told my mother, that it wasn’t serious, that he shouldn’t worry, that Harry was only a good friend I was getting to know, all of which, of course, only made things worst. After that phone call I was so tired and so sad that I couldn’t tell my parents the truth I just went to sleep.

When I woke up the next morning, I started getting ready for my last audition for the movie, and deciding I’d rather go back to dealing with the Harry-news than obsessing over the audition, I called Taylor.

“Well, good morning, Your Royal Highness”, she said, playfully as she picked up the phone and I groaned.

“Shut up”, I said, “So you’ve heard then”

“Oh, sweetie”, she said, “I think at this point the entire freaking world has heard”.

“Yeah”, I groaned, “Tell me about it, my dad talked and talked when I called him”

“I know, he called me too”

“My dad?!”

“Yes, he wanted to know if I had heard from you, and if I knew about this”

“God, I’m so sorry, Taylor”.

“It’s okay, he’s just worried. And it’s understandable too. I mean, they haven’t seen you since you went home right after David. You didn’t even went home for the holydays-“

“I was working! They know that”

“… And then you start dating this guy, who is super high profile… Not to mention your parents are from the same generation that accompanied on real time the whole drama with Lady Di…”

“This has nothing to do with-“, I sighed, “I told you, it’s not serious”.

“And I believe you”, she said, “But, you know, I stopped for a coffee at a Starbucks and took a look at the magazine stand and you were in all of the covers”.

“Ugh, I’m sorry”, I said, and she laughed.

“You look great, though. Seems like you had a good weekend”.

“I did”, I said, putting her on speaker so I could get my make up going, “I really did”.

“That’s good”, she said and I could almost hear the smile on her voice, “So… How long has this been going on? Do you like him?”

“A few weeks back”, I said, “It’s not serious though”

“Yeah?”, she asked, “Okay, but do you like him?”

“I do”, I felt my heart on my throat, feeling so guilty about lying so directly to my best friend. Somehow, up until this question it didn’t feel like I was doing anything wrong, but to answer this question, this question out of any question she could have asked, made feel like I was the worst person in the world. Mostly because I knew that was a big question for people like us, people from
this industry, and specially, people who were known for getting love wrong again and again. I tried
to think of the things I did like about Harry, as a friend. “I, uhm, I like him a lot. He’s… He’s
funny, and caring, and he’s a great listener. And he likes most of the same stuff I do and we have a
great time together”.

“Well, good”, she said, “Then I’m happy for you. And is he a good kisser?”. I laughed,
remembering our awkward fake kiss on the beach.

“Yeah, you could say that. But I told you, it’s not serious”

“It doesn’t have to be”, she said, “I’m just happy you’re, you know, dating again”, I smiled.

“Thanks, Tay”

“You deserve a real relationship, Jen. A normal one, without drama, especially after David and
Tyler”, I cringed after ‘real relationship’, “Well, I mean, as normal as people like us can get”.

I told her goodbye before leaving the house, putting on my sun glasses and praying to all the old
Gods and the new that I would get that part. That the actor they picked to play the husband would
be nice. That I wouldn’t encounter any paparazzi whatsoever in the whole way there, but that was,
of course, when I started asking too much.

The last auditions with the other actor took place in a building in downtown LA, which meant I had
to park and leave the car and get inside the building all while ditching paparazzi and ignoring more
shouted questions about Harry and me and even David and Chelsy. I had to remind myself
mentally that the fact they were there was only proof things were going the way we planned. After
I got into the building, however, I took my glasses off, took a deep breath and forced myself to go
into game mode and forget everything that didn’t have to do with Vanessa Thompson and the story
of her life.

The actor they casted to play her husband was none other than Jonathan Groff, who I knew from
Broadway and who had also done Glee. I loved him and his work with all my heart and now I
really wanted that part.

I went through the paparazzi to go back to my car after the audition feeling very confused. I was
half happy about the audition and about the prospect of working with Jonathan, and half stressed
about getting to my car, and reversing without killing anybody.

After the audition, I went home to start answering some e-mails and Janine called me.

“I was going to call you”, I said, before giving her the chance to say hello, “I swear, I just got really
busy-“

“I don’t have time for this, Jenifer”, she said, “We’re going to have lunch today, with Richard,
there’s a lot we need to discuss, especially before you’re interview with Ellen DeGeneres this
afternoon”.

“Uh-“, I saw the e-mails from my brother’s fiancé, Livia, all piled up one after the other, feeling
the guilt take over me, “I was actually planning on having lunch here I have some many e-mails
to-Wait, you’re in Cali? And what interview?”

“The Ellen Show”, she said, “With Elle DeGeneres”.

“I completely forgot about that”, I said, “That’s why Monica said she was going to pick me up this
afternoon!”
“Yes”, Janine sighed, “And now that your life is all over the news, we’re gonna need to plan exactly how you’re going to answer the questions you know she’s gonna ask”

“We already know what she’s going to ask”, I told her, “I emailed you my answers weeks ago”.

Show business 101: No interview ever has any question whatsoever that surprises the person being interviewed. Actually, let me rephrase that: except for those press conferences after awards and things. Usually, someone from the production of the show will email or call the celebrity to inform them of the question they’re planning on asking so this person can plan the answers and give them topics about what’s going on in their lives and stuff, so the person conducting the interview knows what to ask. Sorry to ruin the magic for you.

“Yes, weeks ago”, Janine said, “Before you started dating royalty”.

“Oh. Right”, I said, trying to sound surprise and desperate, “God, Janine, of course she’s going to talk about Harry. What do I do?!”

“Well, that’s why you pay me”, she said, “We’re coming over for lunch, and we’re bringing the food so don’t worry about it. Now go back to answering those emails because there’s a few of mine in your inbox”.

Of course I knew I was going to Ellen DeGeneres right after the weekend with Harry, and I had told him already exactly how I was planning on talking about him.

Going back to my emails, before I could reach the ones from Janine, though, there was someone I knew I had to talk to first, and thankfully, she picked up on the first ring when I called her.

“Well, at least now I know you’re alive”, Livia said.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry”, I started, “I’m so so sorry!”

“Do you know how stressful it is to plan a wedding, Jenifer?”, my soon-to-be sister-in-law asked.

“No, but I bet it’s very-“

“And you know how hard it is when one of my bridesmaids won’t answer my emails?”

“I am so sorry!”

“Do you even know when the wedding is?!”

“In a few months?”

“In less than two months”

“Oh”, That close? I could have sworn it was more, “Right”

“Have you even called Monica to make sure she keeps your schedule clear for at least one week around the wedding day?”

“I-yes!”

“Really? When was that? Because when I called her last month to ask her to do it she said you hadn’t mention the date yet”. I sighed, closing my eyes.

“Okay, I know. I suck. I’m a terrible bridesmaid and sister. I’m really sorry”, I took a deep breath,
“But in my defense it has been really busy here”

“Oh, I know that”, she said, “I saw the pictures of you looking very busy in a beach in Africa with a hot prince”, I laughed.

“Sorry?”

“At least give me this”, she said, playfully, “Is he a good kisser?”, I smiled.

“Yes, he is”

“And is he good in bed?”

“Livia!”, I heard my brother’s voice in the background.

“What?”, she talked to him, “It’s not like I’m asking to overhear my conversation with your sister, go do the dishes or something”, I laughed. “So? You owe me that answer after completely ignoring the bride”

“Yes, he is”, I said and she laughed.

“God, you’re so lucky. Dating hot-good-in-bed royalty, looking like a Disney Princess, winning awards, being an internet meme… Now if you could just tell me you have a dress picked out already”.

“Hm, I’m looking at dresses right now”, I opened a new tab quickly making Google Image search of my favorite designers, loving Livia for not staying in the subject more than I could handle, “What’s the color you choose again?”, I heard her take a deep breath and understood I probably should know the answer to that question.

“Let me give you a hint, madrinha”, she used the Portuguese word for bridesmaid, “You gave the idea, you said it would look chic, I agreed with you, and because of that I’ve been hearing how unlucky that is from every older woman in my family for the last few months”.

“Black!”, I said, remembering our conversations about how ridiculous it was the whole superstition of wearing black to weddings, “Oh, that will look beautiful”.

“Yes, you said that when I told you I choose that color three months ago”.

“Right”, I said again, feeling the guilt coming back, “And we’re talking long dresses right? Have I said I’m sorry?”

“As long as you pick a nice long dress soon enough you’re forgiven”.

“Found it”, I said, looking at the most beautiful Elie Saab design from the previous year’s collection, “I’m gonna email my personal stylist to ask if she can get me it for the wedding and I’ll let you know as soon as she replies”

“Okay, am I gonna get a picture?”

“Sending you an email right… Now”

“Oh”, she said, a minute later, “Oh, that is beautiful. Oh, the other madrinhas will positively hate you”, I laughed.

“I hope that’s an approval from the bride to my bridesmaid dress?”
“Oh, yes it is”, she said and we laughed, “Should I add a place for Harry in our table?”

“No!”, I said, “No, no, no, no, no. Definitely not. Nope. Please don’t. No, we’re not. He’s not”, I took a deep breath, “He’s not coming. We’re not serious. Not that serious, if you know what I mean. We’re just… Getting to know each other”.

“Well, calm down”, she joked, “I’m just saying, we’d love to meet him”.

“I’m sure you’d love him, we’re just not… There yet”.

We talked for about another hour, about the wedding and my audition, their dogs and whatever else, and I finally had to turn off when I heard the doorbell. I had completely forgotten Rich and Jan coming for lunch. When I headed upstairs to let them in, expecting their mad familiar faces – for both having to deal with my new relationship and for having to be together again – I found another person at the door.

“Payton?!?”

“Jenifer!”, Richard’s only daughter smiled brightly throwing her arms in the air waiting for a hug, which I gladly gave her, “It’s so good to see you!”

“Pay, it’s been so long!”, I said, “You look beautiful, when did you get this big?”

“I’ve been wondering that myself”, said Janine behind her, “Hello, sweetie”, she kissed me in both cheeks before she went downstairs with Pay. Richard was coming right behind her carrying all the bags with the lunch.

“I’m sorry”, he said, “Pay had volleyball practice today but they canceled and my mother is out of town and her nanny couldn’t make it and Asher is out so-“

“And dad doesn’t understand I’m old enough to be left home alone”, Pay screamed from my living room.

“Calm down, you’re thirteen”, Rich said, “Hello, sweetie”, he gave me a kiss before heading downstairs. I made a mental note on how ironic it was that he and Jan greeted me the same way, and then followed him down.

“Jen, tell me”, Pay asked me when I helped her father with the bags as Janine started setting the table, “Is Prince Harry a good kisser?”

“Payton”, Richard sighed and I laughed.

“Yes”, I told her, winking, and she started squealing excitedly.

“Oh, my God, he’s so cute”, she said, following us to the kitchen. “Is he romantic?”

“Well, he’s a prince”, I said, “What do you think?”

“Oh, my God”, she said again and I laughed. “I wrote a song about you, you know?”

“Hey Payton!”, said Richard, “Let’s talk about something else, shall we?”

“Not that one, dad”, she said, on a tone that alarmed me, “After I saw this really beautiful edit of the two of you on Tumblr I kept thinking how messy and complicated it must be for two famous people to try and date each other knowing how the entire world would make such a big deal about it but deciding to be together anyway because they love each other”. I smiled at her rambling. “So I
kept thinking about it, two stars falling in love, and I thought how weird it was that my brain picked the word ‘star’ to talk about celebrities and so I wrote a song about two stars falling in love. But like, literal stars. But it’s really a metaphor for you and Prince Harry”.

“Really? Well I gotta hear that”, I told her, “And when it becomes a hit when you’re famous you better pay me royalties”. She laughed.

“Do you love him?”, she asked, “Can you keep on acting if you get married?”

“Pay!”, her dad said, “We’re heating the lasagna, why don’t you go watch TV on Jen’s room so we can talk business? We’ll call you when it’s time to eat”. Pay sighed, looking at me.

“Make yourself at home”, I said, “But you can stay if you want, I don’t mind. Especially since you should get to know what business talk sounds like”, she looked at her dad, seeing the frown in his face, and made her way to my bedroom. “What song did you think she was talking about?”, I asked Richard after she left.

“We need to talk”, he said, when he looked at me. I looked at Janine who was staring at the plates.

“Guys, what song was she talking about?”

“It’s called Manhattan”, Rich said, giving in, “She wrote it after you and David broke up, it’s about how you didn’t go back to the city for months after what happened.

“It’s a beautiful song”, Janine said.

“It’s not a big deal. Jenifer. We have more important stuff to talk about”.


“Really, Jenifer?”, Richard said, “The party-prince?”

“I mean, sweetheart, don’t get me wrong”, Janine said, “He’s a hotie, good job. But…”, they looked at each other before going through the same round of questions I had already answered before. For how long has this been going on? Do you like him? Is this serious? Couldn’t you have told us?

“Jenifer”, Janine said at last, after all the questions had been answered and we had been in silence for a bit, “Do you really think this is… Smart?”

“Smart?”

“Yes, smart”, Richard said, “Jenny”, he took a deep breath and the look on his face was apologetic, “First David. Then Tyler. And now the party-prince? Yes, the question is, do you really think this is a smart decision?”

“I don’t choose who I have feelings for, guys”, I said, “And Harry is a nice guy. A really nice guy”.

“Who’s coming from a terrible break up”, Janine said.

“Yes, which is why we get on so well”, I said, “We know what it feels like. We know how each other feel and we don’t mind each other’s fear of hurting again. He’s good for me”.

“Jenifer”, Janine said, “Your father called us”.
“Ugh, not you too”, I said, standing up to check the oven, “He called Taylor too. And mom called Monica. What is going on with all of you? I can still control my life I don’t need all of this supervision”.

“We think it might be wise if you go back to seeing Doctor Wright”, Janine said. I opened my mouth to reply but no sound came out so I just sighed, trying to keep my thoughts together. ‘One day’, I promised myself, ‘one day I’ll tell them the truth and they’ll have to answer about all of this lack of faith in me’.

“I’m not seeing a therapist just because I’m dating a guy”.

“Not because you’re dating a guy”, Richard started, “Because the guy you’re dating is going to inevitably put you at the top of a skyscraper of media attention. Way. Too. Fast.”

“I’m sorry, correct me if I’m wrong”, I started, “Where are the people that a month ago were telling me I needed more media coverage?!’

“Controlled media coverage, Jenifer”, he said, “The kind we plan, and look after so it doesn’t get out of hand. Not the kind that comes from you dating royalty. Good God, Jenifer, everyone knows what that people did to his mother, and his fiancé did not leave him for no reason”.

“And with your history of anxiety and panic attacks,” Janine said, and I started breathing fast seeing where this was going, “and the allergic reaction that you know it’s triggered when your emotional side is affected, we just thought it would be healthy to deal with this head first with help and maybe medication”.

I stared at them dead serious for what felt like half a minute, and then gave them my back as I went to check on the lasagna. I remembered the nights on Emergency Rooms because the sickness wouldn’t let me sleep. I remembered not being able to stand up because of my swollen feet and the undying cough that seemed to never leave me after the David-thing. I remembered the heavy medication, the needles on my arms and the sessions talking about my feelings to a total stranger.

In between the silence, I started hearing the sweet melody coming from my room, and I imagined Pay had found her way to my piano.

“Come in close, now, it’s time to tell the story, long ago, and so many years before we ever were, ever dreamed we even could be, there was her and her very first heartbeat”, she was singing, and I made my way through the hallway with Jan and Rich right behind me. “Fell in love with another burning bright, she dreamed of a way to ignite… She said ‘tonight, come on, come on collide! Break me to pieces I think you’re just like heaven. Why, come on, come on collide! Let’s see what a fire feels like, I bet it’s just like heaven’”. I leaned on the doorway, letting Payton Artchet’s sweet voice calm me down, as she went on: “So she sighs and she burns with desperation, learns to cry over love of constellations. Then a spark from a star shooting too close, they both smiled ‘What a day to explode!’”, she repeated the chorus, and I looked behind me to Jan and Rich.

“I’m okay”, I said, “And I know I’ve made you worry on the past. And I understand I was so young and living in Cali alone when we met, so you thought you needed to protect me. But I’ve been in this business for ten years, I know what I want, I know how to get it, and I know in the past I made the mistake of trusting people I shouldn’t have. But I need you to understand that I am okay now”. In the bedroom, Payton was still singing, unaware that we could hear her, and Janine and Richard exchanged looks. “And I can trust Harry. I’m not saying I’m gonna marry this guy. But I like him. And I’m not gonna start shutting people I care about out just because of mistakes I made in the past or just because they come with baggage, because, let’s be real, I have a lot of baggage too. And he doesn’t mind that, so I’m not gonna mind his. And, honestly, you should be proud of
me for that”. I looked at Pay before going back to the kitchen. I tried to bring myself to lighter tone of voice. “I mean, come on guys, I’m dating a cute guy I like, and it’s not serious or anything, and I’m having fun and getting a lot of media coverage, can’t we be happy about it and enjoy it to get me the serious roles I want?”.

“I’m just not sure this is the right way to get it”, Richard said. ‘You and I both, buddy’, I thought.

“Well, she’s right”, Jan said, “Be it the right way or not, the media attention we had talked about is here now”. She looked at me. “We’re just gonna have to deal with it and make sure it goes our way, and make sure Jen is safe”.

Richard shrugged, going back to the room to call Payton for lunch. And the rest of the time we had before I had to go to my interview was spent as we discussed how to answer if Ellen decided to talk about Harry – not that I needed their help, since I already had a plan. We talked about the Met Ball in Manhattan, to which I had been invited again, and about Payton’s mom, who she was excited to see, since she was going to be in town for the weekend.

But the truth is, through that whole day the words that really remained on my mind were Pay’s words, about two stars that decided to collide and exploded, becoming stardust.
When Nothing Hurts

Chapter Summary

Everyone has an opinion on Jerry, pop culture's new it couple, but when by accident Jen and Harry end up on the same very public party, all bets are off as literally everything goes wrong.

Chapter Notes

People's tweets about Jerry:
http://fakeituntilyoumakeitphff.tumblr.com/post/79513716812/fakeituntilyoumakeitphff
Met Ball outfit:
http://fakeituntilyoumakeitphff.tumblr.com/post/79386207623/myroyalfandomsets-now-i-long-for-yesterday-por
Ellen's Interview outfit:
http://fakeituntilyoumakeitphff.tumblr.com/post/79535673708/myroyalfandomsets-tell-the-world-that-we-finally
Song they dance to: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kFfKb_WEkCE

“Rise and shine, princess!”

The deep, loud, heavily accented voice was the first thing I heard in that Monday morning. I cringed, groaning loudly, and forcing my eyes shut as I hid myself in my comforter, pretending Harry was just a dream and trying to find another one.

“Come on, Silva, look”, he said, closer, and I sighed coming out of my cocoon of blankets, noticing what he had put in my nightstand. Bagels and coffee.

“Somebody is learning”, I said, my grog voice coming deeper than I planned, and Harry smiled. I picked one of the creamcheese filled bagels. “Ugh, my head hurts. What time is it?”

“Eight”

“Damn it, Harry, it’s too soon!”

“Well, some of us have a time to go to work”, he said, opening the curtain in my bedroom, “Despite having had a late night at a fancy ball yesterday, and despite being hangover… And I wanted to check on you before leaving”.

I groaned, bitterly, closing my eyes again, remembering everything we had had to do just a few hours prior, and foreseeing in my mind all the consequences that would probably come our way because of it.

“Why did we ever think this whole thing was a good idea?!”
“Hey, everything turned out okay at the end”, he said, sitting next to me, signaling for me to pass him a bagel.

“You call that okay?”, I looked at him, “Harry, if there’s any word that could properly describe the last couple of weeks we’ve had, ‘okay’ is definitely not it”.

“Not the last two weeks, but if you think about it, last night was pretty okay to me”, he said, “We weren’t caught, that’s a win in my book.”

“...I guess you’re right”

“I mean, sure, things didn’t exactly went as we planned, but, at the end, it all worked out, right?”

I sighed, trying to remember exactly what was the plan again. It had been two weeks since the world found out Prince Harry of Wales was dating Hollywood actress Jenifer Silva, and everybody seemed to think it was their problem and everybody seemed to have an opinion on it. Just two weeks since we had put our little evil plan to work, but it felt like a totally different lifetime. Time passes really fast when you’re the downfall of a Monarchy.

You could resume those two weeks, and the beginning of our fake relationship, in levels. Most of it was planned by us, a lot of it wasn’t, and a few mistakes could have blown the whole thing away had the right people pick them up – which didn’t happen.

I like to call the first level ‘bullshit’. With the news breaking with our pictures in Morgan Bay, people and the media took their turn to yell their opinions on it at whoever wanted to hear. No one was sure what was happening, so, of course, they made it up. The British newspapers interviewed almost every royal watcher available and called Kensington Palace for explanations so much they actually made a press release just to let people know they WEREN’T going to make a press release about it. The media wrote their stories on how mad ‘the palace’ was with how badly Harry had handled this and ‘upon finding out he had actually moved to the US for me, which they didn’t know’. They wrote on how outrageous it was that he was supposed to be there working and instead was going on holydays with actresses. They chased Chelsy Davy even harder everywhere she went to get her opinion on her ex’s new relationship. They had body language experts analyze our pictures (all of whom seemed to agree we were ‘very at ease with each other, and very much in love indeed’ - hysterical!).

The American papers had no fucks to give, so they skipped this phase going straight to calling me Princess Jenifer, and writing my life story back from Disney all the way until my ‘embarrassingly adorable’ Golden Globe Acceptance speech, and the whole meme situation. Then they started calling me the Real Life Disney Princess – get it? Because I was in Disney when I was a kid. Never mind it was Disney CHANNEL and that I played a freaking villain. I was an actress who had started on Disney and was now dating a real life prince, LETS USE THAT. People Magazine made a detailed article comparing me with Grace Kelly. Us Weekly swore they had the exclusive on how much the Queen was furious with Harry for dating an actress. New York Post published an 8 pages long timeline of the relationship – this after we had been together, as far as they knew, for days. Glamour had an actually really touching piece on how Harry and I had helped each overcome our heartbreaks. TMZ found a picture of the day I had my audition, when I was wearing an Hermès watch shaped with the letter ‘H’, and made a video about how it was ‘probably’ a present from Harry, because his name starts with ‘H’, and it was ‘engraved in the back with ‘I love you, H’ and ‘the date of when we first met’, when the truth was the watch had been a gift from Richard when I won my first People’s Choice Awards five years ago. I didn’t even remember the exact day I met Harry.

Literally all of these newspapers quoted ‘sources close to the couple’, who swore that: Harry and I
had ‘been together for the longest time and were so in love’, I ’made him move to the US because
she couldn’t take the long distance relationship anymore’, ‘they’re already planning on getting
married, which is why Jenifer is slowing down her career’ (ouch!), ‘Kate Middleton is furious
they’re stealing the limelight!’ and ‘she’s pregnant, they’re going to elope and sell it as a
honeymoon baby’. But hey, on the plus side, my first pregnancy rumor! I guess I made it.
Congratulations to me. It would have amazed us how easy it was to make people believe in
something when they wanted to, if we weren’t so used to it. Truth be told, our whole lives were
dedicated to it.

On the popular side, the public had their very own way of seeing things: It was just a
misunderstanding; I bet it’s not serious; they’re not really together; She’s too young for him; that
seems to be her type; that’s never gonna work; I wonder if she’s the reason he moved to the US; I
heard they met when he was still engaged; And then he broke it up a month later; he probably
cheated on his fiancé with her; I pity him, he’s clearly not the type to commit; I pity her, his family
will never let him marry her, she’s an actress; And she has tattoos; Poor Chelsy Davy; But oh, it’s
just like the Grace Kelly story!; Oh, she’d look great in a tiara... – their opinions were a mix of
dangerous inadvertent accuracy (‘it’s only a PR move, Harry would never be dumb enough to marry
an actress’), and borderline verbal assault.

A lot of this was going on online, on sites like twitter and tumblr, so I had to get my own blog,
under a cryptic name, of course, so I could keep my eye on the news, knowing it’d be way
suspicious if I kept on asking Alessa what people were saying over here. On the plus side: I had
a lot of fans on the so called ‘Royal Fandom’, and even my already stablised fans kept making the
prettiest edits of our pictures together. On the downside: no one can hate more than someone who
loves, and those people loved Harry and me more than it was sane to admit. On the other plus side:
it was a funny site, that Tumblr, a lot of cool posts about Doctor Who and all the other shows I
watched.

The bullshit phase only lasted a few days, and started do die after I came home in Manhattan for
the first time after we came back from South Africa. I had been in Los Angeles for a few days, for
a last round of auditions for the Thompson movie and an interview with Ellen DeGeneres that had
been scheduled for weeks and arrived in Manhattan on a Wednesday night, after deciding to flee
Los Angeles as quick as possible after realizing I’d have to have dinner with Selena if I stayed and,
it’s not that I didn’t want to, but for the well maintenance of our plan it was better if we didn’t meet
for a while – it was hard enough lying to them over the phone, but I was pretty sure it would be
almost impossible doing it in person and I was not about to let Harry give me an ‘I told you so’
about this.

The moment I arrived back home in Manhattan had also been planned. I knew getting there at night
was good because Harry would have gotten home from work already, meaning the paparazzi
would be there, and they still had no idea we lived in the same building, so their first thought – that
we were counting on – would be: Is she gonna sleep in his place? Do they live together? But just
because we were planning all of this, didn’t mean we liked it. We liked the final result we were
expecting, but the actual process of having to deal with the paparazzi was excruciatingly
exhaustive. I had to go through the whole part where I leave the car in a hurry, throwing the cabbie
his money, ignoring the punch in my stomach when I realize how many of them were there in front
of our building, wearing sun glasses at night, pulling my bag with me trying not to hit anything or
anyone in the process, getting really scared when they realize who I am and trying to ignore their
shouts so hurried and desperate they all merge into one big breathless question (HI JENIFER
SMILE LOOK OVER HOW LONG HAVE YOU TWO BEEN TOGETHER IS IT TRUTH HE
BROKE HIS ENGAGEMENT FOR HAVE YOU MET THE QUEEN?!). Thankfully, the
doorman and the security officer from the building managed to come to help me get inside,
carrying my bag for me as I walked as fast as I could, looking straight in front, shielding my eyes
from the flashes so I wouldn’t get blinded. Also, unlike what happens in Los Angeles, the paparazzi in New York like to give you space to walk like an actual human being without throwing themselves on the way to get a better picture, which, you know, helps.

That was the night people discovered actress Jenifer Silva was sleeping in Prince Harry’s apartment, which fueled a whole new round of speculation and rage. That’s the name of level two: speculation. Or, as I like to refer to it, more bullshit. How serious was the relationship? If his apartment is being paid with tax payer’s money, is her living being technically paid by the public too? Were the pregnancy rumors truth? Were they together before he moved there or not?

This was when the worst part happened, because, upon realizing how serious our relationship was, the paparazzi in London wanted answers even more, so they continued to follow Chelsy Davy around so much she actually tripped trying to get to her car one day (the paparazzi in London are clearly not as respectfull as in New York) and had to get stiches. She started sueing the paparazzi and decided it would be best to ask the law firm where she was working since the break up with Harry for a transfer to another filial in Johanesburg, where her parents lived.

Harry was so mad. Despite still being utterly mad at her for breaking up the engagement (hell, for even saying yes in the first place), Harry never wanted her to get hurt, or to be forced to leave London, a town she loved. He would never have admitted it, but I knew he still loved her, and I knew despite playing it like he just wanted the paparazzi to forget about the engagement so he could do his job right, the whole point of us doing the publicity stunt, on his part, was to give her a chance of a normal life as soon as possible.

But what they were doing to Chelsy went beyond the physical harassment. It was actually the reason behind the physical harassment: it was a story The Sun published affirming ‘according to close sources’ Harry and I had been together ever since we met the year before, when he was still engaged. They were saying he cheated on his fiancè with me, which was the real reason they broke up and he moved to the States. Amazingly – or not, at this point I don’t know why I’m still surprised – a lot of people seemed to believe it. And all of a sudden, I wasn’t a victim anymore. Harry wasn’t the victim of what had happened between him and Chelsy. No, all of a sudden, Chelsy was the victim. And we were the bad guys. The douchbag and the homewrecking slut that stole him. All of a sudden, the hot and cute new power couple, the ‘breath of fresh air to the royal world’, had become the downfall of the Monarchy. The party prince and the actress. The jerk and the slut. The ginger and the meme girl. It is a well-known fact that no one in show business lasts too long on the public’s hearts, so quicker than expected – in under two weeks-, Harry and I went from coolest thing to happen in pop culture to disgraceful bastards, and although Harry was used to it, and had not only experienced it, but seen it happen with his mother and sister in law, I wasn’t. All my life I had been either appreciated by the public – first on a very modest basis, then on a very quickly escalated basis with the Mediator fans-, or just ignored by them. I was used to the dedication and passion of some fans, and to people not knowing me at all, or even pity, after the David thing, but I wasn’t used to being this hated. So as I tried to deal with it as gracefully as possible, I became more and more paranoid about not messing up our plan.

Everytime I had to leave the building was crazy, now they knew I was living there – although they still seemed to think I lived with Harry-, the paparazzi didn’t all followed him to work, a lot of them stayed behind to wait for me. I had experienced crazy paparazzi frenezi before, on fan-conference tours abroad and stuff, but nothing this… Permanent. Nothing that would last everyday in my own home, affecting my daily routine, making me feel like an animal being watched in a zoo. This resulted in me working out on our building’s gym instead of going out for bike rides in Central Park and doing as much work from home as possible, instead of going out and, although I liked being home and could even work better from there, I missed walking or biceclying for Central Park, and stopping for a capuccino at Starbucks, or buying bagels on the street. I missed
the paparazzi from a distance, pretending they were giving me space so I didn’t know they were there. And I definitely missed their silence or the question’s they’d ask me before, like why was the show ending and if I was still mad at David. Can’t believe I’d ever miss things like this, but I did, because they were definitely better than the questions I was asked now, and the anger in their voices now, like all bets were off.

I quickly learned a very simple trick: earphones. I’d plug them in right before leaving the building, turning the music on as loud as possible so I couldn’t hear a thing until when I was safely inside the cab I now had to take to go wherever I had to. There’s another thing I missed: walking in the city. What was the point of living so close to everything if I had to take a cab to not be harassed?

As my level of stress and anxiety rose, my family, friends and management team’s level of concern rose too, but there was nothing I could do besides try and make them understand that despite Harry being the big reason why everyone was now so interested in me, I knew this could happen when I choose this career, so they shouldn’t worry about me. Lying to everybody was exhaustive, but at least I had one person who knew exactly how I felt, the one person who was doing the exact same thing at the same time: Harry.

We talked about it on the day I got back from Los Angeles, the same night everyone realized I lived in his building, when I came to his apartment late at night.

“I hope your last few days were as terrible as mine”, I said, entering his room without knocking.

“She says to her beloved boyfriend”, he said, sarcastic, looking away from his notebook, “And if you mean the twice as much paparazzi as before and lectures from what feels like every member of my family, then you’ll be happy to know that, yes, they were. Poor Thomas has been on the phone with the PR team almost all the time since the news broke”.

“Selena thinks I hate her”, I said, laying on his bed and staring at the ornamented ceiling, “Because I was in LA and purposely avoided her the whole time”.

“My father thinks our relationship is a cry for help”, he said.

“My management team and my family want me to see a therapist”, I said and his head snapped in my direction, looking confused. “Wait, I’m sorry. A cry for help?”

“You have tattoos, you’re a lot younger than me, you’re an actress…”, he said, spinning in his chair, “He says, his words not mine, he’s glad I’m finally letting my pain out and that I’ve found someone I can spill my rage healthily with, and he’s sure you’re a lovely girl, but he wishes I was more careful not to harm the family’s image”, he finished his sentence and looked at me, “Don’t take it personally, he doesn’t even know you”.

“Uhm, that’s the point”, I said, exasperated. “And yeah, that’s very personal”.

“Do you really want to talk about family concern? Because you just told me your family wants you to see a therapist about this”.

“But that has nothing to do with who you are”, I said, “I mean, it’s a little you. But it’s a lot more about me and my past, they’re worried I’m showing a self-destructive pattern”.

“Same thing here”, he justified, shrugging, “After the scandal of the broken engagement all they want is a normal, calm relationship for me and I show up with an actress. They seem to like I’m over Chelsy, but they’re not very happy about my choice of company.”

“Sounds like all they care about it’s the family’s image”
“A little bit, yes”, he said, standing up and walking towards the bed, laying down by my side, “My brother and Zara actually wanted to know if I was happy, so that’s something. And Peter just thinks I’m the new family hero for being with you- That you should take as compliment”.

“Zara and Peter…?”

“Cousins”

“Wow, you really did talk to your whole family, and I thought I had it bad for hearing a lecture from my father…”

“Peter texted me, technically. And Zara sent an email, but yeah. They’re starting to talk about getting me back to London sooner than expected”. I sighed.

“Isn’t it frustrating how little they trust us?”, I asked, “I mean, I know is not real, but to see their reactions, to see how little they trust we know what we’re doing… Is very… I don’t know”.

“Diminishing?”

“Yeah”, I sighed, closing my eyes, “It’s kind of fun, though, isn’t it?”, he smiled.

“Tricking the entire world’s media into believing a lie and thinking they’re winning when in fact they’re doing exactly what we want them to?”, he looked at me, “Hell yeah it is”, we laughed.

“What are we doing, Harry? This is absurd, this is ridiculous. This is the worst idea any of us ever had, this is the worst idea anyone has ever had… Ever”.

“Jen”, he held my hand, “You’re doing it again”

“Doing what?”

“Freaking out”, he said, “Focus on your… Breathing or something. Think about… I don’t know, let’s take it slow, one step at a time, alright? What do you have to do tomorrow?”, I took a deep breath, thinking.

“I have to call my accountant to discuss the new rent for one of my small businesses in Brazil”

“Okay, cool. What kind of business?”

“It’s a franchise. We had a good rent, but the landlord decided to raise it, we can either negotiate and pay a little more or try to move, but the location right now is really good and maybe the profit won’t remain as good if we have to move”

“Do you take care of all of those kinds of decisions?”

“My parents manage all we have there with my brother”, I explained, “But when something big happens, it’s up to me.”

“So, you’re not good delegating. Shocker”, he chuckled, “What else?”

“I have to call my personal stylist to see if she got me the dress for my brother’s wedding, and make sure everything is okay for the Mel Ball”.

“Right. Sunday, I’m going to that too. What else?”

“There’s th- What do you mean you’re going to that?”
“The Met Ball, at the Metropolitan Museum?”, I nodded, looking at him, “I’m going, I was invited”

“Harry,”, I sat up, letting his hand go, “I’m going to that!”

“I know, you just said it”

“No, you don’t understand, we’re both going to the same event, at the same time”.

“Aham…?”

“We’re supposed to be dating!”

“I know?”

“We can’t both go. Taylor’s going to be there”.

“So…”

“So, we’ll have to talk to her, and pretend we’re a couple for her”, I raised my voice, “How did you not tell me this before?!”

“I forgot?”

“Goddammit, Harry!”, I stood up, and he sat up.

“Jen, calm down!”, he said, “It’s not a big deal, we can do it! It’s not hard, we just have to hold hands and call each other ‘honey’”.

“Harry, no!”, I said, “This is not how girls work. First of all, ‘honey’ is a terrible nickname. And this is definitely not how girls work upon meeting their best friend’s new boyfriend. She’s going to ask questions, and she’s going to want to know how our first kiss was and stuff.”

“I think you’re overthinking again”

“Unless!”, I stopped, “Unless I try to talk to her beforehand, and beg her to go easy not to scare you off…”

“I’d like to think I don’t scare that easily-“

“And just to make sure I’ll have to talk to Monica about trying to keep us apart the whole night… I mean, it’s a big place, she’s famous, she’ll have a lot of people to talk to, right? And you, you’ll have to-why the hell are you going?!?”

“I have a job too, you know?”, he asked, “It involves raising money to finance the extraction of the debris of war, but up until now we’re only planning a gala for a photography exhibition, which is not enough”, he sighed, “So I’ll go over there, talk to some famous people, try and get their interest in the cause… I have to do something about it…”

“Okay, good, so you’ll have people to talk too, that’s good. Sorry, Tay, Harry’s busy talking to people about his work, it’s really important. People are dying and stuff. Yes, that’s a good excuse”.

“Are we going to… Arrive together or something?”, he asked.

“Hell no”, I said, “No, we’ll have to plan it so we’ll arrive the longest time possible apart from each other… We’re still trying to keep it to ourselves, you know? Or that’s how it has to look.”
If you have never been to a gala before, let me you all you need to know about it: it is the definition of fancy. It all starts with the theme of the night, when the personal stylists make the fashion choices for their clients. In my case, when we were trying to take as much advantage of the level of attention I was attracting as possible, everything was even more important. We opted for a black Alexander McQueen dress that left my back almost entirely nude, knowing people would realize it couldn’t be a coincidence that I was wearing a British designer. My hair was up in a high bun, I had a black smokey eye on, with a dark red lipstick, and golden jewelry that involved huge badass earrings. In galas, everything is couture, all the staff is dressed in black, including the photographers, that all stay at on side of the large marble staircase covered with the biggest red carpet you've ever seen. If you manage to take your eyes off the beautiful décor, you'll see the biggest gathering of celebrities New York City can provide.

When we arrived at the Met the sun had already set, but there were still a lot of people arriving. I stopped for pictures at the big red carpet area, feeling a bit cold and heavily underdressed, which always happened when I started seeing the fashion choices everyone else had made, thinking I could have done better. I made my way upstairs, slowly, stopping for pictures again and again, with Monica guiding me, and stopping to talk to Jennifer Lawrence, whom I had met at the Golden Globes and who was also a client of Richard’s – we kept joking about having the same name-, and other friends from the industry I hadn’t seen in a long time. By the time we finally reached the actual ball all I wanted was to sit down and get something to eat.

Harry and I had planned – and been advised by our people – to keep our distance from each other during the ball. There were no photographers inside, but since we didn’t want to drag more attention to ourselves – or so Thomas and Janine thought -, we were better play it safe. My personal agenda was that I had to keep Taylor and Harry apart, so I'd use every excuse I had to do so. Unfortunately for me, there was something I hadn’t counted on: our people had zero power over the seating chart of the Met Ball.

So for the first half an hour or so after I reached the dark ball room, starting to get really pumped with the electro music playing, it seemed like everything was on our side. I walked around, joking around, laughing and making small talk to friends I hadn't seen in a long time, like my cast mates from The Mediator –although it looked like Tyler was purposely avoiding me- and other movies I had made in the past, taking selfies for instagram, and everyone was kind enough not to bring up Harry at all – they just seemed very interested in the fact that they kept seeing a lot of me now, everywhere, but when someone tapped my shoulder as I was talking to Emilia Clarke, I knew it was show time.

“Hello, stranger!”, Taylor said and I smiled, hugging her.

“Tay! It feels like it’s been so long!”, I said, and pointed back at Emilia, “You remember Emilia, right?”

“Yes, we met at the Golden Globes”, Tay said, and she and Emilia hugged.

“How are you?”, Em asked her.

“I’m great, kind of hungry”.

“Yes, when are they going to serve dinner?”, I asked.

“I don’t know but I hope it’s soon enough”, Tay said, “Have you been to our table, by the way? I don’t think I remember the way there”
“Our table?” I asked, feeling the air disappear from my lungs.

“Yes, we’re sitting together as usual”, she said, as if it was nothing. “Me, you and your boyfriend”. My eyes widened, and I smiled to try and make up for it, nodding nervously.

“…Yay”, I said. As Taylor and Emilia engaged in a different discussion, I allowed my mind to think about what was happening and what to do. Clearly Monica and Thomas hadn’t been unsuccessful in sitting us separately. I could call Monica immediately and have her make up an excuse to change Taylor or Harry to a different table, or Harry and me to a different table since it seemed like the ship of keeping us apart had sailed. But I knew that if they had had weeks to do it and failed she had no chance of doing it now in minutes.

“Uhm, Em, would you excuse us? We’ll talk later”, I said, after a while.

“Sure, see you guys soon”, she smiled, and I grabbed Taylor’s arm, walking away.

“What’s up? Oh, there’s Gabe, I have to talk to him. Oh, he looks good”.

“Taylor, we need to talk about Harry”, suddenly, I had her full attention, “I had no idea we would be sitting with him tonight”.

“Why not, aren’t you guys together?”, she asked. “The staff here probably knew it and wanted to give you a chance of having a good night as a couple”.

“Yes, but as I told you before, we’re trying to keep it casual.”

“So?”

“So, this isn’t helping”.

“Right. Well, technically, you’re just having dinner side by side in a table with a lot of other people”, she said, “And if it starts to feel too… Coupley just keep talking to me”, she smiled, and I actually felt guilty for having such a good friend, “So, when am I going to meet him?”

“Taylor, listen to me”, I said, “Please don’t interrogate him, okay?”

“Interrogate?”

“Yes, you know what I’m talking about”, I said, “How did you two meet? How was your first kiss? How is the relationship going?”, she rolled her eyes, “It is crucial to me that you do not ask these questions tonight. Or any other about me and him, okay? We are just two people who happen to have a good time together, but it is not serious. If it was up to me you’d never meet but I guess that ship has sailed”.

“Well, thank you”, she said, sarcastically.

“You know what I meant”, I said, “Meeting the best friend, it kind of feels like pressure to make it serious, which is not what I want. He’s not even my boyfriend, there’s no labels, we’re not there yet.”

“Wow”, she said, crossing her arms on her chest, “You really like him, don’t you?”, that’s what she got from all of that?

“I never said that. I like him. I just… I don’t want to… Rush this, you know?”

“Yeah, but… You’re all worried about him feeling pressured and labels and stuff. You care. Would
“You want this?” she asked, “Being serious?”

“I just”, I sighed, “I just don’t want to mess this up”, I said, more honestly than I had expected.

“Honey”, she said, “It can’t all be about what he wants. If you want the relationship to go to another level, you should tell him”.

“Yes, I know. I’m just happy with how things are right now, okay? Don’t worry about me”, I spotted Monica from afar. “I’ll talk to you later, ok? I have to go see someone”.

“Yeah, sure, I’ll go say hi to Gabe.”

“Jenifer”, Monica said when I reached her, “How’s everything going?”

“What happened to keeping me and Harry apart?”, I asked. “Taylor said we’re sitting together”, ‘what the hell, Monica?’ I finished in my head, stopping myself from saying it out loud, remembering I was supposed to want to seat with him. "Did you not manage to ask for us to be in different tables?"

“Surprise!”, Monica said, smiling, “Me and Thomas talked a lot about it, well, we talked a lot about a lot of things lately. He’s a nice guy. And we though how bad it was that you two already had to deal with so much negativity from your families, the media and the public, when all you want is to be together and have a nice time, so we decided, since there’s no photographers here anyway, it wouldn’t hurt anyone to let you two enjoy your night together!”. She finished, with an excited smile, and I had to take a deep breath. “So we didn't even ask for you to be seated apart… Surprise!”

“...That is so nice of you”, I said, automatically, feeling like something was twisting my insides, and turned around, walking out. I picked a champagne flute as I walked and I barely made much distance when Harry found me, and kissed me in the cheek. I’m not going to lie, with the nerves I was having, it was good having someone kissing me for a change.

“We have a problem”, he said, in a whisper.

“I know, we’re sitting together”, I said, bitterly, “And with Taylor. Even worst news: apparently we have assistants that are good people and care about us. And I think Monica has a crush on Thomas, so there’s that”

“That is not what I’m talking about”, he said.

“Fuck, how many more bad news can we get tonight?!”, I complained and Harry just kept staring at me. He put his hands on his pockets and looked around, “Harry, what happened?”, it took him a while, probably trying to think of how to say it, but when he did, I felt my insides twisting again.

“He’s here”, he said, “Your ex is here”

“Tyler? Yes, I saw him. He’s weirdly avoiding me…”

“Jen”, he said, again, more cautious this time, and I got it that that was not who he was talking about. “Wait, you dated Tyler Alvin?!”

“Who were you talking about?”
“David Cobb is here, Jen… With his wife”.

It must have been ten minutes between when Harry said that and when I actually managed a response. I had to focus all my mind to breathing otherwise I don’t think I could do it, but in the meantime we somehow found our table, and he sat me down and ordered me some vodka.

“A wise man told me once that vodka is the number one step to numb all life’s pains”, I said, looking at the glass, and then took a deep breath looking around, wondering when had we gotten there. There were two more people that I didn’t recognize in the table, sitting across us and ignoring us completely. I looked at Harry, sitting by my side, facing me, with an arm around my shoulders.

“That’s the truth”, he said, smiling. “It’ll be okay. It’s crowded, it’s dark, everybody is busy… They’ll start serving dinner soon. Chances are you’re not even going to see him”

“I’ll be fine”, I said, patting his knee, and looked around our table, to the dark room, trying to see where David was. I picked the glass and drank the whole thing in one sip. “But I see Taylor heading this way. You should go”

“I’m not leaving”, he said.

“I’m not going to be alone, Taylor’s coming here”, I said, “Stick to the plan and avoid her, Harry, you know how important this is. Go.” He looked me in the eyes for what felt like several seconds and I wondered how much time we still had before Taylor got there. “Seriously, go”, I said, in a low whisper.


“Hi, it is so nice to meet you”, she said, and they shook hands. Taylor sat in her place to my left and turned to us. “Jen spoke a lot about you”. That was a lie, I had said as little as possible.

“She spoke a lot about you too”, Harry said. Also a lie. “All good things, of course.”

“Good”, Tay answered and they smiled at each other and I just stood there, asking myself why didn’t I just go to Med School or something. When did my life become such a soap opera?

“Hi”, I said, looking at the table’s centerpiece, “I’m Jenifer”. Taylor laughed, and Harry looked down.

“Have you seen him?”, Taylor asked, “The one-that-shall-not-be-named?”

“No”, I said, “Have you?”

“No, I didn’t even know he was here until Harry’s guy called me”. Harry’s guy? I looked at him.

“I had Thomas find her when I brought you here”, he said, “Thought it’d do you good”.

I sighed. His good intentions almost made me forgive him for going against the one thing I had told him to do tonight. Well, at least the one more important thing amongst all the other things I told him to do tonight.

“J, we want to help you”, Tay said, “But we need to know how. So you need to tell us what is it that you want right now. How are you feeling?”
I looked at the silver plate, trying to figure that out. I saw David very clearly in my mind, his tick
eyebrows, his short black hair, his green eyes and cute, messed up smile. I saw the wrinkled skin
and manicured nails of his big and strong hands. I could smell his cologne and I could almost guess
what he was wearing without even seeing him. I remembered the way his eyes gleamed when he
was trying to apologize for going back to his wife and not telling me about it. I remembered how
his hands tried to reach me and I remembered how his lips felt when he kissed me later that night
on the performance and I remembered how his skin felt on my hand as my character slapped his
right after that.

Even after all this time I just had so many questions.

“You know, we could go talk to him”, Harry said, “Or, you know, accidently bump into him or
something.”

“Why would she do that?”, Tay asked.

“Revenge?”, Harry suggested, looking at me, “I don’t want to sound pretentious but your new
boyfriend is a prince”, he winked at me, smiling, “Some people would consider that winning the
break up”. What he was saying was so absurd, and at the same time so sweet that I just started to
laugh.

“You could leave too”, Tay said, “Although I agree with your boyfriend, I really think it’d be best
if you stayed and faced this. After all, David was the one who did something wrong, he should be
afraid to go out in public”, it didn’t escape me for a second the way she said the word boyfriend,
and I realized Harry had called himself that, and now Taylor was thinking we were serious. Great.
“After all,” she went on, “When was the last time you had fun? Like, a really, really great night?”

“Have you forgotten about my amazing vacations in South Africa?”

“Okay, let me rephrase that. When was the last time you had a great time without worrying one bit
about who’s in the same room or who will find out about you two?”, I thought about it. When was
the last time I had fun without worrying about David, my career or the publicity stunt?

“The Golden Globes”

“So more than a month ago?”, Tay asked, “Look around you. Almost every single one of your
friends is here, your best friend is here,”, she pointed at herself, “your boyfriend is here”, she said
it in that funny way again, “They’re starting to serve dinner, which you just know will be amazing,
we have alcohol, and if at the end of it all you still feel like it’ll do you good, you can always go on
over there and rub your new boyfriend, who so happens to be a prince, in David and his wife’s
faces”.

She was right about one thing: everyone was walking around, finding their own tables and they
started serving dinner right after that. The two people sitting there had no idea who we were, and
we didn’t know them, so that was fun. And the food was delicious. Emma Watson took her place
on the seat next to Harry and then our table was complete.

“This must be the British table!”, she joked, upon greeting Harry with a modest curtseY which I had
to make a mental note to tease him about later on.

“Oh, hello”, he said, getting up to shake her hand.

“It is nice to see you again, your royal highness”, she said. Oh look, people actually call him that.
More teasing material.
“Ms. Watson, it definitely is. Let me introduce you…”, he pointed at me and Taylor.

“Emma, hi!”, I got up and kissed her on the cheek.

“Oh, right, I forget you actually know more people than I do”, Harry said, and we laughed.

Dinner was delicious and fun, and before I could tell, it was almost over. Harry was actually so full I had to finish his desert for him. The one thing I didn’t have the power to stop was him and Taylor talking, but thankfully, even though he called himself my boyfriend, she eased up on the relationship talk. She mostly asked him about his work, which he was glad to talk about, with a lot of insight from Emma on how the royal family helps the UK with their charity work. Harry explained he was there trying to get public people’s interest in the organization he was working with now, the Halo Trust, which worked deactivating debris of war – such as mines – that to this day still killed people. Both Emma and Taylor were very interested on it, so just like that, he got two famous girls to join the cause in the future. But the important bit of the conversation came when Emma told me these words:

“Oh, Jen, this reminds me. I watched your hilarious interview on Ellen the other day”, she said, “I wish we could all get away with inopportune questions like you did!”

“Oh, thank you”, I said, smiling. My interview with Ellen had aired a few days before, and the video was already on Youtube. On it, Ellen kept trying to ask about the pictures of me and Harry in South Africa, even showing them in her big screen, as all I said was ‘I don’t know what you’re talking about’, ‘I don’t know what you’re talking about, Ellen’, ‘what pictures? I don’t see anything’, ‘I don’t know any Harry’, very sarcastically naïve, to the entertainment of all her audience. We went a full block of the show like this, practically having two different conversations, and she kept asking about it, and I went to say things like ‘did you hear about the show’s series finale? I’m going to sob’, and she’d ask if I have met the Queen and I’d go, ‘I’m not saying someone dies, but, basically, someone dies’.

“And the result was so funny, you never know when a video will go viral, right?”, Emma went on.

“Yeah… You what now?!”

“Your interview video, when I watched it, it had almost ten million views”, she said. Harry looked from her to me, and quickly picked his cellphone.

“I can’t believe you’re going viral… Again”, he said.

When he found the link to my video, it did have more than three million views and a remix version where they made it into a really catchy song, where I repeat the words over and over again in an upbeat rhythm. Harry thought it was hilarious, so he showed it to Emma, who hadn’t seen the song yet, and then to Taylor, who quickly tweeted about it saying she was from now on going to be adept of what she called the Jen Silva Interview Method.

The dance floor started taking off again now that most people were done with dinner, and, at some point when an Ed Sheeran song started playing, Harry grabbed my hand and we made our way through Beyoncé and Jay Z, and a heavily pregnant Kim Kardashian with Kanyw West, and started dancing too.

“This is cool, you know”, he said, caressing my back with his right hand, the other holding mine in the air, “I like this”.

“Yes, I’ve been told I’m a great dancer”.


“No, you’re not”, he joked, “And you know what I mean, I mean this night. This night is pretty cool”. I sighed.

“First of all, how dare you?”, he laughed, “I’ll have you know I’ve been doing ballet for years now. You’re just saying that because you’re jealous of my moves. Second of all, everything that could possibly have gone wrong tonight, did”.

“Well, they still think we’re a couple”, he said, “That’s a win”.

“I guess you’re right”

He brought me closer to him, and touched my cheek with his, and the slow, sensual involving rhythm was so good I closed my eyes. Ed Sheeran was singing ‘I’m falling for your eyes but they don’t know me yet’ when Harry talked again, in a whisper close enough to my ear that I felt chills.

“Now, don’t freak out”, he said, “And don’t look. But David is sitting directly at two o’clock from us, and he’s staring”, I felt my body rigid, and my hands starting to shake, “Here’s what I’m going to do. I’m going to turn my head, I’m going to put my forehead in yours, I’m going to look you in the eyes for a few seconds and then I’m going to kiss you”.

I felt the air leaving my lungs way too fast once more, as many things crossed my mind. The last words I told David, the tabloids and the comments from people, saying I should have known. The fact I was about to be kissed by my publicity stunt boyfriend with the biggest celebrities in the industry watching. The fact I was between two other people for the role of my life. The fact I had had to consciously lie to my best friend about something this big for the entire night. The fact it had been so easy. The fact I kind of liked it. The fact I still remembered where each of his dapples were. The fact I hated his wife’s smile. The fact I kind of missed hanging out with his daughter.

When Harry’s forehead met mine, our noses touched, and I felt his breath on my lips. ‘Stop it’, I thought. ‘Fake boyfriend. Fake. You’re not supposed to like this’. I guess I had just been alone for too long. The last intimate contact I had had with anyone had been with Tyler when we were shooting the season finale of the show, which wasn’t exactly something I was looking back at very fondly.

“It’s funny how you can miss being the sole center of someone’s interest”, I whispered, enjoying the warmth of his breath on my face more than I should. I noticed he stopped rocking us to the beat of the song, so I opened my eyes, finding his blue orbs staring back at me, robbing me from air once more, in a different way. I noticed I was calmer than a second before.

“It’s funny how it doesn’t matter how much someone hurts you”, he answered, in the same tone. “You still want to be the sole center of their interest”.

“I didn’t mean his interest”, I said, realizing since he didn’t know what I had been thinking, he could have misunderstood what I said. “I just meant any interest. General interest by an attractive person of the opposite sex… I just miss having someone thinking that… That I’m interesting”, he looked confuse, “I just think it’s ironic how I had to find a fake boyfriend to have that again”, and I chuckled modestly.

“Jenifer”, he said, his eyebrows together in confusion, I looked into his eyes, somehow feeling very difficult to look any other way despite feeling he could see things inside of me I did not want him to. “I’m not saying this as your fake boyfriend; I’m saying this as your friend. You are worthy of interest”, he paused, to just let me read in his eyes he meant it, “You are the most interesting person I know”. I took my right hand out of his left one, placing it on his shoulder like the other one, and he hugged my waist. “You’re the most interesting person I know”, he repeated, in a
whisper, more to himself than to me, sounding a little surprised this time. Before I could think too much about it – if all of this wasn’t already thinking too much about it – he hugged me tighter and closed his eyes, and then he kissed me.

I don’t know if it was the things he was saying right before he did it, or the fact the last person I kissed for real had to quit to get away from me, or that the guy before him had been the last straw in a strike of bad relationships that destroyed me almost completely. I don’t know if it was the vodka, or the cold air conditioning in the Met, or Ed Sheeran’s sweet voice going ‘I’ve been feeling everything from hate to love from lust to truth and I guess that’s how I know you’, but when I was greeted again by the soft, wet, feeling of being kissed, when I felt his tongue meet mine, I made the conscious decision of pretending everything in my life was in its rightful place, and pretending all of the tabloids were speaking the truth and Harry and I were a couple for months now, because we had met and I had caught the Prince’s interest, because I was the most interesting person he knew. I pretended he gave me the Hermès watch and I pretended it was engraved with the date of when we met, and I pretended that everything in that somehow fun yet messed up evening was made okay by the simple fact that I was there with my boyfriend. I pretended that I had one, and that we had labeled the relationship as serious on that very night, and that I didn’t even know my ex-boyfriend was watching us, that this fictional being in my mind had just kissed me because he wanted to, and as I did this, and as Harry – and not the fictional, hypothetical being I invented in my mind – kept holding my tighter and tighter I felt my hands burn and I felt my head dizzy, and I felt myself warming up in ways that blankets and coats could never help with. And I remembered how much I missed being wanted and it almost physically hurt me to know it wasn’t truth.

When I finally realized making this kiss longer than it should be just because I felt lonely would be tremendously pathetic, I gently pushed him away, leaving our faces still close, because, after all, we were still a couple, not two very awkward friends who were pulling a publicity stunt together. When he looked up – probably to check if David was still watching– I realized in that moment he wasn’t just doing it for the publicity, after all, there was no photographers inside the Met Ball. I realized he was doing it for me, so that I could win my breakup, for friendship. Somehow that thought hurt me even more, the thought of this really kind guy doing things like this – and almost jeopardizing the entire plan by meeting my best friend just to make sure I’d be okay earlier – and still being in just as much pain as I was, or even worst.

“Thank you, Harry”, I said, honestly, as we went back to rocking each other to the beat as a new song began.

“Yes, I’ve been told I’m a great kisser”. I laughed. Loudly.

“No, you’re not”, I joked, lying, “and you know what I mean”. He looked at me.

“I do”, he said, and kissed my forehead. “I do”.

The night went on a lot better after this, the DJ played some upbeat music and we danced even harder, and were joined by Taylor and Emma, and everyone from the Mediator. We drank vodka and champagne and as I looked back at it now, on the Monday morning right after Harry woke me up with bagels and coffee, I realized I didn’t even see David that night. I know he left early because Monica informed me at some point, but throughout the entire thing, I didn’t actually look at him, or his wife, not even once. And although that didn’t matter much, since I could still see him very clearly in my mind, it was nice thinking that after all, after everything going wrong, I managed to have that one great night of dancing, friends and booze, without my stupid ex completely ruining it.

And then I remembered the kiss, so different from the one in Morgan Bay, to the sound of Ed
Sheeran and I was so glad he couldn’t read my mind and know what I was thinking when he was kissing me.

“You’re right”, I said to Harry, after a long time when we just sat there in my bed, eating bagels and watching the morning news. “Last night was pretty okay”.

“Yes it was”, he agreed, “Almost worth the hangover”. I smiled.

‘And last night Manhattan hosted another edition of the Met Ball, and the stars were all reunited for what specialists call one of the most important nights for fashion’, the news anchor was saying, ‘but everybody’s eyes were really on The Mediator star Jenifer Silva and Prince Harry as they showed up for the first time in an event together as a couple, and although they arrived separately they were seen leaving together back to their Upper East Side love nest—’

“Who the hell says love nest?”, Harry asked, looking like those words hurt him more than the hangover.

‘… And with the social media revolution caused by websites like Instagram and Twitter, pictures of the couple emerged last night…’, they showed two Instagram pictures: one of me and Harry at our table, with me leaned up to him and smiling – if I recalled, that was when I was finishing his dessert -, the other from our kiss in the dance floor.

“The fact that this is news it’s very depressing”, Harry said, “But on the plus side, more progress for our plan. Yay”, there was a pause, and after I didn’t answer, he looked at me. I was staring at my cellphone, reading an email over and over again, trying to make sure I wasn’t hallucinating. “Something wrong?”

“I might still be drunk”, I said, giving him the cellphone, “Would you mind reading me this email out loud? I think I’m imagining things”, he picked it up and took a deep breath.

“Dear Jen, 911!!! Call me as soon as you read this. Leonard just called me himself to let me know they want you. They want you for the lead! Call me, I have the details. Calling Joshua right away for contract. Call me! Love, Rich.”, he finished. “I don’t… I don’t understand. Who’s Leonard? Who’s Jos—”, he stopped, looking at me.

I don’t know if It was the Instagram pictures of us still displayed on the television, or the headache, or the amazing taste of the cappuccino he had brought me, but I had tears streaming down my face, and my hands covering my mouth, trying to bring myself to believe the words my fake boyfriend – my friend – had just read out loud on the cloudy Monday morning of April, the first morning of April.

“Jen, what the—“

“Leonard, Charles Leonard”, I said, cleaning my face, “He’s the director of the Thompson movie, that one about the family that loses the little boy to cancer?”, he nodded, remembering the one project I had been talking about ever since he moved to the City. “So, apparently Charles called Richard, who’s my manager, to say they want me, and Richard is going to call Joshua, who’s my lawyer, to, I’m guessing, start talking about my contract…”

“But what does it mean, they want you? Want you for what?“

“Harry”, I put the coffee and the bagel back on the plate on my nightstand, and kneeled on the mattress, turning to Harry with the biggest smile on my face, “He means they want me for the movie, they casted me for the lead role in the Thompson movie!”}, Harry’s face broke into a
gigantic genuine smile, “I got the part!”

And then, nothing hurt.
Back To The Therapy

Chapter Summary

Jenifer goes back to therapy; Harry finds out about her issues; They’re forced to make birthday plans as well as wedding plans and the stress leads her to tell someone the truth.

Chapter Notes

Jen's outfit:
http://fakeituntilyoumakeitphff.tumblr.com/post/80066299109/myroyalfandomsets-tell-her-that-i-love-her-por

“This is stupid”, I said.

“Thank you, Jenifer. That’s very insightful”, he said, sarcastic, “Now why do you think you’re here?”, I stared right into his face, trying to ignore the obnoxious yet obvious choice he had made of wearing a light yellow suit with cargo pants. I sighed.

“I’m here because my parents aren’t”, I said.

“How so?”

“They feel guilty they weren’t here when Us Weekly published pictures of David cheating on me with his ex-wife, well, she’s his wife again now, I guess. I read they remarried. So now my parents wanna make sure I’m okay all the time, even when I’m doing normal things, things they should be happy about, like dating again”.

“So you blame your parents for this?”, he asked, “Do you blame them for not being here?”

“Dammit, Dr. Arrow, that’s not what I said at all”. My therapist sighed.

“I’m just working with what I have here, Jenifer”

“Did you talk to Dr. Wright before this?”, I asked, suspicious, “You did, didn’t you? She told you how to make me talk”

“We did exchange notes”

“Ahh-hah!”, I said, pointing my finger at him, who was still staring at me unimpressed.

“That’s what doctors do when they start treating other doctor’s patients, it’s very normal. Now,”, he adjusted himself in his chair, “that’s not about me, Jenifer. Do you blame your parents for leaving you alone in this country?”, I sighed again, rolling my eyes.

“No.”
“Really?”

“Yes, they never liked it here. They missed their families. My brother hated speaking English all the time”

“And you did? You liked it here?”

“Don’t you have these answers in the notes you exchanged with Dr. Wright?”

“Just… Answer the question, Jenifer”, he took his glasses out, cleaning them in his shirt.

“I didn’t really… I never remembered much besides here. It felt weird moving back to Brazil. I was ten when we moved to California, I was used to this country. I had gotten into college, so I stayed. I never thought much of it, it was just… Natural”.

“Then if you don’t blame your parents, why do you think you’re here?”

“Because my parents and my management team don’t think I know what I’m doing with my life”, I smiled, sarcastically.

“Do you?”

I sighed for the millionth time, making myself comfortable in the couch, knowing we’d be there for a while. I hated therapy. I hated therapy with all of my being, but a lot happened after the Met Ball night, so my management team and my parents were deadset on me going back to treatment.

On the last night of March when Harry and I put on some fancy clothes and drove to the Met Ball – separately, of course, trying to convince people we weren’t really together -, we found out our two assistants – well, my assistant and his aide – had changed the plans to let us seat together and ‘enjoy our night as a couple’. The problem was, despite not having photographers, the Met Ball still had people on it. And people had cellphones with cameras, and people had eyes and people not only managed to take two pictures of me and Harry – one of us kissing -, but there were also reports all around from people saying we took the dance floor when an Ed Sheeran song started playing – it was truth-, saying it was our song, and even saying Harry and David had a very heated argument about me. It’s not like we could deny any of this, so the public and the media went on and on about it and there was nothing we could do except accept the fact that we now were an official couple (one person who definitely thought we were an official couple was Taylor, who wasted no time on calling Selena and letting her know Harry was now calling himself my ‘boyfriend’). Janine and Richard and my parents were sure I was lying about being in the same place as David that night, they were sure I was keeping things in, so I’m sure that didn’t help at all, but the one thing that really made them force me into therapy again was what happened after the Met Ball: when it was announced the title and official early casting for the Thompson movie – now called Wild and Free -, when it was announced I was cast for the lead role of Vanessa Thompson, who lost her four years old baby son to cancer after a two years battle. Mr. Thompson was going to be played by Jonathan Groff, and despite the initial opinion of all of Mrs. Thompson’s fans (she wrote a book about her family’s struggle that became a bestseller) that both me and Jonathan were too young for the parts, what really was concerning my family was the dramatic nature of the story and how it would affect me on top of all of the attention and hatred I was now on center of.

So because my original therapist, Dr. Wright, was in California, Janine and Richard asked her opinion on a good therapist in New York City, and she recommended Dr. Arrow. And because I felt guilty for lying and worrying so many people, I agreed to a few sessions. The hilarious part was, I wondered what would happen if I actually told him what I was feeling and why I was feeling it.
“I’m not sure I know what that question even means”, I said.

“Do you know what you’re doing with your life?”

“I’m an actress. I’m shooting a movie in the summer. I have a Golden Globe, some People’s Choice Awards, some MTV Movie Awards, a lot of Teen Choice Awards. I have a lot of money. I invested most of it. I have a lot of small businesses in Brazil. I’m going to be a bridesmaid in my brother’s wedding soon”, I stopped, “I guess that’s all I know for sure”.

“And your boyfriend?”

“What about him?”

“What do you know for sure about him?”

“…You can’t tell anyone anything I say here, right?”, I asked, suspicious.

“There’s such thing as doctor-patient confidentiality, yes. And besides that I also signed a confidentially contract with your lawyer”

“For how long?”

“Life-long”, he said, “My life, in case you’re wondering, even if you die first I still can’t tell anyone, or write a book, or anything”

“But you’re going to report this to my parents?”

“No, I’m not. You’re not underage.”

“Richard Artchet?”

“No”

“Janine Merchant?”

“No”

“Monica Williams?”

“No”

“My boyfriend is twenty-eight. He is ginger. And tall. Great shoulders. Great blue eyes. He’s British, you know what that means: great accent... He’s a prince, which means if two or three people died he could actually rule the United Kingdom. God help us all, I guess-“

“Jenifer, I meant if you know anything for sure about your feelings for him?”, Dr. Arrow rephrased his question.

“Oh”, I thought about it, “I feel, for sure... He is a great guy. Really great. The kind that wants to make sure you’re okay, you know? I feel he... I feel he deserves the best”. He sighed.

“Is he a good boyfriend?”

“Yes”, I said. “He sent me flowers just the other day”

That was a funny story, actually. Not many days before I was sitting in my couch staring at my
sketch notebook with all of my dress designs, deciding if I would make one specific model in lace or simple silk (you know, one day, when I had the chance) when the doorman ringed to let me know I had a special delivery. When the doorbell ringed in my apartment, a guy was standing there, barely visible, because he was holding the biggest bouquet of pink roses I had ever seen. He turned to the side so I could see his face.

“Afternoon, ma-am”, he said, surprise flickering in his eyes one second later – something I was used with, when people recognized me.

“Hi, uhm, wow”, I said, uncertain of what to do, “Maybe you should, uhm- Can you put it there, please?”

“Sure thing”, he walked to the side table on my foyer and tried to place the vase there, but the circle of flowers was so big it didn’t fit, so I told him to put it in the dinner table – that’s how big it was. “Good day”, he said, making his way out, and I ran back to the table to read the card, that I could barely find in the middle of all the flowers, when I got it, this is what I read:

‘Dear Jen,

Nathan is making me do this. He says I should apologize for the media harassment and let you know I appreciate you putting up with it. I could just tell you but apparently I should ‘be a gentleman’. Fuck being a gentleman, have you seen the size of this thing? There’s 150 roses there. He made me choose this one. Cost me $400, I better get a refund on this, Silva.

Love, H.’

I laughed, looking at the roses, finding the whole thing hilarious. I instantly took my phone and took a picture of it, planning on sending it to the girls to talk about how hysterical it was, but then I remembered I couldn’t. Because they wouldn’t get it. The only person I could really talk about this with was Harry, and that wasn’t the same. I started getting really done with not being able to properly talk about Harry to anyone – at least not the truth. I ended up just posting the picture on Instagram, with the caption ‘It’s a good day =)’, and the comment section flooded with people asking if they were from Harry.

What I did then was send Harry a basket with a bottle of Vodka and a box of Godiva Chocolate Truffles, with a card that said:

‘Dear H,

HAHAHA Nathan is awesome! Enjoy these, as it is the only refund you’ll get. Appreciate the flowers, though.

Love, Jen’

I received another smaller bouquet on the same day, and the card read:

‘Dear Jen,

Fuck you.

Love, H’

“Do you think you sabotage yourself?”, Dr. Arrow asked, and I sighed, coming out of my little trip
down Memory Lane.

“Have you seen Freaky Friday?”, I asked and Dr. Arrow closed his eyes. It was hard to know if this whole thing was more painful for me or him.

“No, Jenifer, I never saw Freaky Friday.”

“You’re lying, everyone’s seen Freaky Friday. Anyway, Lindsay Lohan’s mom is this therapist and when they change bodies she has to teach her daughter how to be a therapist really quick, right? So she tells her ‘it’s very easy, all you have to do is listen to what they say and ask them how they feel about it’”, I said, “Is there any truth to that? Is it that easy?”

“I don’t know, Jenifer”, he said, “How do you feel about it?”, I laughed.

“Good. You’re good”.

“So you don’t think dating someone who puts you even more in the limelight is dangerous?”

“Ugh”, I groaned, “The limelight is there anyway. It was there before Harry, it’ll still be there after him”, I hoped, “He has nothing to do with it, he just… Intensified it. Or did you not hear about the stupid tabloids and media harassment I went through after David? That happened before I even knew Harry.”

“Do you love him?”, he asked, and I stood up and walked to the window in frustration. As if it wasn’t enough lying to the media, my family, my management team, my friends, now I had to even lie to my therapist. Outside, it was a sunny warm day in Manhattan and everyone was enjoying as they could. The number of tourists had increased, children were out and about in the parks, which were as green as could be with the last of the snow finally melting, and some brave women were even wearing dresses. Everyone was enjoying while it lasted, because we all knew what to expect after heat waves in April before summer finally came: a thunderstorm.

“I don’t want to talk about it”.

“Well, we could not talk, but that’s the opposite of what you’re paying me for”

“What am I paying you for?”

“To talk about what’s happening in your life and how that makes you feel”

“And you think the only thing happening in my life is the fact I’m dating a prince?”

“That and that you’re about to play a grieving mother of three on a movie, yes,”, he stood up as well, continuing to talk as he walked to a table nearby to pour himself some coffee, “and me and the people in your life that care about you think, given your history, the more you talk about how you feel, the safer you’ll be when faced with the backlash from the public over your relationship and the negativeness that comes with your future role in, what’s the name of the movie again? Wild and Free?”

“Yes. And that’s not all my life is about right now, thank you very much”

“And what else would you consider interesting?”

“Excuse me, have you not heard my Ellen Show interview went viral?”, I asked, turning around in my heels, smiling sarcastically, “It’s not all negativity, a lot of people seem to agree I’m adorable”
“Oh, yes,”, his voice sounded so ironic I could almost hear him thinking ‘oh yes, adorable, sure’, “the interview where you purposely avoid confrontation about your new relationship with Prince Harry-“

“That is not what I did!”

“Okay, then let’s talk about it”, he turned around as well, sugar pot in hand, “Is Prince Harry of Wales your boyfriend?”, ‘he has a contract’, I told myself, ‘he signed a contract, he can’t tell anyone’.

“Yes”, I said, crossing my arms in my chest defiantly.

“How long has it been going on?”, he went on.

“A couple of months now”

“Who kissed who for the first time?”

“I kissed him”, I answered, improvising, realizing he was turning that into a rapid fire kind of thing.

“What day exactly?”, ‘think, Jenifer, think, he moved in in the beginning of February…’

“The 13th”

“What day of the week was it?”, ‘trick question’, I thought, ‘nobody remembers in what day of the week something happened’.

“I don’t remember”

“Did you like him long before that?”

“A few days, not long, it kind of just happened”

“Was there music playing?”

“Yes, an Ed Sheeran song”

“Did he came on to you before that?”

“No”

“Was he surprised when you kissed him?”

“Yes”

“But did he kiss you back?”

“Yes”

“When did you meet?”

“Last September, in a gala in Kensington Palace, I wore Ziad Nakad and Valentino shoes with a Marchesa clutch”

“Who talked to whom first?”

“I talked to him”
“Were you attracted to him?”

“I- He was engaged”

“And you weren’t blind”, he turned back to his coffee mug.

“Uhm… Yes, I thought he was attractive. But we never- Nothing happened until February”

“I didn’t ask that”

“But you were going to, everybody does”. He didn’t speak for a while, and when he got back to his chair, he took his sweet little time taking a sip of his coffee before talking again.

“Do you love him?”

“I-“, I took a deep breath, thinking of the kiss on the beach, under the Morgan Bay sky, so awkward and simple, and of the kiss on the Met Ball, so much more complex, strong and warm. “I don’t- I like him a lot. I’m dating him, so of course I do, I just think love is something that should be handled carefully and- I’m sorry, how is this relevant?”

“We were talking about you avoiding confrontation on what concerned your relationship”

“Right. That. Well, as you can see, I don’t… Do that. I just-“

“I don’t think you’re really dating him”, he said, serious, and looked at me waiting for a reaction.

I felt my heart on my throat as I weighed my options, trying to ignore the choir of ‘WHAT OH MY GOD HOW DOES HE KNOW I WAS SO GOOD I MADE ALL THE ANSWERS UP REALLY FAST’. Option 1, I could deny it all and go to my grave doing so. Option 2, he did sign a pretty good binding contract, I could come forward, ease my humiliation and threaten to sue him. Option 3, I could play dumb until either a miracle happened or I had more time to think of what to do. Guess which one I picked?

“What is that supposed to mean?”, I said, making my most confused expression.

“I think you’re dating the idea of being in control of a relationship for the first time.” He said and I let the air out from my nostrils, closing my eyes in relief. ‘Oh, thank God’, I thought, ‘he’s not psychic, just thinks he’s really smart’. “You kissed him first, you talked to him first…”

“That is completely normal”

“It is, but coming from someone who so many times was a piece of the puzzle the entire time until the break-up, I think this time you’re more attracted to the idea of being the player instead of the piece than the actual relationship itself”

“This is the most ridiculous thing I have ever heard”

“So you don’t think you have a problem with control?”

“I know I do!”, I said, going back to the couch, “But why should it mean-“

“You’re reluctant to admitting deep permanent feelings for him, you feel guilty about meeting and feeling attracted to him when he was still unavailable, you don’t seem very confident in the future of the relationship-“

“That is because he’s from London”, I said, “he’s not going to stay here forever”
“He could, wouldn’t be impossible. What if he falls in love with you? What if he wants to stay?”, I rolled my eyes, “What if you could make the relationship work long distance?”

“Never”

“Because you don’t believe love is strong enough?”, he asked, “Or because you know you don’t love him, just the idea of being in control of th-“, because there is a God above, my phone ringed in this exact time and I hurried to pick it up. “You didn’t turn off your phone?”

“Sorry, I just”, I looked at my phone, “I have to get this, is my boyfriend. You don’t mind right?”, I laid back in the couch, “Hi, babe”

“Jen, we have a problem”, Harry’s voice echoed in my ears.

“I know, I miss you two!”, I said, pretending not to see the expression on Dr. Arrow’s face, “But we’ll talk soon, I’m going home right after this”

“Oh, Harry said, cautious, “I’m assuming therapy is not going well”

“You’re so smart”, I said.

“Jen, this is- I just thought you’d like to know I just had the longest phone conversation of my life with your friend Taylor Swift”, my eyes widened automatically, “and it involved your birthday, all of your friends, and… She mentioned some problems you had last year and why you went to therapy then… I just thought you’d like to know.”

“Thanks, uh…”, I said, serious now, “Can we talk later?”

“Yes, we should. I was gonna say we could meet for lunch, but I’ll just eat in the office today”, he said, “I really think we should talk about your birthday thing, things are getting really complicated here. Taylor does not get no for an answer, does she?”

“I’ll be there in twenty”, I said, turning off, not giving him time to respond, “Well, this was lovely, but I’m going to have to go”, I told Dr. Arrow.

“Did something happen?”, he asked. ‘I’m afraid so’, I thought.

“I’ll see you next week, Dr. Arrow”, I said, smiling, picking my purse and making my way to the door.

Dr. Arrow’s practice was less than two blocks away from The Halo’s offices, but because I knew I’d attract paparazzi attention if I walked there, I knew I had to take a cab. I had had a stressful morning, and I knew there were bad news waiting for me when I reached Harry, so I made the decision of not letting the paparazzi get to me that day, and when I walked out and stepped onto the street to try and get myself a cab – which was always made more difficult by the fact I couldn’t whistle -, and they got closer to snap pictures, all I did was act as if that was the best day of my life. It’s a good thing I’m an actress and can pretend well.

“Jenifer! Jenifer over here!”, they shouted.

“Good morning, boys”, I said, starting to look for a damn cab.

“Jenifer, hi”, a guy with a big video camera stood in front of me.

“Dude, I’m trying to get a cab”, I said, trying to see the road behind him.
“Oh, sorry. Hey, uhm, how is it living with Harry? Does he wash the dishes?”, he asked, and I chuckled, somehow just knowing he was from TMZ. “Do you like living in that building? Must be nice, close to Central Park and all”

“Ahn, yes, I love it, that’s why I’ve been living there for a year now”, I said, taking advantage of the perfect opportunity to deny the rumors Harry and I lived together.

“Really? Do you not live with Harry?”, the guy asked, excitedly, and I finally managed to attract a cab’s attention, “Bye Jenifer, have good a day”, he said when the cab stopped.

“Thanks, you too”, I answered, realizing that treatment meant a lot less stress to an already stressful situation.

I gave the cabbie more money and told him to keep the change, feeling guilty for making him drive me for two blocks, and got out of the cab making my way through the doors as fast as possible, glad the paparazzi around the entrance of the building realized it was me when I was already there.

After I was in, I took a look around the huge busy lobby, trying to figure out where to go, when someone found me.

“Jenifer”, Eddy said, “Hi”

“Hi, Eddy, what's up? Do you know how do I get to Harry’s office?”

Ed was the American protection officer Thomas had hired after they arrived in Manhattan. Harry should always have three POs, and Ed was hired to assist Nathan and Clark on walking around the city.

“Yes, just go over there, and- You know what? Let me help you”, he guided me to the reception.

“Clara”, he talked to the young lady behind the counter, “Ms. Silva is here to see David Mountbatten on floor 42, his secretary’s number is 3456. Just tell him his girlfriend is here for him, he’ll know what to do”. Clara nodded, smiling at me, and started calling… David’s secretary.

“Who’s David?”, I whispered to Ed, when Clara was busy talking.

“Harry’s fourth middle name”, he said, smiling. Right. I should know that, I guess, I’m his girlfriend.

“I love your show”, Clara told me, in a low tone, when she was done.

“Thank you”, I said, smiling.

“You can go up, here’s your visitor’s badge”

“Let me escort you up”, Ed offered, and guided me to the elevators. We made small talk until we reached the 42nd floor, where Halo had their American headquarters, and I quickly saw Clark.

“Hi, Jen”, he said, “Are you here for Harry?”, he asked.

“Yes. Hi, Clark”, I said, and Ed bid us goodbye and got back into the elevator back to the lobby, as Clark guided me to the smaller reception under the words ‘HALO TRUST’ in big aluminum letters. I showed the receptionist my badge, and she pointed to the corridor to my left.

“It’s ok”, said Clark, “I’ll take her there”. I noticed Clark was wearing a similar badge to the one Ed had, a red one, with their picture, and I wondered if they had the freedom to go whatever they
“You guys stand guard everywhere?”, I asked, realizing Nathan was at the door of what I thought was Harry’s office.

“Yes, one in the lobby to keep an eye on the paparazzi, one in the elevator and stairs, and one in Harry’s office”, he explained, “We take turns”.

“Ms. Silva, hello”, a skinny young man greeted me, smiling, coming from one of the many isles of cubicles, specifically, the one in front of Harry’s door, “I’m Jonathan Scott, I’m Mr. Montbatten’s”, he winked in a very obvious manner, still smiling, “secretary. Welcome.”, he opened the door to Harry’s office for me and let me in first. Clark went back to his place on the elevators and Nathan greeted me.

“Yes, hello. Hi, Nathan”, I said, to the over-enthusiastic secretary and Nate, taking a look at Harry’s office right after. It wasn’t huge, all the walls were white, and he had a great view of the city. “Is Harry here?”

“He’s in Mr. Bonnem’s office, but he should be right out”, Scott said. “I’ll let him know you’re here when he does. Make yourself at home!”, he smiled, closing the door behind him and Nathan as they left me alone in the room.

I barely thought twice before leaving my purse in one of the chairs and making my way to behind Harry’s big glass desk, sitting comfortably in his huge leather chair and crossing my feet on the table. I looked around, noticing the huge picture of London’s skyline in the opposite wall, and smiling at myself upon doing so. There was a white magnetic board in another wall, with numerous papers and annotations on it and about half a dozen post-its around Harry’s Mac Book Air’s screen. I read a few of them: ‘present for Jen’, ‘call T Swift back’, ‘call Wills’, ‘THINK OF SOMETHING’. I had so many questions.

I turned on his notebook and went to Youtube, trying to find a way of passing my time. The remix song of my interview with Ellen DeGeneres was on the popular page, so I quickly searched for something random so I wouldn’t start thinking about it. When Harry got to his office about fifteen minutes later, that’s how he found me. Laying in his leather chair, my feet on his desk, Youtube opened on his notebook.

“Well, I’m glad you made yourself confortable”, he said, closing the door behind him and then spoke again in an exasperated whisper, “what are you doing here?!"

“This is nice, the table, the big chair… I should get myself an office… You told me you had a long conversation with the one friend I’m trying to keep away from you and you expected me to wait until you got home to hear about it?”, I asked, as he put some papers in the desk and came to take my feet out of it, “How about no?”

“How about what happened to ‘we’re keeping this to ourselves’?"

“That ship sailed the moment Taylor got your phone number”, I said, going to seat in one of the smaller chairs in front of the desk, as he took his place in the leather one, “How did she do it, by the way?”

“I gave it to her”, he said, and my eyes widened, “She said she wanted to work with Halo, I thought ‘cool, lets exchange numbers’, next thing I know she’s calling me to know my plans for your birthday”.

needed with it.
“What?!”

“Thanks for letting me know your birthday was coming, by the way”, he added, “I think, as your boyfriend I should have known that”. My mouth was opened now, as I thought of what to do.

“Okay”, I said, finally, “What did you tell her?”

“I told her, and please notice how awesome I was at improvising this, that I was planning on taking you out to dinner”, he said.

“You think that’s good improv? You should have seen my talk with my therapist today”

“I’m not done. I quickly realized I’d never take you out for dinner with the paparazzi following us everywhere, so I told her it would be a private dinner thing, at my place”

“Still nothing on my talk with my therapist”, I said, “If anyone asks, I kissed you first… So Taylor thinks we’re having dinner at my birthday. What’s the big deal? She’s not even in the city”

“That’s the big deal”, he said, “She’s coming. She’ll be here on the weekend of your birthday, and she said she talked to a lot of your friends at the Met Ball and they’ll be around as well, so she wants to make you a birthday surprise”

“What kind of surprise?”

“She’s gathering everybody in a club and wants me to take you there after we’re done having dinner… She says they wanted to make you feel good after the year you had and all the attention you’re getting now”

“Ugh”, I groaned, throwing my head back pressing my eyes with my hands, “I feel so guilty! Why do I have such good friends?!”

“Jen?”, he asked, after a pause.

“Yes, Harry”

“Why didn’t you tell me about your health issues last year?”, he wondered, and I took a deep breath before uncovering my eyes and looking at him.

“I don’t know”, I shrugged, “I’m just trying to let it go, I guess”

“Taylor’s worried about you”, he said, “They all are, aren’t they? Your team, your family, that’s why they made you go back to therapy”

“I can’t believe she told you that”, I said.

“In all fairness, she did ask me not to tell you…”

“Thank you Harry that makes me feel better”, I complained. “Listen”, I started, thinking of an easy and fast way to phrase this, “the bottom line is this: I was always a sensitive person. My only normal experience with school was before Disney Channel, and after was just a mess of either being bullied or glorified for stupid reasons. I was exposed to the industry from a very young age and I suddenly had a lot of people, powerful people, having a lot of expectations about me, and telling me I needed to lose weight to fit in, or be the least Latin I could be. I had major questions of identity from very early on. My parents did their best, and they did wonderful, but they just didn’t know better. And then there was the Bafta nomination and Broadway and always hearing things
like, you know, being in the arts it’s hard, especially musical theater, and how there’s always someone out there who’s going to be better than you… Everyone seemed to have the perfect recipe for success, but everyone was always so messed up. I was so… confused.” I didn’t dare looking up, to his face, so I kept staring at the stain in his glass desk, “the reason I stopped acting for one semester to go to college was because of this one thing someone quoted me once. Somebody once said, if you could live without acting, you should. I was 17, but nothing ever haunted me that much. So I applied to some colleges, and since Alessa was going to NYU I decided to go there too. I took one semester of the most random introductory classes I could think of. Photography, fashion design, economics, marketing, literature, English… I lived in a dorm with Ally, we went to parties and made lots of friends. I got drunk. I got hangover. I made out with guys I had just met. I made out with girls I had just met. I spent hours in a library. I didn’t sleep to finish a paper. I got really proud when I got good grade. The whole college experience bucket list, you know? All smashed in one semester and I loved every minute of it. But when I heard they were making one of my favorite book series into a TV show, I… I didn’t even think twice. I sent in my own audition tape and they called me, and two months later I was living in California again. I hired Richard, and Janine, and Monica three years later. And after the first season things kind of just exploded. I’m not saying I was like Justin Bieber or a Kardashian or anything like it, but I had a legion of people following me on twitter, people who wanted to hear what I had to say, you know? People recognizing me and dressing up as my character in Comic-Con, and waiting in line for hours to see me. It kind of built up. So in one of the breaks from the show I went back to Broadway, a modern, comedic, musical, without much drama and with a nice happy ending. What could go wrong? I spent some time with Alessa in the City. I fell in love with a guy thirty years older. I had to beat his own preconceptions about being with me, and then I held his hand in public and arrived with him in a red carpet, calling myself the bigger person, and daring anyone to say that was wrong – which they did anyway. I never saw David’s age. I never saw his troubled divorce. His daughter and I became quite close – she’s my age. I never saw the warnings… all I ever saw was David and his beautiful green eyes and his smile”, I made a pause, to make sure my voice wouldn’t break, and then I went on, “And then everything happened and it was like the whole world was saying ‘I told you so’, and making up stories and talking about it. I don’t need to explain this part, you know how it is… but I just couldn’t take it. I started coughing like crazy, it was even hurting my throat at some point. I felt sick. I had headaches, and one day I started scratching the side of my arm and I looked and there were these little red plaques slightly swollen. I thought it was nothing but by the time I finally went to see a doctor about it I had to wear long sleeves in summer because they were all over my body. Even in my lips, my tongue, my eyelids. And the worst part was the soles of my feet because, since it was swollen it meant I could barely walk. Every time I stood up was like a thousand needles punching through my whole legs”, I took a deep breath, “It was a cholinergic allergy reaction triggered by stress and anxiety… they prescribed me some heavy medication, I went to Brazil, I didn’t talk to anyone for weeks, I didn’t leave the house… I started hyperventilating on a mere thought of my inbox. I got so scared of ever having to walk another red carpet in my life I decided to quit. Retire. Never leave Brazil again. I didn’t need the money, anyway. I knew we’d all be fine, my family and me. So I just… stayed there”. Harry took a deep breath.

“When you told me this story before you said you got bored and came back. That’s not what happened, is it?”

“Taylor, Selena and Alessa happened. And Janine, Monica and Richard”, I said, slightly smiling at the thought of that day months ago, “they all went to Brazil together, they sat with me, practically invaded my room, opening the curtains, sitting by my side, talking loudly about the trip there and making me laugh. They started talking about the plans for when I got home and everything I had missed, like Taylor’s stories of her tour and all the great people she had met, and Selena’s drama with Bieber, and Payton falling in love for the first time, Hunter scoring in a national final. Max, Monica’s son, learning how to skate”, I sighed, “and the whole time they were talking I kept
thinking, ‘it’s okay, I can still be friends with these people, we’ll call each other all the time’, and as I was thinking I could keep up with their lives by the phone I realized, I didn’t want to’, my voice broke, and I felt a lump in my throat, cursing myself to make it stop, “so when they started talking about going back home, filming the new season of the show, and a prospect to making an appearance in Game of Thrones I just… remembered why I started to do this in the first place. And I realized maybe one day I’ll be able to live without acting, but I’m not there yet”.

There was a long break after this, as I recomposed myself, doing my breathing exercises and focusing on good things, trying to forget how messy my life was, and then, Harry spoke.

“Well, now I hate myself”

“Why?!?”

“Because if I had known I’d never have let you put yourself in this mess!”, he said, “Damn it, Jenifer, look at us. Lying, pretending, planning every detail of something that could ruin us both—“

“Harry, stop”, I said, “I made this decision conscious of all that could go wrong and I’d never unmake this”, he stared at me, thinking.

“Damn it, that’s why your family is so concerned”

“I told you, stop worrying”, I said.

“And all the stuff I said, about you being a control-freak, and OCD, and neurotic… I’m really sorry”

“Harry, relax!”

“I bloody can’t!”, he yelled and I got back in my seat, scared, “Jesus fucking Christ, Jenifer, I’ve seen what this life does to people, and you know the one thing I ever told myself to, I don’t know, justify it? To tell myself I can do it, anyone can do it? That the only reason my mother is dead, the only reason she was so bad at handling this, was because she was sick. She was sick before she got married and because my father didn’t know what to do, she only got worst. So don’t tell me to stop it, to not to worry about you. Of course I’m going to worry, damn it”

Another long break, this time for Harry to focus on his breathing, and for me to realize how sexy he looked in a suit and tie, sitting in a big leather chair behind a massive glass desk, talking all angrily and stuff—’Stop it’. I took a deep breath.

I remembered the things I had read on him when I was thinking about accepting his idea for the publicity stunt, on how he had always preferred blonde, free spirited, independent women, realizing it was probably because he never wanted to do to anyone what his father had unknowingly done to his mother. He never wanted to date someone who he knew wouldn’t be able to handle this life, someone who would end up breaking. He didn’t want to destroy someone just for loving them and bringing them in.

And just like that I found a whole new level of admiration for my boyfriend.

“Sorry I yelled”, he said, a minute later, a lot calmer. “You’re right, is none of my business. I don’t own you or anything, I jus-This is really confusing to me. Trying to understand exactly how much responsibility I’m supposed to have over a fake relationship”

“I know, it’s okay”, I said, “It’s confusing for me too”. Another pause. “So, what else did Taylor say? Did you make up an excuse for us not to do the birthday surprise thing?”
“What excuse could I have possibly given her?”, he asked, “I couldn’t think of anything”

“And you call yourself the improv master, really?”, I teased, trying to force the tension out, he reached for his mug to get a drink of tea, “Why didn’t you just tell her after dinner we’d be too busy having birthday sex?”, he almost drowned. “So I guess I’m having a birthday surprise?”

“That’s not…”, he started, finding a handkerchief to swipe his mess, “That’s not all”

“Oh, God”, I said, “What now?”

“Between the time you hanged up the phone on me”, he said, “and when you got here, I got another call, and this is a real mystery, because I still have no idea how she got my number, but…”, he cleaned his throat, “Your future sister-in-law called me”. I sat up straight in my chair.

“What?!”

“Now, be honest, I swear I won’t be mad”, he said, “Did you give her my number?”

“No!”, I yelled, “Why would I give her your number?!”

“Is there any chance you accidently gave her my number?”

“I did not give her your fucking number!”

“How did she get my number?”

“Harry, I. Don’t. Know. Who cares about your number?! What did Livia say?!”

“Don’t worry, she was very polite”, he said, “Called me Your Royal Highness and everything, said despite I couldn’t see her she was curtsying”

“Oh, God”, I mumbled.

“And then it was her turn to give me a little speech about how worried your parents were, and how they’d be a lot calmer if they, at least, got to meet their baby girl’s boyfriend for a change”.

“Oh, Dear Lord”, I said, now louder, realizing where this was going.

“It was a very intense bit of the conversation, but bottom line, she invited me to her wedding.”

“Ugh”, I groaned. “You said no, right?”, he looked back at the coffee stains on his suit, “Harry?!”

“Listen, it was a very intense conversation-”

“YOU SAID YES?!”

“It was a very intense conversation, she basically said if I cared about you at all I had to go, so I couldn’t say no!”

“Jesus Christ, Harry!”, I got up, and started pacing around the room. “What are we going to do? You need to make up an excuse, say you have an emergency thing at the day.”

“Jen, I’m going”, he said.

“What? Why?”

“Because now I know what you went through and how mad your family must be going… And how
you feel about not having them here, and having to lie to them… I’m going to go with you. And you’re going to tell me all about your family, and I’m going to be the perfect boyfriend, so they’ll stop worrying about you, so you’ll stop worrying about them worrying about you, so you’ll be calmer and won’t have a meltdown”. I sighed.

“Damn it why do you have to be such a good guy?!”, I asked, making him smile. “This is… This is madness”

“And listen, the wedding is a long time away, maybe we’ll have broken up by then?”

“You’re right, there’s my birthday first”, I said, not being able to completely remove the wedding from my mind, but trying really hard to, “So what’s the deal? What are the plans?”

“Well, if I told you, it wouldn’t be a birthday surprise, would it?”, he winked at me, a smirk on his lips, “And as for dinner, the boys will probably make me do something fancy, they’re all about making us work these days…”

“I think your POs are the only people in our lives who are supportive of this relationship”

“Yeah”, he laughed, “I feel bad. I’ll let you know, though”

“Cool… Now I need to go”, I said, after a while, getting my purse and my blazer.

“Where are you going, I thought we were going to have lunch?”

“Sorry, there’s someone I have to see”, I said, “We’ll have dinner, I’ll cook”

“You mean take out?”

“You know it”

I made my way out of the building, bidding goodbye to all his POs, returning the badge to Clara at reception and walking out of the building as if I owned the place, knowing there would be pictures. Eddy helped me get a cab without being too harassed, and soon enough my heels were clicking the marble floors back into Dr. Arrow’s practice.

The whole time there the only words in my mind were ‘he has a contract; he signed a contract; Harry will meet my family; he can’t tell anyone; My whole family in Brazil; Dr. Arrow signed a contract; Harry in the same room as my family’.

As I walked into his office completely ignoring his secretary, Dr. Arrow was putting his jacket on, probably to go to lunch.

“Jenif-“

“You were right, I’m not dating him”, I said, and as the words came out of my mouth, the little voice in my head was going crazy screaming ‘STOP THIS’, “But I’m also not dating the… idea of him or whatever bullshit you talked about earlier. I’m just… not dating him. It’s a lie, it’s a publicity stunt. We made it all up for the publicity”

There was a long pause of silence, even the annoying little voice in my head shutting up in tension, and then Dr. Arrow pressed a button on the phone on his desk.

“Cancel my lunch”, he told his secretary, taking off his coat, “This is going to take a while”
I turned 23 on a Friday in April 2013, and because we all worked, it was agreed the celebration would be on the Saturday. I spent a couple of hours Skyping with my family who were all so excited Harry was coming for the wedding they didn’t even notice how mad I was because of that. They sent me a present a few days before that, and it arrived on Saturday a few hours before I left for Harry’s apartment. It was a golden round locket necklace, with two pictures inside: one of my parents, my brother and I years ago, when we still lived in Brazil, and one of me with our dogs. I loved it so much I didn’t feel I could wear it, but I knew I would. I also Skyped with Selena and Taylor, pretending I didn’t know I’d see them the next day, and Alessa and I had a slumber party with brigadeiro and a New Girl marathon.

“You and Harry are just like Jess and Nick!” she said, at some point, “You live in the same building and you were close friends before falling in love, that’s so sweet!” I rolled my eyes, but noticed she seemed pretty calm considering she’d be meeting Harry the next day.

When the next day came, I made my way upstairs to the penthouse to the romantic dinner Harry’s POs and aide had made him do, determined to make us work, trying to remember to keep my cool and unstressed as I my therapist had recommended.

Dr. Arrow had a lot of recommendations after I told him… well, everything, a few days prior. It was one of the weirdest moments of my life, standing there in his office awkwardly waiting for him to say something, praying in my mind he wouldn’t tell anyone despite his binding contract, or his doctor-patient confidentiality ethics. I prayed he wouldn’t make a phone call and tell Richard or Janine or Monica, and as I was waiting all he did was to take his coat off, grab his notepad, his pen and recorder and sit in his chair. He put the things in the coffee table, though, without turning the recorder on, and then brought his hands together, staring at the distance.

“When you say it’s all a lie”, he started, “You mean everything?”

“Yes”, I said, still holding my purse and standing up.

“So you’ve never really dated him?”
“No, I just- We made it all up. We’re friends. Great friends”

“Sit down, Jenifer”, he asked, seeing I was still standing up. “Who had the idea?” I made my way to the couch.

“He did”, I said, “Well, technically I told him it was possible, jokingly. But I meant something a lot smaller. And then he… he proposed this… what we’re doing now”, Dr. Arrow nodded.

“The pictures in South Africa…? You were kissing.”

“I planned everything”, I said, “We arrived separately to give the impression we were trying to be secretive, but we let people see us and take photos so they’d attract the paparazzi. We live in the same building so we let people think we were living together. I keep wearing my Hermès watch because people think Harry gave it to me. I didn’t cancel my Ellen interview because I knew she’d ask about him – although I don’t know why it became so popular…”, Dr. Arrow sighed, and then he looked at me.

“Jenifer”, he started, “You’re a young, beautiful, talented actress who’s dating a real life good looking prince. You’ve both had problems with relationships in the past and are now dating each other. Of course people are interested in the story. People are always interested when celebrities talk about their lives even if they’re just denying things. And the way you denied your relationship, in a clever way without really denying it… it was funny. That’s why you keep going viral. Because you’re clever, you think fast and you plan well. You planned it perfectly, I gotta give you that”, I nodded, kind of grateful for finally being appreciated, waiting for the catch, “But…”, and here it comes. Dr. Arrow sighed, “Why are you doing it? Why are you putting yourself in the epicenter of stress and worries and polemics after the year you had-?”

“Because of the year I had!”, I interrupted, “Because people wouldn’t stop talking about David whenever I showed my face. Because he remarried his wife. Because I want a movie career, a serious movie career and a fashion line, and a fragrance. Because Harry does amazing charity work every day and no one would know because all they cared about was how much weight he lost since the break up and what Chelsy Davy is doing now. Because our lives sucked more than it ever did before and we had to do something about it”

“And you thought this was the healthiest way of dealing with all of that?”

“Hell no”, I said, “But it was the fastest and most effective way”

“And nobody knows?”

“Just me and Harry”, I said, “…and now you”

“And I can’t tell anyone”, he said, a smirk on his face, “smart”. I nodded and there was a long pause. “Why did you tell me?” I thought of it.

“Things are getting out of hand”, I said, and the look on his face said ‘no shit, of course they are, this is the stupidest idea ever’, “Harry met my friend Taylor, and he’s gonna have to meet my other friends… and even my family in my brother’s wedding. And I didn’t want this to come this far. We weren’t supposed to have to pretend to actually be a couple, you know? Not for real. Just hang out where people could see us and make shit up. But we weren’t supposed to have to act for my friends and family”

“Can’t he make up an excuse and not go?”

“He won’t do it”, I said, “He found out about everything that happened and now he says it will be
healthier for me if I deal with my relationship with my parents upfront. So they’ll see I’m better than last time they saw me and I’ll stop feeling guilty about lying to them.”

“He’s not wrong”, Dr. Arrow pointed out. "He found out... everything?"

"Last year's everything", I clarified, and he nodded.

"Good"

“You’re telling me you’re in favor of... this?"

“Oh, no!”, he corrected. “Hell no. I think this is a horrible idea. You were not completely better and you just threw yourself back into a hurricane. It’s really dumb. But you’re overage and so is your boyfri-Prince Harry, and I don’t suppose anything I say now will make you end this madness?”

“I couldn’t’, I said, “Not now. Not now everyone knows... if we break up my family will think... I don’t know, that I’m afraid to commit. That now I have relationship-fobia. That they ruined it because they went to talk to him. And we’d still live in the same building. I just- I don’t know. Now is just complicated. I’m still building my image and I don’t want to be the girl who dated Prince Harry for two months. Not to mention people will say we broke up because we still have feelings for our exes and then everything would start again”

“Well, to be completely frank you are afraid of commitment”, he pointed out, and I gave him a sharp look. Lying back in his chair, he ran 'his hands through his hair, “This is such a mess”

“Yeah, well”, I started, “Welcome to my life”.

“I gotta admit, Jenifer”, he said, “I’m impressed at your bravery”

“My bravery?”

“Yes, for doing all of this”, he explained, “It’s stupid and reckless, but for someone who wanted to retire and never come back to Hollywood less than a year ago, you’ve made clear progress”

I nodded, really touched he thought I could still get better despite everything and after this, Dr. Arrow said now it was indispensable that I kept focused on my health. That I should practice breathing exercises, and try to remove myself from stressful situations. He said I should be well rested and focus less at work and try to see everything that came as a result from my relationship with Harry as a good thing. Something we planned for. Something we wanted despite what it was. He said I should try and look at this as helping myself and my friends and family to get back to seeing me as someone who’s able to love and to have a normal and healthy relationship, and he said if I had to fake it to believe it, so be it.

“You’re an actress”, he said, “Fake it. Pretend this relationship is real. It doesn’t have to be forever, is just a nice relationship to get you out there and to prove to yourself and everyone that you’re ready for it’’

“What if I’m not?”, I asked.

“Again, you’re an actress”, he said, “Fake it until you make it”.

“Really?”, I asked, “’Fake it until you make it’? The most expensive therapist in Manhattan and that’s all you can come up with? Do they teach that in therapy school?”
After all, that is what I did. I tried to remain calm and get excited about turning 23 and seeing my friends that night. I tried to get excited about dressing up and having fun.

Harry’s protection officers and aide - the three guys that lived with him - were determined to make our relationship work by helping him be the perfect boyfriend as much as they could, so although this was very sweet of them, it meant there was no way we could just tell everyone we had dinner and not do it, because they thought the penthouse’s terrace was ‘a lot more romantic’ so Harry ‘had to make the dinner there’. Which wasn’t that bad, I guess. I’d have a romantic dinner on the terrace with a good friend. I’ve had worst birthdays.

I took the elevator four floors up to the penthouse and Clark opened the door for me. In the foyer, the lights were dim and there were candles and rose petals in the sides of the steps of the stairs. I’m not going to lie, I was utterly impressed. As I made my way up the stairs I could smell something delicious coming from the kitchen and hear a sweet violin melody from the corner of the living room.

“Ms. Silva, welcome”, Thomas greeted me. “And happy birthday!”

“Thank you, and how many times will I have to tell you, Thom? Is just Jen”

“As usual, ma-am, at least one more time”, he smiled.

“Don’t think I don’t know you stole that line from Pirates of the Caribbean”, we laughed.

“Jen”, Harry made his way into the room, coming from the hall, “Hey”, we hugged, for a little longer than usual, “Happy birthday!”

“Thank you”, I smiled, and, because Thom was there, he gave me a little kiss on lips. That wasn’t all bad either.

“You look beautiful”, he said, sounding honest, and a little bit astonished, which took me by surprise as I wondered if that was also just because Thomas was there, and I selfishly wished he wasn’t.

“You look beautiful”, he said, sounding honest, and a little bit astonished, which took me by surprise as I wondered if that was also just because Thomas was there, and I selfishly wished he wasn’t.

“Thanks”, I said, looking at my dress just in case my cheeks had gotten red. ‘Pull yourself together, Jenifer, God, you’re not in middle school anymore’. “You don’t look bad yourself! I see you took my advice on striped social shirts”, he laughed, looking down at his blue and white stripes under his black suit. He was looking really dashing. “Everything is so beautiful, we even have music!”

“Dinner will be served shortly, so, if you excuse me”, Thom said, a little smirk at Harry, and made his way to the kitchen.

“A violinist?”, I whispered to Harry when he was gone, and we made our way to the terrace, “Really?”

“You think I have anything to do with it?”, he asked, leaving the door open so the music could follow us out, “I’m flattered”. I looked around in the terrace, realizing it was completely different from last time I had been there. The couches and rocking chairs were gone, replaced by a simple small round table with a red silk table towel. In the table, two golden candlesticks held candles, and the rail all around the terrace was decorated with white Christmas lights.

“Wow”, I said, truly speechless for a moment, “Harry, this is amazing!”, he smiled, looking around, “Be sure to mention to the guys how impressed I was”

“I will”, he said, pulling my chair for me, “But for your information, with this part I had a little to
“Really?” I asked, laughing, taking my place.

“Yes, the Christmas lights thing was my idea”

“Wow, I’m impressed”, I admitted.

“Thank you”, he said. “Despite what Ed, Nate, Clark and Thom seem to think I actually can be a good boyfriend on my own”, I laughed.

“Do you ever wonder why they’re so interested in making us work?”

“I like to think they just care about me”, he said, and I chuckled, “You know, apart from Ed, I’ve known these guys for years now. They watched me grow up. They’ve seen me in my worst, - really douchey worst - so I kind of get why they’re so keen in making me be my best”

“That’s nice”, I smiled. Thomas walked in at the moment with two champagne flutes and informed us the food would be there in a second. After they brought it, Harry noticed the locket I was wearing.

“That’s pretty”, he commented, “And huge”

“My parents sent me”, I said, excitedly, picking the lock and opening it up to show him.

“Cool. Are those your dogs?”

“Yes, last time I saw them. They must be a tad different now, they’re getting old”.

“You miss them a lot, don’t you?”

“I really do”, I said, looking at the picture again.

“Why did you never get another dog?”, he asked, as we started to eat, “I know why you didn’t when you were in college, but over the last six years, living in California, why didn’t you adopt another one?”

“I don’t know, it’s complicated, I guess”, I said, “At first I felt really guilty thinking my dogs in Brazil would think I was deserting them, don’t laugh”, he coughed, stopping in the middle of a half-laughter, “But then I started traveling a lot and I just, I don’t know, I wouldn’t feel right leaving a puppy in those dog sitting places so often, you know?”

“Yeah”, he agreed, “You could just get one of those really small ones and take it with you”.

“Yeah, I guess”, I thought about it, “That sounds interesting”

“Oh, thank God you said that!”, he left out a nervous breath.

“Why?”

“Well,”, he started, “remember when I said I wasn’t going to get you anything?”

Oh, yes, that I remembered. The conversation had happened the same day Harry told me about the guys pressuring him to give me jewelry, after I asked him what he was really going to get me for my birthday.
“A birthday gift?”, he asked, “How is this for a birthday gift: I gave you $400 dollars in flowers just the other day and I did not get a refund.”

“Dude”, I said, “Let it go”

“I’m pulling a very dangerous publicity stunt with you, something that will not only benefit you, but that could also not only ruin me, but my whole family’s image”

“Don’t act like it isn’t beneficial to you too”

“Not saying it isn’t”, he answered, “And on top of all that, I will be paying for the whole dinner thing, so…”

“Okay, fine”, I said, “Whatever”

“Yeah, I think I vaguely remember that conversation”, I said, at the terrace.

“Well, remember when I thought you were having a meltdown earlier this week?”, he asked, and I sighed.

“You seem to think I’m having a meltdown every week lately”, I said, “which is also why I didn’t want to tell you about my mental health status”

“Yes, well”, he said, “you were crying a lot, Silva, so don’t blame me”

“I always cry a lot, you should know that by now”

“Okay, sorry”, he said, dismissively. Harry had gotten very protective after finding out about the mental health issues I had had last year, and it didn’t help that one day he came to my apartment and I was sobbing in front of my notebook watching a Youtube video of a little girl getting a puppy for Christmas. “Anyway, I kept thinking about that, and about the day you came to my office to talk about Taylor…”

“What about it?”

“After you left, I checked my notebook and realized you had been watching puppy videos”

“I was bored and I like puppies, so what? Everybody does”

“You do!”, he pointed at me, excitedly and, I noticed, a tad nervous, “you do, right? You like puppies!”

“Yes-“

“Great!”, he said, standing up, “Awesome! Because I bought you a present, and I understand is a complicated present, so, if you don’t want it, I totally get it, you’re a busy person. So I can keep it. I’m sure the boys will love it, they’re in love with her already. She’s actually in their room right now, I’ll be right back”. As he ran out, I had my mouth opened in shock, realizing what he was saying, somehow knowing what he had done, and I instantly started crying. I’m not proud of it, it just happened. It didn’t help that the violinist, from somewhere in the living room was playing an instrumental version of Cold Coffee, by Ed Sheeran.

“I was right, the boys were cuddling her”, Harry’s voice found me before I could see him, and I started trying to pull myself together, “It’s funny to see those big guys all lovey-dovey with such a small pup, but I guess she is pretty darn cut-Are you having a meltdown again?!“
“Shut up, I can’t help it!”, I said, standing up, wiping out the tears, staring at the little ball of white fur in his arms and instantly feeling my heart swell with warmth, “is she for me?!”, I asked, my voice an eight higher than usual.

“If you want her, yes”

“If I want her? Of course I want her!”, I grabbed the scared and confused puppy in his arms, the smallest thing I had ever seen, and tucked her in my arms, trying to whisper so I wouldn’t scare her, “She’s the cutest little thing I have ever seen ever!”, Harry laughed.

“Okay, here’s the story”, he started, “She is a teacup Maltese, and she was rescued from irresponsible breeders and delivered to The Mia Foundation a few weeks ago”, I looked at him, surprised, “Yes, she’s from TMF, I thought you’d like that. As you can imagine, because she was bred irresponsibly, that means she can develop health issues, she was already diagnosed with hypoglycemia, which means you have to feed her all the time or she might have seizures and die. Now”, he paused, “I know that’s a lot of work, and I understand you never meant this when you said a small dog would be the best, so I’m serious when I tell you I can keep her if you think you can’t, I really won’t mind”

“Sh!”, I stopped him, covering the pup’s ears with my hand, “Stop saying that, she can hear you! Of course I want her!”, I looked at the puppy, “Of course I want you, I love you already!”, I smiled, not believing the cute little thing I had in my arms. I got her close to my face, and she licked my nose with her tiny little tongue, making me giggle and want to cry again. “Oh, my God, I love her already!”. I looked back at Harry, who had his hands in his pockets, looking at us – me and the pup - with the world’s most adorable smile on his face.

“I knew you would”, he said, “I just thought, you know, just because someone did something bad to her doesn’t mean she any less deserving of love and a home”

The song the violinist was playing reached a part which I recognized as ‘I’ll wake with coffee in the morning, but she prefers two lumps of sugar and tea, outside the day is up and calling, but I don’t have to be so please go back to sleep’. I sighed, happily, thinking when did my life get like this? – in a good way for the first time - and then I took a step closer to him, still feeling the puppy’s warmth in my arm, I put my hand on his neck and pulled him down so I could kiss him on the lips. He seemed surprised for a bit, and then I felt his hand in my waist, as our lips danced together for I don’t know for sure how long. After I broke the kiss, I slid my hand down his shoulder, taking a bit long to distance my face from his, enjoying the warmth of his breath in mine.

“The boys are watching?”, he asked, the smirk that was on his lips since I kissed him never leaving. I looked over his shoulder on the direction of the living room through the glass walls and, no mistake; Thom, Nate, Ed and Clark were all watching us, giggling like school girls. I smiled, realizing of course that’s why he thinks I kissed him, because the boys were watching and I was supposed to be just a grateful girlfriend, putting on a show.

“Yes”, I said, deciding that’s why I should have kissed him, not just because he gave me the best present any friend ever did. ‘After all’, I thought, ‘friends don’t kiss on the lips when they’re grateful’. Even if you just got the best present ever: a life. A little life to love you and for you to love even when you have no one else. Someone to care for, someone to keep yourself healthy for.

I petted the puppy gently, as she smelled my dress, getting away from Harry and going back to my seat, realizing a very important question.

“What’s her name?!”
“Well, that’s your call”, he said, smiling, and going back to his place as well, “We’ve just been calling her pup since we got her yesterday”.

“Oh, my God, that’s such a responsibility!” I said, bringing her up again to look at her, “It has to be awesome and something important. Something we love... Hey pretty, what’s your name?”, she stared around, at the Christmas lights, and I smiled, “Ugh, you’re too cute... Oh, I know!”, I smiled at Harry, who was still smiling too, “Vodka!”

“I’m sorry?”, he asked, confused. “Oh, right, I guess we could have some to celebrate-“

“No! We should call her Vodka!”, I started laughing, and Harry followed me, we both realizing how awesome that sounded, “That’s the best name ever!”

“Hey, Vodka!”, Harry called her, trying out the name, “Vodka?! Are you sure about this?”

“Yes, yes, I am!”, I looked at Vodka again, “Right, Vodka?”, she shook her little tail, “See? She loves it!”, we laughed.

“I don’t think we can call her Vodka”, he said.

“Too late, that’s her name now”, I said. “Oh, Harry, she’s too cute! You know what we should do tomorrow? Find a pet store. I’m gonna need to buy her dog food and a dog bawl, and treats to train her!”

“We have some dog food here we bought when we brought her home, remember to take it with you”

“And she just looks like the kind of dog that would wear a little dog dress, doesn’t she?”

“Alright, time to eat before it gets cold…”, he said, “I’ll take her back to the room-“

“No!”, I said, placing Vodka comfortably on my lap, “She can stay... Is it unhygienic?”, I looked at him, serious for a moment, “Oh, screw it, it’s my birthday! I don’t care!”

“Talking about you not caring”, he said, as we started to eat our chicken quiches with mashed potatoes, “Did you see what they said about you going to Halo the other day?”

“Which one?”, I asked, “I read one that I only showed my face because I was going to break up with you. And how posh I am for only wearing designer clothes”

“Oh, no”, he said, a dangerous smirk on his face, “I read another one, a lot more interesting... Someone said the only reason you’d show up and leave so early is because you were there to just give me a... Quickie”. We laughed loudly.

“That’s a good one, although trust me, even my quickies are longer than the time I spent there”, I said, making him laugh, “Still not as intricate as the TMZ one about you giving me my Hermès watch just because it is shaped as a letter H... Or you know, the whole I’m pregnant and we’re getting married one. That was gold!”, he laughed.

“I keep reading stories about you dressing up too slutty”, he mentioned. “I don’t think so”

“Oh, yeah, I remember that”, I said, laughing, “After the Met Ball thing it was all people could talk about just because my back was almost all out”

“Didn’t they say they could see your side boob?”, he asked, and I nodded, “Well, they’re idiots.
I’m sure I’d remember if I had seen your side boobs”, I laughed, blushing, as he winked at me, and decided it was time to change the subject.

“And talking about your office”, I mentioned, giving Vodka a piece of chicken, “That was a cool picture of London in your wall. I love how you can have the best of both worlds with the picture in one side and the Manhattan view from the window”

“That was there when I got there”, he said, “I guess they wanted to make me feel at home”

“That’s sweet”

We finished eating talking even more about little Vodka and all of the cute things we wanted to do with her, like put her inside an actual cup for a picture, and carry her around in a purse like Ellen Woods does in Legally Blonde.

“I don’t know what she’s doing to me”, I said, petting her, as Harry stood up, “I’ve never been this kind of girly girl that walks around with a tiny dog- What?”. Harry had come to stand in front of me and was now giving me his hand.

“Let’s dance”, he said, and I noticed for the first time in a while the violinist was still playing instrumental Ed Sheeran songs. I looked back at the living room floor through the glass windows, realizing the living room was empty.

“Wh-Why?”

“We’re a couple. It’s your birthday and we’re having a romantic dinner in a terrace with Christmas lights and violin music and you deserve a dance.”, he said, “I believe if this was real, this is what I’d do”

“… Oh”, I said, “Do you think it’s really necessary? There’s nobody watching”. He put his hand down, looking around to the living room to check if the guys were there.

“Oh”, he said, seemingly a bit embarrassed, “Sure you don’t want to dance with a friend? It’s your birthday, you should do whatever you want. You should get to dance with a guy even if it’s not real”, I smiled at him, standing up with Vodka still in my arms.

“You’ve done enough”, I said, “Really, this was fun”, he nodded, and looked around. “And I’m sorry I have to ask you to do even more, but I think it’s time to get going”.

Yes, the second part of the night. My surprise party at the club. I was actually really excited to see who was there since the only people I knew for sure would were Tay, Sel and Ally. We left Vodka in Harry’s bedroom, taking everything that was destroyable out of her reach range and covering one corner of the bathroom with sheets of paper hoping she’d use it as a bathroom.

After a long goodbye on my part – Harry deeply repented not waiting until we were back from the club to give her to me – Harry left the house with Ed, Nate and Clark in a car first, and Thomas and I waited five minutes before heading out, ducking our heads from the flashes.

When we arrived at the club, there were a lot of paparazzi at the entrance, so I tried to make a run for it without hurting myself. The line was huge, and as I waked fast by it trying to make my way to the entrance with Thomas right behind me, a couple of people shouted for me.

“Happy birthday, Jenifer!”, I heard, from… somewhere.

“Thank you”, I said, smiling, turning around really quick without being able to see who said it. We
got into the club without major problems, well, without any problem, actually. It was funny how easy it was to get into anywhere without waiting in line or even talking to anyone just because paparazzi are after you.

As we made our way to the dark foggy club to the sound of some upbeat dancing song, Clark immediately found us and lead us to the mezzanine VIP lounge area, with a full view to the dance floor and bar that I imagine Taylor had reserved for us and, as I finished climbing the stairs, it was once again show time. I had never had a surprise party before, and I had definitely never had to pretend I didn’t know about a surprise party before, so I was a bit on the limb there but I think I managed the surprise face quite well – it’s the eyes, I guess. The secret is in widening your eyes and then pretend to be surprised by your own reaction and widen it even more while laughing. I added up covering my mouth with my hands – like, in surprise – and, yeah, I guess they all bought it.

And by ‘all’ I mean a lot of people! It was dark and I was quite excited and they were all screaming ‘surprise’ and ‘Jenifer’ and ‘Suze-Booze’ so it took me a while to properly register who was there – plus the music was still going tun-ts-tun-ts-tun-ts and it made everything more confusing.

Harry greeted me first, keeping the appearances as I was supposed to think I was meeting only him there, and he hugged me saying ‘surprise!’.

“You got me!”, I shouted, laughing and he laughed too probably thinking the whole thing too hilarious to handle, “You really did you sneaky little bastard!” everyone was laughing at my reaction as they came to greet me, glasses in their hands, full of pride for their successful birthday surprise. I guess I am actually a good actress.

“Hi!”, Taylor said, hugging me, “Were you surprised?!”

“I totally was!”, I lied, still laughing, “How did you guys do this?!”

“Tay talked to most people on the Met Ball”, Alessa said, coming right after her, “And we sent e-vites. And your boyfriend helped, of course”

“A lot of people wanted to be here but couldn’t make the trip do the city. I have a list!”, Selena said, “I’ll show you later!”

“Thank you, girls!”, I said, “This is awesome!”

“Go say hi to everybody!”, Tay said, so I made my way around the group of people, genuinely surprised to see so many friends were there. I took my time, talking to everybody, so they kind of went back to seat down in puffs and stools and couches around the room.

“Suze-Booze!”, a group of them greeted me as I approached, all from The Mediator cast, and I made my way hugging them to the chants of ‘happy birthday!’, ‘it’s nice to see you!’ and ‘I missed you!’.

“Guys, I can’t believe you’re here!”, I said, hugging Claire, who along with Matt, whom I hugged next, had played my best friend for the last six years. “Did you cut your hair?”

“I did!”, she said, “It was time to change… After six years with the same haircut!”, we laughed.

“Yes, I definitely cut my hair!”, Matt joked, when I hugged him. He had gotten a lot wider since we had met six years ago. At first his character was supposed to be this skinny kid but with time it became pretty difficult to make him look nerdy.
After them, I greeted Jake and Bonnagiere – whose name was actually Phil, but we only ever called Bonnagiere because that was his last name and it was just too fancy not to use - who played my step brothers.

“We still need to have the talk with your Mr. Prince over there”, Jake said. He wasn’t tall, but he was really muscled as his character was supposed to be a big time jock. Everybody was talking to each other and the VIP mezzanine area was quite large so I was glad Harry couldn’t hear them.

“That’s right”, agreed Bonnagiere, “I don’t care the show is over, it’ll always be our jobs to scare the little sister’s boyfriends away”. I was so glad these guys existed in the world.

“Nice dress!”, said Anna, who was at least three inches taller than me and had the most flawless skin of anyone I had ever met.

“Thank you! And look who’s speaking!”, I said, looking at her gorgeous model like legs exposed in the little black dress she was wearing. Her character was best described exactly like that: model like.

“And, Booze, don’t let them get to you”, she said, “Be freaking proud about that piece of man you’ve got over there. Bow. Down. Bitches.” I laughed, as I pretty much always did whenever she opened her mouth. The biggest reason, I reckon, as to why I felt nobody at the Met Ball brought Harry up as they talked to me was because Anna, Bonnagiere and Jake weren’t there, because as soon as they did, I guess everyone thought it was okay to, so Chris spoke next.

“Yeah, is it okay to, like, call you Princess Booze now?”, he asked.

“Oh, God”, I said, “Please don’t”

“Yo everybody, it’s official”, he shouted, looking around the room, “Jen’s new nickname is Princess-Booze!”

“Dude, are you even old enough to be here?”, I asked, and everybody kind of went ‘oooh’ and ‘burned’ like the bunch of douche high schoolers we essentially turned into when we were together. “Christian, did you get a fake ID?”, I asked, teasingly.

“Shut up, Jenifer, you’re not my mother!”, he joked, making us laugh. When we started doing the show, Christian, who was my character’s third and youngest step brother, was only thirteen – he was playing a genius twelve years old boy who – ironically, now that I think about it – was ginger. He had natural freckles and blue eyes, but he had had to die his hair red for the last six years. He was wearing a beanie now, so I couldn’t tell if he had already died it back, but it truly did amaze me he was old enough to get into a club now, since I guess I’d always see him as the little shy 13 year old I met six years ago.

“Happy birthday”, Tyler Alvin said when I hugged him next. He was standing in the corner of the group, and after six years, I could tell the smile in his face was absolutely false.

“Thank you, Ty!”, I said, trying to ignore it for now that we had so much attention on us, but making a mental note to talk to him later “I feel like I haven’t seen you in ages. You were at the Met Ball but I didn’t have the chance to talk to you”. Meaning he purposely avoided me the whole night.

“Yeah, you were really busy”, he said, and this time the sarcasm on his tone was so obvious it was like a brick being thrown in my face.

“I was, wasn’t i?”, I asked, nodding, still holding his look on mine, slowly realizing what was
going on with him, but strongly praying I was wrong. “I’ll be right back guys, let me go talk to
everybody”.

As I walked to the next person, pushing Tyler to the back of my mind, I realized I didn’t
particularly knew him. Or the guy standing by his side. Party crashers? Man, my party was going
awesome.

“Hello”, I said, approaching them, one quick look at the guy with a beanie and reading glasses and
I immediately realized who he was. “Ed Sheeran?”, I asked, perplex.

“Hi, I’m Ed”, he said, looking embarrassed, “Sorry to crash your party, Taylor made me do it”.

“Oh, that’s right!”, I said, “You’re touring with her!”

“Yes, the Red Tour”, he said, smiling, “Again, sorry”

“Please, don’t!”, I said, “I’m so happy to meet you, I’m a huge fan! I’m happy you’re here!”, I
looked around the room, looking for Harry, whom I spotted at the bar, “Harry! Honey!”, he looked
at me and I pointed at Ed Sheeran, excited. He smiled, making his way to us. “Look who’s here!”

“Nice to meet you”, Harry said, shaking Ed’s hand, who made a little bow my eyed didn’t miss,
“Let me tell you pretty much the only songs Jen and I have ever danced to are yours”

“Wow, thank you”, Ed said, “I never get to meet any gingers let alone any British gingers”, he
joked.

“Yes, we’re a small club, aren’t we?”, Harry said.

“Taylor has been talking about you for ages”, I mentioned, “But sometimes I fail to connect the
person to the voice in the awesome songs”

“Oh, thank you”, Ed said, “Means a lot”

“The amount of British accents in this conversation is melting my heart”, said the other guy who
Ed was talking to before I interrupted.

“I’m sorry, hi!”, I said, turning to him, as Harry and Ed engaged in another talk about… Gingers or
England or whatever it was. “I’m sorry, I got really excited about Ed Sheeran I forgot to talk to
you”

“Don’t worry, I get it, it’s Ed Sheeran”, the brunette good looking guy said smiling.

“I know I know you from somewhere, but I’m sorry I forgot”.

“It’s totally cool, I’m actually kind of crashing as well”, he joked.

“Oh, God, I feel so bad. I know you!”, I said, laughing.

“It’s okay”, he said, laughing as well, “I’m Shane-“

“Harper!”, I said, remembering, “You’re Brigit’s boyfriend! You’re from Disney Channel too!”

“Yes! You got it!”, he said, laughing. “Sorry to crash your party”

“Please, don’t! The more the merrier! Is Brigit here too?”
“She is, Brig!”, he called, and the blonde girl came from another part of the room. I had met Brigit Mendler… I had no idea when or where or how. She was just one of the many people in my life I felt like I just… knew. I’m sure it had been something about Disney Channel, since despite having left the network exactly ten years ago on that day, it felt like everybody who had worked there shared some kind of spell that just attracted us to one another.

“Happy birthday, Jen!”, she said, hugging me, “I’ve missed you!”

“I know, me too!”, I said, “You totally ditched the People’s Choice this year!”

“I did”, she said, “That was my fault. Award shows are usually the only time we get to see each other”

“I know!”, I held her hands as I talked, “I heard your album! I love it!”, I mentioned, since Brig was yet another Disney actress who had slowly shifted to a music career.

“Are you serious? Thank you! I’m actually in town for the GMA tomorrow”

“Yes, I am, it’s so different! And wow, that’s huge! Congrats, I’m so proud of you!”

“Told you”, said Shane, pinching her waist, “Everybody loves it”, she laughed at him, and they looked at each other in such a cute way I left them alone and went searching for new people to talk to.

“This is so awesome”, I told Alessa, who was seating in stools at the mini bar with her roommate Mandy. “Thank you so much”

“Happy birthday, Jen!”, Mandy said, hugging me, as did her fiancé, Fred, next.

“Were you really surprised?”, Fred asked.

“I was!”, I said, smiling.

“But why did you think you were coming here for?”, Josh asked, from behind the bar counter where he was mixing something up. I noticed Nathan by his side, pouring a drink to Clark, Thom and Ed who were sitting by Mandy’s side with Taylor’s bodyguard.

“Did you say hi to her yet?”, Alessa asked him, “At least say happy birthday before interrogating her”.

“I’m making her a drink”, he said, “But okay”, he started making his way around the counter.

“No, no”, I stopped them, as I usually had to, “I’d rather have alcohol than a hug”, they laughed, and Josh high-fived me over the table. Josh and Ally were dating for almost two years now. “And to answer your question, I thought I was meeting Harry here”, I said, “I thought there was something weird with that, because we’ve been really housy since everything”

“But were you surprised, though?”

“Yes, I was!”, I said, and she looked so happy I really didn’t feel that bad for lying.

“Excuse me, bartender”, Harry said to Nathan, hugging me from my back, “Can I have some scotch here?”, we laughed. Well, Harry and I and the boys laughed, but Ally, Mandy, Fred and Josh all looked a bit freaked out and I realized I hadn’t introduced anyone.

“Harry, these are Fred, his fiancé Mandy, Josh”, I pointed at them as I spoke, and they gave Harry
really shy smiles, and I knew they were doing their best to keep their cool at that point. “… And Alessa”. When I said her name, Ally looked like she had been preparing all her life for this moment. She kept a good posture, she offered Harry her hand and said:

“It’s a pleasure meeting you”, with a lot of poise and calm. Well, she refrained from screaming and asking for a selfie, so I guess that’s a win.

“It’s all mine”, Harry said, “Jen has talked a lot about you”. Alessa’s gasp was so low I think only I could hear it.

“All good things”, I said, assuring her I didn’t mention her obsession with him. “These are all old friends from my semester at NYU”, I explained to Harry, “Except for Ally who, as you know, I’ve known since High School”.

“Nice”, Harry said.

“Hey, Silva”, I heard, “What does a guys have to do to get the birthday girl’s attention around here?”

“Excuse me, guys”, I said, starting to make my way to the person who called me, thinking maybe is not a good idea to leave Harry with Alessa.

Hunter Artchet was wearing loose worn out jeans and a black and white plaid shirt with a green football cap that read – I couldn’t see because of the lights, but I knew – Dartmouth. He opened his arms when I got closer and pulled me into a tight hug. Despite being one year younger than me, Hunter had been taller for years now.

“I missed you guys”, I said, sincere, trying to remember the last time I had seen Hunter and his brother Asher, who was standing beside him, and realizing it had been on Christmas, when since I couldn’t go home to Brazil because of work, Richard invited me to their party.

“I know, it’s been a while”, he said, “College and stuff, and you’ve been pretty busy yourself”

“I have”, I said, and he gave me a box saying it was from his father. There were beautiful earrings inside, and a cute card with happy birthday wishes from him, Pay and a little drawing by Aiden.

When someone pinched me I realized Asher Artchet, the tall and skinny blonde with a camera in his hand – as usual – was there. He was wearing a leather jacket and an Arctic Monkeys tee and his hair was a perfectly neat mess when he hugged me.

“Are you old enough to be here?”, I asked and, unlike what had happened when I asked Chris the same question, I meant it this time. “Oh, that’s right, you turned 18 a few weeks ago. God, you kids need to stop growing so fast!”

‘‘You kids’? Are you serious? You’re not that much older than me”, Asher said.

“She likes to pretend to be better just because of her age”, Hunter joked to the girl by his side. “Jen, this is Poppy”, he said, pointing at the girl with straight long blond hair and clear blue eyes. “My girlfriend”. Right, the girl Richard said was the reason Hunter was talking about staying in New Hampshire after his graduation next month instead of moving to Los Angeles to work with him. I shook hands with Poppy, making jokes about how awkward her boyfriend was when I met him six years before, embarrassing him like a good old sister would do – a total lie, since Hunter Artchet had never been awkward in his life. Hot? Yes. Awkward? No.

“Oh, so I’m awkward? How awkward was the last Youtubers React episode for you?”
“The what?”, I asked, and Asher got really excited all of a sudden.

“Jenifer!”, he shouted, “I was in a Youtubers React about you!”

“What the hell is that?”

“There’s a Youtube Channel called The Fine Bros, they make videos of kids, teens, elders and youtubers reacting to specific videos, and answering questions about it and they had me over with a lot of other people to react to you!”, he said, in one breath, really fast.

“What do you mean ‘react to me’?”

“They showed us a compilation of videos about you…”, Ash explained, “One with your Golden Globe speech, one with your Ellen DeGeneres interview where you purposely ditch all the questions about dating Prince Harry, the remix of that, a video montage of The Mediator and a couple of paparazzi and fan clips of you on the street and trying to walk around in Manhattan and stuff with paparazzi on your way and how you deal with it. It was really funny”

“Ok, but”, I started, “What’s that about?”

“Well, they usually choose viral videos or trending topics to cover”, Ash continued, “So this basically means you’re huge right now”.

“Oh, thank you”, I said, sarcastic, “I wouldn’t have known had you not just said that”

“Give me a little credit”, he said, “I spoke all good thing about you. But I’ll show you the video with all the other people’s reactions tomorrow at dinner”

“But what did these other people say?”

“The questions were about what makes a celebrity huge all of a sudden even though they’ve been working on the business for a while before”, he said, “And our opinions on the privacy of public people and how we feel about paparazzi harassment and inopportunite questions celebrity go through”.

“What did people say?”

“Most of them agreed no human being should have to go through all of that”, he said, “And that being as actor or singer, or anything, for that matter, does not give people the right to an invasion of privacy or personal comfort… Some of them just said it’s complicated considering these people went into these business knowing what it would be like. But, don’t worry, I told’em. I said nothing gives anyone the excuse to be invasive and that being public on television and planned interviews shouldn’t equal on people expecting you to be happy about being harassed every time of the day”. He finished, shrugging, and it took me a couple of seconds to take it all in, but when I did, I hugged him again, for longer this time, with my eyes closed, just glad he was there, he existed. Just glad people like him existed and took the time to make a video about it that would reach other millions of people.

A little after that they brought a gigantic Dom Perignon Champagne bottle with sparklers on the stopper. They all formed a circle around me and told me to blow the sparklers and make a wish and as I looked to those people, people I had grown up with for the last six years or more, people who had seen me in my best and in my worst, people who had made me cry of laughing so hard, people who had stood up for me and people I hadn’t known for even six months but already loved, and I thought of my little puppy at home and of my family and of the movie I’d start shooting soon and I realized sure, there were some things I wanted. But what did I wish?
I wanted the movie to work out, and I wanted Brigit’s album to sell big, and I wanted to be a good owner to Vodka, and I wanted my friends to believe I was dating the ginger guy who was standing right by my side, and I wanted my brother’s wedding to be perfect, and I wanted Richard to let his kids do what made them happy and I wanted my parents to stop worrying about me, and I wanted to stop worrying about myself. And I knew my health was something I had to put dedication on to get better, and I knew I was doing all I could about my career and the rest was out of my hands and when I looked around the room and saw some of the best people I had met in my last 23 years of life, all smiling at me, I thought that maybe I’d be okay.

But the one thing, the one thing I truly wished for I figured out when I felt Harry’s hand rest on my waist, and I thought how bizarre it was that this guy had put on a diner and bought me a puppy and was meeting all of my friends and pretending to be my boyfriend, initially because he wanted his ex to have a chance at a normal life, and then because he wanted to do his job, and because he wanted me to be ok. And I knew that all I truly wished for was for Harry to get the happy ending he deserved. And so I closed my eyes, and I pictured him years from now, with a wife that loved him enough to give up her life for him, and a whole bunch of kids, helping people in his charity work. And then I blew the sparklers and everyone clapped and cheered and we drank the champagne.

The girls were smart enough to wait until I had enough alcohol in my system before they started talking about how they had prepared a Brazilian song for me to teach them some ‘moves’. I tried telling them as for my 23rd birthday I was officially living in the US for longer than I had lived in Brazil, but they wouldn’t listen – they had more than enough alcohol in them as well. So as it turned out, we went to dance floor as a Brazilian funk started playing – it was the English version which was really bizarre to me. However, when the melody started to fill my ears and the lights started to blink to the beat, I forgot how little embarrassed I was at the song and at the situation and I just started to dance. I moved my hips and I danced and when I looked up at the VIP mezzanine, Harry was at the rail looking at us. I smiled at him, dancing, and signed for him to come down. He laughed at my attempt at a sensual calling, but at some point he signed for Clark to follow him and he made his way downstairs.

If I had thought it was bizarre to listen to a Brazilian song in English, it was because I had yet to see Harry in a dance floor. He was still wearing his nice black suit with the blue and white striped shirt but when he found us, he surprisingly danced away the bizarreness. My friends cheered for having him join us, and then, we just danced.

When his hands wrapped my waist once more, making me incredibly aware of myself, I kept in mind he was supposed to be my boyfriend. And I let him. I let his hands travel around my back and waist and thighs for a while, and I threw my arms around his neck, continuing to dance to the beat of the song, moving my hips along his, keeping my gaze on his shirt, or specific parts of his skin, like his neck and cheeks – avoiding his eyes with all I had. It was funny the pattern of his freckles, and how his cheekbones were naturally red, or the also natural almost purple tone of his lips. It was also funny to me how blonde his eyebrows were and even his lashes, they were so clear they were almost invisible comparing to the blue of his eyes. Dammit, his eyes. Just why did they have to be so blue? I felt his breath on my face, and the grip of his hands get tighter on my back, bringing me closer to him, if that was even possible. It took only a second for me to notice the lack of breath and how in trance I was by his gaze and the song and the flickering lights and the beat of the song when his hand got a little too close to my bum an I pulled it back to my back, laying my head in his shoulder and taking a deep breath. ‘Don’t make it too real’, I thought, ‘don’t forget what this is, it’s not real’.

“Sorry”, he said in my ear, the only way to be heard with the music so loud. He was trying to apologize but the touch of his lips on my earlobe as he spoke only made it worse. “I got a bit
carried away”. I smiled to let him know I heard him, and decided I need some space to breathe, so I signaled I was going up to get a drink and he nodded, turning to Ed and starting to dance with group.

I made my way upstairs back to the VIP area, finding Thom and Ed at the mini bar, where they were kind enough to make me a vodka soda. We small talked about the surprise, and how good it was to have my friends there, and when I turned to go back downstairs, I realized Tyler was in one of the couches checking something on his phone.

“Hey”, I said, deciding that was as good as any other time to talk to him, “Don’t feel like dancing?”

“No”, he said, still looking at his phone, “I just- I’m not in the mood”.

“Ty”, I sat down by his side, “Are you… Are we okay?”. He took a deep breath and bit his lip, putting down his phone.

“Yeah”, he said, “We are”

“Tyler”, I said, “Please don’t do this”

“Do what?”, he asked, “Try to maintain the little that’s left of our friendship?”, he looked at me, “Because that’s what I’ve been trying to do since I ruined it”

“You didn’t”, I said, “You… Tyler, you didn’t”

“You know the one thing that pissed me off thought?”, he asked, “Is that I wish you’d have been honest with me”

“I was”

“Jenifer”, he started, “I’m not a child. I knew you didn’t like me as I liked you, I just wanted you not to pretend you didn’t want to be with me for any other reason”

“What do you mean?”

“Really? You don’t even”, he laughed, bitter, “You don’t even know… You told me you didn’t want a relationship. And then you got yourself one”. He looked at me.

“No, I didn’t-“, I stopped, realizing he meant Harry. I sighed. “I didn’t realize… I didn’t want to hurt you”

“Yeah, well”, he said, getting up, “Good job”. And he made his way downstairs, leaving me alone to drink my vodka and hate myself.

“Hey”, someone said, and I looked up, seeing Harry find his way to the couches, sitting in a chair by my side, “The boys signed for me to come, what’s up?”. I sighed.

“I talked to Tyler”, I said, “And I’m a horrible person”. Harry looked around. We were alone at the lounge part of the mezzanine, but his POs and Thom were at the bar, not very successfully hiding that they were staring at us.

“Come here”, he said, “They’re looking, sit with me”. I hesitated for about a second, before deciding I was too upset to deny a cuddle, however fake it was, so I sat on his leg and rested my head on his shoulder, my nose right on his neck, and his beautiful smell filled me with warmth. “You never told me what happened between you two”.
“Just friends boy and girl who work together. Girl gets heartbroken. Boy is there for her. He tells her he loves her. She says she doesn’t want a relationship. Months later she’s in magazine covers with a prince”

“Oh”, he replied, “That’s unfortunate”. I chuckled at his choice of words. “But on the plus side, tonight wasn’t so bad… the music is so loud your friends could barely interrogate me”

“Barely?”

“Well, I had a cool talk with your friend Alessa about you”

“Cool?”

“Yeah, about how it is living with you”, he said, “And your thing with cleaning and neatness and never cooking in six years”, I laughed.

“You’re right”, I closed my eyes, “Wasn’t so bad”. His hand caressed my tight, on a calming almost unconscious movement.

“Do you–”, he sighed, “do you sometimes wish this was real?”, he asked, on a low tone, and I tried not to be alarmed by the question.

“What are you saying?”

“Being here”, he said, “Doing this. This whole night. Does it make you wonder if we’ll ever get the real thing? A real person to introduce to friends and dance with and not have to worry about looking enough like a couple because people are watching?”

“Yes”, I said, “It kind of does”.

“Talking about looking like a couple”, he said, “the boys won’t stop checking on us”, he looked at me, “Should I?”, he whispered.

I brought my head closer to his, biting my lip, somehow kind of glad he was the one bringing up the fake kiss this time. “You know, we don't even have to actually kiss... If I just stay like this”, I brought my face closer do his, touching his nose with mine, "It'll look like we're kissing". In the dark room, I could barely see the blueness of his eyes.

I felt his hand splattered on my back, his fingers pressing harder on my skin. In my thigh, the only thing stronger than the chills all over it was his grip. Our noses were together, and i could feel his forehead pressing harder against mine, and his warm breath on my lips. Unsure who leaned in first, next thing I know is that my lips are on his, making a shiver go from my stomach to my arms and hands and legs and neck.

I felt my heart beating on my throat and the beat was so loud it almost blocked the music. If I focused, it was all I could hear. The tun-tun, tun-tun, tun-tun. I grabbed his hair between my fingers when I felt his tongue in mine, and his grip on my thigh got tighter, his hand finding new places in my exposed legs. ‘Not true’, I kept telling myself, ‘this isn't real’. But his hand on my legs, and supporting my back, and his hair on my fingers, and his tongue dancing with mine, soft, warm, wet, his taste on my mouth was so real it was hard to believe it. Then, a bit too soon, his teeth grabbed my lip, pushing it gently and ending the kiss with a sigh.

I laid my head back on his shoulder, trying to avoid his eyes and the thought of what this little unnecessary make-out session could mean. The loud sound of the club was slowly getting back at me, and I realized my dress was way up, so I adjusted it back to the right place, covering what it
could of my tights.

“Hey, lovebirds”, I heard Hunter making his way to the mini bar, “Let’s get back downstairs”

Harry and I followed him back to the dance floor, holding hands, the skin contact definitely making me wish this was real.

We danced the night away with my friends and Harry’s POs, and we even managed to get Thomas do bust some moves. Tyler left early; the girls didn’t have much of a chance to talk to Harry about anything; we planned on spending the day together tomorrow; and soon enough it was time to live.

Harry gave me his jacket when we were making our way outside, realizing it had gotten way colder during the time we were there. We decided to leave together, since it was just stupid to try and pretend we weren’t there together. So we ran to the car, the flashes blinding us as usual, and I was thankful I had his jacket covering my legs as I got into the car before him. After we were gone, after the lights of the flashes had faded, we could finally breathe.

When the elevator stopped in my floor, I pushed the button to close the doors and went up with him and the boys, one last thought on my mind, when last thing I wanted while it was still kind of my birthday.

I grabbed Harry's hand and pulled him up the foyer with me, taking my shoes off and opening the doors to the terrace, still illuminated by the white christmas lights.

“It’s raining”, he said, “What are we doing?”

“It’s not raining!”, I said, and as if the skies wanted to see me wrong, I instantly felt a drop of rain in my nose, “Ok, it’s starting to rain. But, it’s still my birthday and there’s one last thing I want!”

“Okay”, he said, “What?” I walked to him, and took his hands in mine, pulling him with me to the center of the terrace.

“I want a dance, Harry”

“...why?”

“Because it’s my birthday and we had a romantic dinner in a terrace with Christmas lights and violin music and I think I deserve a dance”

“... there’s no music anymore”, true, the violinist had left at the same time we did.

I put Harry’s hands on my waist, and mine in his shoulders, and started pacing us softly, as the rain drops got thicker and more frequent. “She’s like cold coffee in the morning, I’m drunk off last night’s whisky and coke”, I sang, the alcohol in my system not allowing any space to embarrassments, “She’ll make me shiver without warning, and make me laugh as if I’m in on the joke. And you can stay with me forever... Or you could stay with me for now”. It took a while, but Harry found his own pace within the song in my voice, bringing me closer to him, resting his head on mine as I enlaced my arms around his neck. We paced from one side to another as the rain got stronger and, at some point, my hair was all wet and I could see his undershirt through his wet buttoned one, and his jacket that I was still wearing was getting heavier and heavier.

We didn’t care, I guess. No one suggested we went back in, or that we finished the dance on the bedroom, it wouldn’t have been the same. Somehow the rain and lightning only made it better, and the thunders that followed only made me sing louder. “Tell me if I’m wrong! Tell me if I’m right! Tell me if you need a loving hand to help you fall asleep tonight”, I went on, “Tell me if I know,
tell me if I do. Tell me how to fall in love the way you want me to… ‘Cause I love the way you
wake me up and for goodness sake will my love not be enough?’ Harry picked me up, spinning me
in the air as I sang the chorus again, laughing and trying to compete in volume with the
thunderstorm that had finally hit the city. At the end of our crazy, silly little dance in the rain,
Harry french dipped me, holding me by my waist, and I hugged him by his neck, scared he would
let me fall. We were laughing like children when he brought me back up, and as we stared into
each other’s eyes, for a little too long, slowly backing away from each other and spinning in the
rain one last time since we were already completely wet before going back in, I felt like now I
really knew what he had meant earlier.

And God, how I wished this was real.

Chapter End Notes

The song in the terrace is Cold Coffee, by Ed Sheeran.
The Island of Magic

Chapter Summary

Jen's brother is getting married, so she and Harry take their entourage and head to Brazil, where a judgmental despite loving family awaits. When it all becomes a bit too much to handle, Harry is there for Jen, and she has a troublesome realization.

Chapter Notes

Outfit Jen wears in this chapter
http://fakeituntilyoumakeitphff.tumblr.com/post/84748707704/myroyalfandomsets-what-a-girl-wants-por

“Jenifer?”

I inhaled fast, looking back up across the room to Dr. Arrow realizing I had been silent for way too long.

“I can’t help you if you don’t tell me what is going on”, he said, “last time we had an appointment was before you went to Brazil for your brother’s wedding and you sent me an email while you were there, but it wasn’t very clear… It literally just read ‘Dr. Arrow, things are happening. Too fast. I need help. I don’t know what to do’. You made me very worried”.

“I’m sorry”, I said, “The trip was a bit more complicated than I had planned…”, something inside of me found the strength to form a sarcastic laugh at the word ‘complicated’. Yeah, I guess you could call it that.

“Introducing the boyfriend to the family is always difficult”, he said, “Especially when there’s so much your family has been worrying about in your life”

“Especially when is a fake boyfriend”

“That too”, he said, smiling. “So how did it go?”

“Introducing Harry to my family?”, he nodded, and I took a deep breath, wondering where to start. “It was… interesting”.

Here’s the thing you need to know about my family: we love each other. We really do! But love is not always equal to happiness or peace of mind, as I learned from very early on, which is what I tried to explain to Harry on the flight to Brazil, where we were going for my brother’s wedding.

Our entourage included his three protection officers, his assistant aide and my personal assistant and the mood was very weird from the start. Ever since the Met Ball, Harry’s secretary – Edward… Something - had been very harsh on Thomas Hill – Harry’s aide -, for letting things get
so out of control with the media.

“You see”, Harry explained to me, once we were sitting in first class headed to Brazil, away from Thomas (I had convinced him not to travel private this one time), “Edward was actually supposed to have come with me to the States, but I convinced him he wasn’t needed and that I could get by with just Thomas, because Thomas is single and wasn’t leaving anyone behind in Britain. Edward is married, he has a family, I didn’t want to mess his whole life with this”.

“That’s thoughtful of you”

“Yeah, but now that the media has been feasting out of the two of us, Edward blames himself for not being here to control me, so he’s being extra harsh on Thom”

“That sucks”

“I know”

But nonetheless, that’s how we made the trip to Brazil: the seven of us and my dog. Vodka, my new puppy, had been adapting wonderfully to life in Manhattan despite my neurotic nerves about her first time flying.

“I’m sorry”, back in Manhattan, Dr. Arrow interrupted my narrative of the events that lead to my brother’s wedding. “So you didn’t change the dog’s name?” I sighed.

“No, of course not. It’s an awesome name”

“It’s alcohol. You named your dog after alcohol”.

“Listen, I posted a picture of her on Instagram right after I got her, with the name, and everyone loved it. And I’ve been posting pictures and cute videos of her ever since… Playing and doing cute little tricks around the house…I always use the name and everyone loves it”.

“Okay, but-”

“You’re the only one who has a problem with it, Dr. Arrow”.

“My point exactly! I saw your interview with… What’s his name? Jimmy Kimmel? The one when you talked about the dog”

“Stop calling her ‘the dog’”, I said, “Her name’s Vodka”

“Yes, the interview where you said that”, he said.

“Everyone laughed”, I explained, “They think it means I’m a very fun person.”

“You name a dog either something you just think it’s cute, or after something that is meaningful to you, something you consider of personal value… You name your dog after alcohol. Do you really not see the problem?”

“No. Now let me continue the story”.

A few weeks after my birthday, when I traveled to New Hampshire for Hunter Artchet’s graduation
ceremony, because of all the fuss Harry’s secretary was making about us getting too much press, he couldn’t go with me, which ended up working because 1- it made his private secretary happy; 2- he could attend a work gala thing he had with Halo and 3- he could take care of Vodka for me, so she wouldn’t have to fly too soon.

But now, taking almost everyone we knew with us to Brazil, I had no choice but get Vodka’s vet prescribe her a sleeping pill and take her with us, which meant I was stressing out the entire day of the flight about pretty much everything: My puppy is locked in the cargo compartment of a plane all alone; my career is very uncertain right now; I’m fake-dating Prince Harry for the publicity; he’s about to meet my entire family and I’m not entirely sure he’s a good enough actor to pull it off… You know, the usual drill. So to keep my mind off of all these things during the actual flight – which lasted for about ten hours until São Paulo, and then another one and a half to my state, in Southern Brazil – I was using the time we had to lecture Harry on everything he needed to know about my family, and the one important thing was this: we loved each other.

“Like, I’m sure at no point ever since we were born, my parents wanted anything but what was best for both me and my brother, you know?”

“Aham”, he kept saying, “You’ve been saying that for the past twenty minutes. I still haven’t gotten any real information”.

“It’s just, I don’t know, it’s complicated”, I sighed, “I’ve had a really good childhood, you know? I feel bad complaining about it when so much people have it worst”

“Okay, how about I ask you what I want to know?”

“Okay…?”

“You grew up in Southern Brazil”

“Yes, until I was 10”, I said. “In a town that’s actually an island called Florianopolis”, I said the name really slowly knowing it would be hard for him to get it. He didn’t even try.

“Why did you move to the States?”

“Dad got a better job offer”, I said. “We were always really short on money and he worked as an electrician for a tech company. A friend he went to school with offered him a position in the company he worked for in Palo Alto, so we moved”, I looked out the window, staring at the Atlantic Ocean and thinking back in all Dr. Arrow and I had talked about in therapy and deciding that if my therapist had heard my concerns about it, my fake boyfriend deserved to know as well. “The thing is…”

“Yes?”

“Something was going on…”, I paused, realizing Dr. Arrow had been the only other person I had ever expressed this to, “In their marriage. Something about dad. Something was off. I don’t know the details. I don’t think he cheated or anything. I’m pretty sure it was about the money thing. He was… leaving. Not like, leaving us. But he was running, you know? From the problems. He thought he was doing the right thing. If it was up to him I think he would have gone, for like, a year or so, just to save some money and come back, you know? Back then getting a job in the States and earning in dollars was a big deal. It was mom who decided we would all go to the States. I guess she thought we should stick together. Mom knew it would be pointless to solve their financial issues if their marriage crumbled, so she decided we were all going with him.”
“How did you and your brother take it?”

“I was ten, my brother was fifteen”, I said, “I just thought it was all a big adventure. And I never had many friends in school, I was really shy, so I was kind of glad to leave.”

“You were shy?!”

“Ha-ha, yes. I was. My brother, on the other hand, was really upset about the whole thing. Probably because he could sense mom and dad’s problems more than me”

“No, but seriously”, he said, again, “You were shy?!”, I laughed.

“Yes, I was very shy. When we got to California, one of the first things we did after a couple of months, was to go to Disneyland in Anaheim. This talents agent approached my mom there and said she should bring me to an audition on his office some time. He said I had television eyes”

“What?!”, he almost spilled his whisky laughing. I shrugged.

“It was bullshit, I know… But it got us there and-“

“No, I mean”, he looked at me, a bit serious for a moment, “Television eyes, I see it.”

“There’s no such thing as television eyes, Harry”, I said, smiling.

“Well, if there were, you’d have it. Your eyes are beautiful”.

“Pause!”, Dr. Arrow interrupted, back in his office in Manhattan, where I was telling the story, “do you two always flirt like that?”

“We were not flirting!”

“I’m pretty sure ‘if television eyes were a thing, you’d have them, because your eyes are beautiful’ is flirting, Jenifer”.

“You weren’t there”, I argued, “You don’t know what tone he used”

“Okay, what tone he used?”

“I don’t know”

“Did it feel flirtatious?”

I thought about it, looking back at the flight to Brazil, and how our sits were both laying back; how Harry’s arm was touching mine, and we were both laying on our sides, staring at each other closely. And how soft his voice was when he said that and how he was looking at me intensely and how we had been drinking and I remembered how I felt myself blush upon hearing his words, having to go back to staring at the window for a moment so he wouldn’t notice, being careful not to accidently break the very thin invisible line that had been drawn the moment we decided to pretend to be dating.

“Is this a part of the fake-dating dynamic? Flirting? Is it normal?”

I decided it was best to just ignore Dr. Arrow’s questions and continue with the story.
“Whatever”, I told Harry, trying to remember what we were talking about before we got to my television eyes. “The point is… Mom took me to his agency and they decided to tell me to come back when I was older, deciding I was too shy for television just then… So, mom made sure I got into theater in school to help with it, and… I don’t know, it just did. I came back to the agency when I was eleven and I read a scene for them. I’ll never forget it”, I smiled, looking back at him, “It was about this kid who loses her mom in the supermarket, it was a comedy”, he smiled at me, “After that I was sent to a few auditions that turned to nothing until I audition for Disney Channel and the rest is history. I started to be homeschooled; the people from the cast and from the channel were my best friends and, most importantly, I was earning a lot of money and it was enough to pay all my parents debt back in Brazil and give us a comfortable life in the States; Besides that, it all went in a savings account that I started to manage at eighteen”.

“And how are things now?”

“Good”, I said, “I talk to them on the phone or on Skype all the time. They don’t… They don’t get it, you know? Why I don’t just come back to Brazil to be closer to them. They say I can be an actress there. I don’t need to be in the States for the money anymore. I try to explain that’s not the only reason I live there, that I like the place, you know? It’s home for me. But they don’t get it. They think home is where your family is. Home is where you were born”

“What do they do now? Your parents and your brother?”

“At first, as soon as they got back, like, six or seven years ago, my dad retired. You know, I was paying for my own college, my brother had already graduated, so they were okay. My brother is in marketing, so he got an internship. As I got my job in The Mediator, I got an accountant and decided I wanted to put my money to good use, you know, just in case…”

“Just in case of what?”

“I grew up poor, Harry”, I said, “You grew up rich. Tell me, growing up, did you ever worried about your parents running out of money one day? Did you ever worried about growing up and having to do your own thing and failing?”

“…Not really”

“Of course not, as I said, you grew up rich. I grew up watching my parents count every last penny to make sure we could afford both groceries and rent that month. Ever since I started making my own money-“

“At twelve”

“Yes, at twelve. Ever since then I promised myself I’d never get that deep into debt”

“Oh!”, Dr. Arrow interrupted again, “Do you feel this was the start of your paranoia?”

“My- what?”

“Your paranoia, well, that’s how you call it. Your obsession with work and with controlling your finances and businesses yourself instead of delegating… You thing it has something to do with being afraid you’ll run out of money one day?”
“I’m not going to run out of money”, I said, “I counted it. If I don’t get any other work in acting after the Wild And Free movie, I can still live comfortably for the rest of my life without having to ever work again”

“Okay”, Dr. Arrow said in a condescending tone, “but do you feel you’re responsible for your family in any way?”

“What do you mean?”

“Because you were the source of your family’s comfort for so long and you still is, in a way. The only reason they live comfortably today is because of you. Do you feel you owe it to them to always be financially secure?”. It took me a while to answer.

“They live comfortably without me”, I said, “My brother works in marketing-“

“Doesn’t he hold the accounts of all your businesses there?”

“He had that job before I had businesses there… He’d be okay. And my father has his retirement money. Of course it’s less than what he makes managing my stuff, but he wouldn’t starve if I had no businesses to employ him in… He could easily maintain himself and my mom without me.”

“Does that worry you?”, he asked, “That they’d be okay without you? Do you feel that, since you don’t live so close to them anymore, having them work for you is a way of keeping yourself a part of their lives?”. I took a deep breath, not being able to remember why I had walked myself to that torture, and deciding to just go back to the story.

“So now my parents are like, business managers. They take care of everything I own down there. A lot of franchises, stores, a shipping and delivery service, a lot of parking lots… Stuff like that. My brother has a nice job in marketing and he holds the accounts of all of this. He’s great”.

“What does his fiancé do?”

“She’s a teacher”, I said, “She runs this big language program in private schools and has a job at a university researching… I don’t know, linguistic stuff”

“Nice”, he said, after a while, “Sounds like they did okay”

“It does, doesn’t it?”

“… What?”, I looked at him, confused. “You sound like you disagree”

“I don’t”, I said.

“Well?” Dr. Arrow asked.

“…What?”

“Do you disagree? Do you not think your family did alright?”

“They’re alright”, I said, defensive, “My parents are still married, right? My brother is doing great. I just got a new sister. I’m an award winning actress. I think we did alright”, he said nothing. I sighed. “I mean- I, I don’t know.”
“You’re in therapy right now. Do you think that’s a sign you didn’t turn out okay?”

“I’m here because David Cobb broke my heart”, I said, “And because people don’t think I’m strong enough to handle being the girlfriend of a prince”

“When we met you told me you were here because of your parents”

“That’s not what I said- Damn it, Dr. Arrow, can I go back to the story?”

“Psst”, Harry called, from the sit right next to mine when the plane landed in Southern Brazil, “Look”, he signaled to across the aisle, where Thomas and Monica were preparing to stand up to leave. “They’ve talked nonstop ever since we left the apartment fifteen hours ago”.

“We talked nonstop for fifteen hours”

“Yeah, but, we watched a bit of the movie. And you took a nap. They literally haven’t shut up since we got on the cab to the JFK in New York”.

“First comes love, than comes marriage…”, said Nathan, getting our bags, and he and Harry chuckled.

“You guys are so mature”, I said.

We made our way out of the plane first, with Eddy and Thom leading the way, followed by Clark, me, Harry, Monica and Nathan – it was protocol that the protection officer always covered front and back. We smiled to the polite flight attendants on our way out, Monica and I laughing at their strongly accented ‘obrigado’ (thank you) and ‘tchau’ (bye).

The car, a black minivan with tinted windows, was waiting for us when we made our way down the stairs, which took us straight to a small private office still in the airport so we could show them our passports. Since I was Brazilian and Harry had a diplomatic passport, the rest was pretty easy and fast. We got back to the car and Thom introduced us to the driver and translator he had arranged, and as soon as we made sure the entire luggage was there – including Vodka, who thank God was still asleep in her little dog carriage bag -, it was time to go.

“Alright, next stop”, Thom said, sitting in the front, looking at his tablet, “Lake… How do I pronounce this?”

“Con-cey-saum”, Monica said, by his side.

“I’m pretty sure the right translation is lagoon Conceição”, I said, sitting in the back with Harry, with Vodka’s bag at my feet.

“Have you seen the size of this thing in the map?”, he asked, “Pretty sure it classifies as a lake”

“A huge-ass lake inside an island”, commented Eddy, “Well, now I’ve seen it all”

“Lagoon”, I corrected, as the driver made its way out of the airport.

“What even is the difference between a lake and a lagoon?”, Clark asked from one of the middle sits. The next twenty minutes of the drive were spent as they all tried to get internet on their phones so they could try and figure out if it was supposed to be lake or lagoon just to find it was actually a pond. I just kept staring at the window trying to get a good view of the water on the distant
horizon, patiently answering the occasional ‘are those slums?’ questions.

“Alright, alright, Pond Conceição it is”, Nathan decided, “still pretty sure ponds are small”.

“Yeah, but lakes are described as being completely surrounded by earth and fed by rivers. Conceição has a canal to the ocean”, I said.

“Whatever!”, Thomas called.

“Oh, this place is beautiful, Jen”, Monica said after a while, when we were making our way through Hill Lake. Or Lagoon or Pond or whatever it was.

How to describe Florianópolis? I guess the easiest way is to explain about the island. Floripa – how it’s more normally called – is a big island which is the capital of the state of Santa Catarina (St. Catherine), it officially has 42 beaches and is considered the best place to live in Brazil – by a poll made to Brazilians themselves. It is the most populated city in the state, and most these people live in the north or central regions of the island, the south is less habited – is where the airport is – and the Lagoon Conceição takes big part of its territory. The island survives mostly on tourism and technology of information. To reach my neighborhood on the Lagoon you had to cross over Hill Lagoon, a two way street up and down surrounded by vegetation through and through. At the top of the hill, there was an observation deck where you could see almost half of the lagoon, as well as the dunes – the sand hills where people practiced sandboarding. The reflection of the sun on the water, the different tones of green on the thousands of trees all around, the big, huge, mountains, the picture perfect blue sky and the constant smell of beach – you know, a mix of sun block and salt – made it one of the most beautiful places in the world.

I mentally prepared myself for the moment when we reached the top of the Hill, when you see almost the entire neighborhood of Lagoon Conceição, where the gleam of the sun on the water was so bright it almost blinded everyone, but when the time came, I lost my breath. I smiled at the collective sound of gasps from my friends and the ‘wow’s and ‘oh my God’s, a couple of them let out.

“Welcome to the Island of Magic, people”, I said, dreamily, how my home was known.

“Oh, there’s an observation deck! Thom, can we stop for a picture?”, Harry asked.

“Maybe later, Harry”, Thomas said, “We’ve been traveling all night, let’s just get some rest before sightseeing”.

We made our way down Hill Lagoon and through the central part of the place, the part with the commerce (mini markets, bank agencies and stores) and the bars and restaurants, the part that would be boiling with tourists come high season. We drove in front of the mini mall and cemetery and at every corner I gave people one piece of unnecessary information about myself.

“Oh, this bakery still exists!”, I shouted excitedly, “Me and my brother have a photo there from when I was, like, eight. Oh, I remember this place! Oh, that used to be an ice-cream shop. Great one, actually. The mini mall, yes! It’s smaller than I remembered… I wonder if they still have a restaurant on the top floor, we used to sneak in there just to see the view since we couldn’t afford it. See that apartment building complex? We own it. We brought that Starbucks franchise! First one of the island- Marcos, you’re gonna want to turn left there”, I advised the driver, in Portuguese, realizing we were just about to get on my street.

“We’re here”, I said, in a sight, realizing how long it had been since I was there. Harry held my hand, and squeezed it, comforting me in my sudden nostalgic mood. I realized just then he had
been staring at me the entire time I was walking down memory lane and he had a smile on his face – a small one, just a smirk maybe and it made me feel very nervous about what we were about to do.

“Can we go over our schedule again before we get there?”

“Oh”, Thomas said, getting his tablet again, as the driver, Marcos, turned again into a more residential part of the neighborhood, “We’re going to drop your luggage at your parent’s house, stay there for just a bit so you can say hi to them and introduce him to everyone. Then you’ll guide us to your house at the neighborhood next to this one, where we’ll be staying throughout the trip, since it is more secretive than a hotel. The plans for after that include everyone resting from the long flight and going to the rehearsal dinner at night”.

I knew all of that, of course. I had the schedule memorized. I’d stay at home, with Monica, and the guys would be at my place in a more secluded – read: fancy – neighborhood. We had the long flight as an excuse to just sleep the entire day, and then the dinner at night, where Harry would have to actually interact with my family. Then, tomorrow, hopefully we would be too busy during the day getting ready, and the wedding was at night. Again, dangerously amount of time for Harry to interact with my family. After that, we were free to make up an emergency to fly back to the States as soon as possible – hopefully, soon enough so our PR move doesn’t get figured out. Also hopefully, soon enough so the paparazzi don’t have the time to get here after the inevitable pictures start to be posted on Instagram and twitter – as they probably would at the dinner or at the wedding. All of a sudden, I realized I hadn’t given Harry any piece of real information to help him make a good impression on my family.

“Calm down”, Harry said, squeezing my hand once more, and looking me in the eye to try and assure me all of this’d turn out ok. I heard Vodka’s cry on her bag as she woke up and tried to make sense of where she was, so I picked her up. “Jen, I’m serious, it’ll be okay”

“My mother is going to ask if you don’t want to stay with us and sleep there”, I said, “Say no. She is a nice person, so she’s gonna offer lemonade, say yes. Just be a gentleman and compliment the house or the lemonade, and she’ll like you because you noticed. Do not mention her tattoo, she deeply regrets it”

“Breathe”, he said.

“My brother likes rap music and the dogs. We have two dogs, play with them and he’ll warm up to you. Or ask about his job. And really listen when he starts to rumble. My father is harder-“

“Jen, I know how to be a nice boyfriend”

“He likes Christian history and bible talk. Did I tell you we’re Christians? We were raised Methodists. Do not make any mention to the fact we sleep together. As far as they know I’m saving myself for marriage”, I heard the general laughter around the car, “Hey! Anything other than that is tabloid bullshit. Oh. My. God. Do not swear! Everybody, this goes to you too! Compliment the place, the country in general. He loves football. And he loves me, so just be a gentleman. Open the doors and let me in first, if we’re walking on a sidewalk, don’t let me walk on the side of the street-“

“Wait, what?”

“Apparently when my father was young this was a thing”, I explained, “if a guy was walking with his girlfriend on a sidewalk and the girlfriend was on the side of the street, it meant the guy didn’t care if another dude started hitting on her”
“That’s ridiculous”

“I know, but just go with it. And hold my hand. And wait for me before running for cover-“

“What do you mean?”

“Like when we were leaving the club on my birthday, you know how you ran to the car and let me behind? Don’t do that. Even if it’s protocol, even if there’s paparazzi; if my father is watching, make me your priority”

“Hun”, he sounded like he had just realized something.

“What?”

“I didn’t realize this was such a big deal”

“If it took you this long to realize on a stressful situations like running from paparazzi girls would much rather be able to hold their boyfriends’ hand through it, than”, I got closer and whispered, “it doesn’t surprise me you have a fake girlfriend right now”. He chuckled.

“We’re here”, Monica announced.

“Oh, God. Okay, don’t forget they lived in the States so they can speak English. Brazilians are huggers, people, so just go with it.”

“Jennifer, for the love of God, calm down. They’re gonna love him”, Monica shouted from the front of the car, as the boys opened the door and we made our way out.

“Why wouldn’t they? He’s a prince”, Ed commented as they started to take my luggage out and I let Vodka walk around and pee.

“That’s my point! He brings too much paparazzi harassment to my life, he’s six years older than me, at some point in the future he’s gonna move back across the Atlantic…”

“He’s right here”, Harry added.

“Honey, at this point they’re just gonna be glad he’s not you-know-who”, Monica said.

“It’s David, Monica, you’re allowed to say his name”, I said, and heard her mumble ‘I’m never saying that bastard’s name again’.

I went after Vodka, who had wandered off to a bush to pee, and Harry came after me. He hugged me, pressing me tight, and letting me breathe in and out for a while so I could calm myself and I realized the last time I was home was when I was thinking of retiring after David broke my heart.

“What were we thinking?”, I asked Harry, in a whisper, with my eyes closed and resting in his shoulder as he still hugged me, “They’re never going to buy this. They’ll find out, and they’re gonna bitch about it, and someone’s gonna hear them and then everyone will find out and then we’re screwed”. Harry sighed, still not letting me go from the hug, which I was actually happy about. It helped me relax a little bit. In the back of my mind, I realized it was also good because it’s what coupled did. They showed affection, so the hug made us look more like a couple – which was good. But suddenly I felt I was hugging him for the wrong reasons.

I picked Vodka up and we made our way back to where the other were looking around my house.

“That’s a very narrow street, that’s a problem”, Nathan was saying.
“Their wall is high, which is good. But if they climbed any of these threes or bribed a neighbor to let them use those second floor windows they could get a good view of their backyard”, Eddy added.

“And let’s not forget the entire south part of her parents’ backyard is seaside without any fences or wall. I don’t think there’s passage, but…”

“How do you know that?” I asked.

“You gave me your address and I looked it up on Google Maps”, Thom explained, “Okay, here’s the thing. Ed, you stay with Harry while Clark and Nathan go through the premises”, they all nodded at their orders, “after that, I want you to take rounds. One always on the seaside. I want especial attention to every boat that comes nearby. Use the binoculars to check if people on the boats have cameras-“

“You guys carry binoculars?”, I asked, astonished.

“As I said, I don’t think there’s passage between the water and their house, but if you see civilians, and if they take too long to walk out, kindly ask them to move along. Another of you always on the other side of the backyard. Attention to the neighbors’ windows and to any suspicious movement. The third, of course, with Spikes and Ghost at all times-“


“Codenames, in case things go south. I’m Spikes”, Harry said, smiling, “You’re Ghost”.

“Why?”, I asked and they laughed.

“We wanted something that had to do with you”, Nathan said, “So we picked ghost because of The Mediator”

“Ahn”. My character on The Mediator was known for being able to see and interact with ghosts. “Okay”

“…And your skin is very white”, Clark added.

“…yes?”, a muffled voice, strange to the conversation, came up. I looked around, realizing Monica had pressed the buzzer already.

“Vanessa? É a Monica”, Monica told my mom on the inter com, with her heavy half Portuguese of Portugal, half English accent. “Eu tô aqui com a Jenny”

“She said, Vanessa, it’s Monica, I’m here with Jenny”, Davi, our hired translator, told the group.

“Jenny?”, Clark teased.

“Don’t even think about it”, I warned him. My mom buzzed the high dark green gate open, and we passed in one by one.

“I already told my parents you guys need to check the house, so, go ahead”, I said, and the boys made their way to the front door, passing through my mom and introducing themselves real quick. I heard her tell them to make themselves at home before coming our way. Our house was a two floors property close to water on a huge backyard. The wall surrounding it was about six and a half foot tall and painted salmon, the double door to the garage and the people one was wood and painted dark green. As we made our way in, the house – same color as the wall - was made more
visible at a small distance. The windows and doors were hard brown mahogany and they all had flower vases underneath or around. Mom was big on flowers, the whole place was carefully taken care of – especially after grandma came to live with them, as that was also one of her favorite pastimes. They had all kinds of flowers planted around the wall – and with vases up on it - as well as fruit trees and vegetables. Most of the first floor of the house had glass walls, so it was easy to see through. I could easily spot my cousin Thai sitting on the couch doing something on her notebook and my other smaller cousins seemed to be at the kitchen. The only closed spaces were the main suite – my parents’ bedroom – since dad dreaded climbing up the stairs, and the guest room – which was now my grandma’s. At the other side of the backyard, as soon as we walked in, I knew I would be able to see the big brick barbecue grill and the garden tables splattered around the pool, with just enough shadow that the threes allowed, but before we could do that, my mother made her way towards us from the back.

“How did it feel?”, Dr. Arrow interrupted the story again.

“What?”

“Seeing your mother”, he said, “the time you saw her before that was when you was still… how do I put it?”

“…Crushed”, I said. “The time I saw her before that was when I was utterly crushed because of David… and it felt… weird. Really, really weird”.

“Monica!”, mom complimented her. Monica had followed me to Brazil a few times before, on business, and she always stayed with us, so she knew all my immediate family.

“Nice to see you, Vanessa”, Davi, the translator, went on as they talked, talking to no one in particular and translating both parts at the conversation as well as he could, which was really weird, “You too, you look so good, your hair is amazing”. And then my mother turned to me.

“Oi, mãe”, I said, for one moment genuinely forgetting how weird I felt and smiling, “Que saudade!”

“Filha!”, she said, lovingly, hugging me. In the back, I heard as Davi went ‘I’ve missed you. You look so pretty. I love your hair this long’.

“Mom”, I switched to English, trying to be as natural as possible. As I turned to point at Harry, the words escaped me for a second. He was so tall and broad shouldered in his blue polo shirt and jeans, and his hair was so spiky and orange it was hard for me to associate this guy was my boyfriend. “This is Harry”, I said, and watched as he smiled at her, mouthing a ‘nice to meet you’. Mom went for a hug.

“Welcome, Harry!”, she said, not looking one bit overwhelmed by exactly who that guy was. I kept introducing everyone else, Eddy and Thomas, even Davi and Marcos. “Everyone please make yourselves at home”, mom went on, “Can I offer you some lemonade? Let’s go to the back, your grandparents want to see you!”, she told me, crossing our arms together and leading us to the back.

“Grandparents? You mean grandma?”

“Grandparents, seus avós”, she explained, in Portuguese, she really did mean both of them. “They got here last night. Your cousin is inside, she can’t handle the sun. Way too pregnant, she says.
But, oh, you must see Luiza, she’s gotten so big! When was the last time you saw aunt—“

“Wait”, I stopped, “Are they all here?”

“Yes”, she said, “We’re having a barbecue. The family got here last night and we haven’t seen each other since Christmas, so we’re having a get together… Silvana is here too, you know? The neighbor. Her daughter is back from college for the wedding, they’re gonna love to see you, she’s a big fan of your show. Oh, the boys are going to play football, do you play football, Harry? Thomas?”

“I-Uh-“

“Or do you boys call it soccer over there?”

“Football”, Harry said, smiling, “And, well, I’m sure we don’t play as well you, brazilians, but we do try”

“Good, you can join them-“

“Mom!”, I stopped her again, “we’ve been traveling for, like, fifteen hours. We’re exhausted. We just came to say hello, but we need to sleep-“

“Oh, nonsense, you’ll have plenty of time to sleep!”, she said, “But everyone is so excited to see you and your boyfriend”

“Yeah, Jen”, Harry said, “We can stay for a bit”

“Mom, why don’t you go ahead? I’ll go through the house to introduce Harry to Thai”

“Great, I’ll get you guys some lemonade!”, after she left, walking around the house back to the back where the others were, I turned to Harry.

“This is bad, this is really, really bad”, I said, “I had no idea they’d all be here. This is way too much. My parents? Cool. Everyone at once? No. We’re leaving. Right. Now.”

“Jenifer, calm down”, Harry held my arm right when I was turning back to the door, “This is good, this is good news! Everyone is here at the same time, it means they’ll have less chance to interrogate us!”

“No, everyone here at the same time means they’ll attack you in group. Harry, there’s even a neighbor here. A friend of my mom. And her daughter. We can’t control them.”

“For the love of God”, he said, “I’m the one who should be worried, and I’m cool with it. Time for you to be cool with it too. Let’s go”. Putting his arm around me, he pushed me through the wooden door before I could protest – even more - and inside the living room, where a bouncy three year-old on a pink dress was standing in front of the television.

“Hey, cutie-pie”, I said, back to Portuguese, and Luiza looked at me sucking on her thumb looking very shy. She managed a smile even so.

“Oi”, she said, looking at the TV.

“This is Harry”, I said, and he kneeled besides her, smiling, and offered her a hand, that she shook. I kept staring at him as this happened, only then realizing how many freckles he had. I wondered how I never noticed that before.
“Jenifer?”, I heard my cousin’s voice, coming from the kitchen and we made our way there. I was
desperately trying to buy more time before I had to go through the introductions of Harry to my
entire family and the usual interrogation that came with it, but I knew it was inevitable. My cousin
screamed when she saw me, and I couldn’t help but do the same as we hugged, me trying to dodge
her pregnant belly – it was one of those involuntary reactions that your subconscious known better
than you, nothing I could do about it. We went through the usual ‘I missed you’s and ‘you look so
good’s and ‘I can’t believe you’re here’s and then she looked at Harry.

“This is Harry”, I said, in English, since my cousin already knew his name, and I wanted to let him
know what I was saying. “Harry, this is Thailane, you can call her Thai”

“Nice to meet you”, she managed, smiling, and looked at me again, before whispering in
Portuguese, “Does he get Portuguese?”

“We have a translator”, I whispered back, signaling at Davi.

“Well, welcome!”, she went back to her normal voice tone, smiling wider now.

Thailane was that sort of cousin that I felt I knew better than I knew myself. She had always been
there, ever since I can remember.

“How was your flight?”

“Exhausting”, I said, “Fifteen hours long…”

“God, that sounds awful”

“It was, which is why we can’t stay”, I said, “We’re just here to say hello and then we’re off to
sleep the jet leg off”

“You’re…”, she whispered again, in Portuguese, “Staying with him?”

“No, I’m staying here. I’m just going to take them to my house and I’ll be right back”

“Cool, we have a lot to catch up on!”, she went back to her normal tone, smiling again, as Luiza ran
into the kitchen holding up a cup.

“Aunt Nessa has the lemonade, sweetie, you’ll have to go ask her, she’s outside”, Thai told her
daughter. “I better take her there. I’ll talk to you guys later”, we smiled as she held Luiza’s hand
and they made their way out.

“She looks young for a mother of almost two”, Harry mentioned.

“She’s about three years older than me”, I said.

“That’s really young to be a mother of almost two”

“Almost four. It’s triplets”. His face was priceless. “That’s not all, I have a cousin who’s actually
younger than me and she has two kids”

“What?!”, he asked, making me laugh.

“What can I say? People just start early around here”. Suddenly, there was a loud scream, and my grandmother’s voice calling for my mother, who came
running from outside, the lemonade jar in her hand. Through the glass windows we could see most
people outside around the people could overhear it despite the music and were now staring at us – most of them following my mother in to check on what had happened. From the hallway, Nathan showed up walking backwards back into the kitchen, his hands in the air in defense. My grandmother came after him, a look of panic and confusion in her face.

“I’m sorry”, Nathan said, looking at us, “I knocked before going in, but I don’t think she heard me, sir”, I had noticed before then that the boys all treated Harry by ‘sir’ when other people were around, “I tried to explain I was just doing the round, but…”

“She doesn’t speak English”, I told him. In Portuguese, mom tried to soothe grandma.

“Mom, that is Jenifer’s boyfriend’s bodyguard”, she said to her mother, loud, so she could hear. A quick look around the room told me now my uncles and aunts were in, just like the children – all curious as to what the disturbance was – and they were all staring at us. I spotted my brother in the group, but my father was still in the grill. “He needs to check everyplace they go to make sure there’s nothing dangerous”

“Bodyguard?! …And who the hell does he think he is to need a bodyguard?!”, my grandmother, an 80 years-old lady born and raised in the countryside of Brazil, from a traditional Christian family, who was still desolated over losing her granddaughter to ‘that life of promiscuity and easy money’, went on with her shaky, cranky voice. “What if I was nude?!”

“He said he knocked, he didn’t know you couldn’t hear him right”, my uncle stepped in, trying to help.

“I hear just fine, thank you very much!”, she went on, “I don’t like no man going into women’s rooms. That’s not normal. That’s very wrong-“

“Excuse me?”, Harry said, smoothly, signaling for Davi – who had been translating the whole think on a low voice in the corner -, to translate what he was saying. “Please allow me to apologize for my friend”

“…I can promise you he had no intentions to disturb you, despite having done so”, Harry went on, walking to my grandmother and mom with his puppy dog blue eyes and cute smile. “He just thought the house was empty”

“That was my fault, mom”, my mother said, in Portuguese, “I thought you were outside”.

“Please”, Harry said, once more, swiftly, “How can we make it up to you, ma-am?”

Grandma took her sweet little time before talking again. She was still being aided by my mother and looking from Harry to her, trying to make sense of things.
“…Oh, it was-uh- It was nothing, after all”, she said, in Portuguese, being translated by Davi, and I could swear I could see her blush. “Just an accident”, she said, smiling now, at Harry.

“I’m done with the round, sir, I’ll go stay at the gate if it’ll make things better”, Nathan said.

“Yes, take Ed with you, he’s going to overlook the water”, Thomas said and just like that, crisis averted. Some of my relatives went back outside, and most of them came to say hello now. It was a whole new round of smiles and hugs and kisses and ‘I’ve missed you’s. I tried to find Harry, but my grandmother had snapped him and when I looked he was kissing her hand and she was giggling like a school girl ready to spill all her secrets to him. His smile back to her was extremely adorable and I could just tell she and my mom had his full attention and, with Davi’s help, they were suddenly engaging in a conversation about God knows what.

“Hm”, Dr. Arrow let out, back at his office about two weeks into the future from the scene at my parents’ house, “Interesting”

“…What?”

“Oh, nothing. I’m not going to interrupt the story”, he said. I took a deep breath, counting to ten, before speaking again.

“Well, now you already did. What was that ‘interesting’?”

“Oh, just… You know”, it was like he was purposely making himself vague, which, he probably was. “It’s funny how your instincts are still the normal ones of a girl introducing her boyfriend to her family, you know, the grandma thing… And being proud of his diplomatic powers, and the adorable smile he gave her or how he genuinely cared instead of brushing it off as something that wasn’t his problem. Is funny how these things come to you normally despite the relationship not being real”.

“Yeah, but”, I said, “he’s not my boyfriend but we’re still friends”

“Would you notice these things in a normal trip with a friend?”

“Apparently I do”, I said, “Since that is what that was, essentially, and I noticed. Right?”

“Yes, but”, he leaned in his chair, resting his elbows in his knees, “You were introducing him as your boyfriend. If you were introducing him as just a friend… You think you would care that much?”

“I didn’t care that much… it was just a detail on the- What are you trying to say?!””, I asked, making Dr. Arrow sigh.

“Jen”, he started, looking at me like he was trying really hard to find the right words to say next, “…Just continue the story”.

“Is that a new tattoo?”, my aunt, who had the impression she lead the perfect life of a perfect family, asked, pointing at the words on my forearm.

“It’s been almost a years since I got it, actually”, I said.

“How would we know? You don’t come to see us”, my uncle said, hugging me next.
“You need to stop painting yourself like that”, grandma said, finding her way to me, “You’re hurting your skin”

“It doesn’t hurt, gran”, I said, hugging her, letting the smell of her shampoo remind me of how much I missed her, “I promise”

“This preacher came to church last December”, she started, “And said when you get a tattoo, the blood that comes out of your skin goes straight into the Devil’s mouth as a sacrifice”. My eyes widened, as I thought of how to respond to that.

“Well, then is a good thing mine never bled”, I smiled at her, who made a grumpy face and turned again to look at Harry.

“Do you like tattoos, sweetheart?”, she asked. Sweetheart? Davi translated him the question.

“Well, I don’t have any, ma’am”, he said, “But your granddaughter’s are so pretty I might just get one…”, he smiled at me as Davi translated it back to gran. “Or maybe that’s just her… She makes anything look pretty, after all”.

In his office, Dr. Arrow’s caught didn’t escape my attention and I already knew what was on his mind.

“It wasn’t a flirt!”, I said, “I mean, it- it was, but we’re pretending to be a couple so it wasn’t real”. He stared at me dead serious for a moment.

“…I didn’t say anything”.

Maybe it was his accent, or his blue eyes and ginger hair and his height and the way he stood out from every single one of my relatives. Or maybe he was just really good with his words, and had experience in charming women. But gran held my arm, giggling after his last sentence, completely forgotten on how much she hated my tattoos, and whispered in Portuguese.

“He’s good”.

“He’s a flirt, that’s what he is”, my aunt joked, on the same whispery tone. “You need to be careful, Jenifer. Those are the most dangerous ones and you don’t want to repeat, you know…”, she made a face, and turned to walk out again, but of course I knew what she was talking about. David. ‘You don’t want to repeat David’.

Next, my brother came to introduce himself, and the fact he ignored me and went straight to Harry concerned me to the bones. The conversation was pretty normal, but the handshake and the stare contest told a different story.

“Ei, Ro”, my brother, Lucas, turned to me, finally, “Saudade!”

“And me! Where’s Livia?”, I asked.

“Having a girl’s day with her cousins back at the hotel”

“Cool”, I said, turning to Harry, “Livia is a single child, so her cousins are like her sisters”. He nodded.
“Periquita!” (parakeet) my father came in, with the world’s biggest smile on his face, and gave me a hug, “I’ve missed you so! Why didn’t you come sooner? Do you forget the poor over here?”

“I had work, dad”, I said, “We both did. This is Harry”. The way my father’s voice switched when he talked to Harry would have been hilarious if it wasn’t scary.

“So you’re the guy that keeps taking my daughter to Africa and to clubs and stuff?”, dad said, and I rolled my eyes loudly.

“God, Dad”, I said, as his hands were still together.

“What? I’m just asking a question”, he said, without taking his eyes from Harry or making any movement to stop the handshake. My brother was by his side, arms crossed, staring at Harry too. Neither of them was nearly as tall as Harry, but somehow they looked pretty impressive standing there like they owned me. ‘When did my life became such a cliché?’, I thought.

But the way Harry’s eyes didn’t show any sign of fear of embarrassment or awkwardness was just addicting to look at. And, honestly? Kind of hot. His eyes showed kindness and understanding and he kept a modest smile on his lips the whole time.

“Do you play football, kid?”, dad asked. Kid?

“Yes, sir.”, the way he didn’t play it humble like when my mother asked the same question made me very happy. As you can guess, next thing I know I left Vodka in my room and we’re changing clothes so Harry can be comfortable as he’s being kicked in the tibia in the most intense amateur football match anyone had ever seen.

As he played, I could hear the conversation my family was having and it pretty much sums up my family’s approach to meeting my new boyfriend. A few of them were just straight up enchanted by him (be it his accent, his blue eyes, his sense of humor, or his football skills, I mean, the options are endless), this group was mostly composed by woman – I like to think gran was their leader. The rest of them were just having none of his bullshit, which mixed up with how long I hadn’t seen most of those people meant I had to face an endless list of questions like:

“How old is he? Well, at least not as old as that David fellow”

“When are you moving back home?”

“So you don’t think of getting a real job?”

“When are you going to finish college?”

“I saw a movie with you the other day, you have to tell your boss you need to wear some more decent clothes”

“What does Harry do?”

“When is he moving back to his home?”

“Why is he in New York?”

“Doesn’t he miss his family?”

“Are you guys going to break up when he leaves?”

"I heard you’re in some fancy movie, are you gonna win an Oscar?"
“So… is he the one?”

“Oh, darling, he’s not the one!”

“When are you going to get married?”

“Why do you swear so much on television? You have to think on giving the example”

“You know, our neighbor’s son is gonna be at the wedding, you guys would make such a cute couple…and he leaves here!”

“You don’t have to settle for these Hollywood guys, you deserve someone better, someone normal”

“His family did a hell of a number on his mother, you don’t want to be next, do you?”

These questions and comments came in such a pace that it felt like I was hearing them one after the other, without any time to answer. The line in my brain that separated English from Portuguese started to get really blurry. It was like they all loved him, but didn’t want me to be with him. Being thrown in the middle of the ‘get-a-real-job-conversation’, all of this just became too much for me to handle.

Despite wearing sun glasses, I felt like the sun was constantly blinding me, even when I sat beside my grandfather – dad’s dad - under a tree. He was pretty old and with alzheimer’s and a recent stroke, he didn’t really recognize anyone anymore, or talked much for that matter. He just… sat there. Which is why he was my favorite company at that point. But even grandpa couldn’t help me breathe better or stop the insane fear waves I felt over pretty much everything on my life at that point.

About a half an hour later I’m walking down the wooden pier to the lagoon we had in the backyard-

“Wait, what were you feeling again?”, Dr. Arrow stopped me.

“I know”, I said, “it was a panic attack”

“You had a panic attack over your family not liking your boyfriend?”

“It wasn’t just that. He’s not my… real boyfriend, you really think I would be that upset?”

“Then what was it about?”

“I don’t know, isn’t it your job to tell me? It was just… I don’t know, maybe everything? Everything at the same time. I thought I was just gonna see my parents and everyone was there at once. They all apparently don’t get my job, or my choices or who I am, for that matter. I love those people with all my heart, but they just… suffocated me”

“How long did it last?”

“Maybe… About forty minutes? Maybe a little less’

“How did you stop it?”

“Didn’t”, I said, “Harry did”.
I was focusing on the heat of the sun on my skin as I walked back and forth the and trying breathing exercises to feel better when Harry walked up to me, a little out of breath and with sweat shining in his skin. He took his shirt off as he walked down the pier, with Clark following him from a distance.

“What’s going on?”, he asked.

“Nothing”, I said, “Is the game over?”

“No, I just got out. Are you ok?”

“Yeah, why?”

“You look…”, he cleared his throat. “You don’t look ok”

“I just, I don’t know, I feel like I need to get out of my own skin”, I said, still on my frenetic pace, my hands on my hips, staring at the ground, glad the pier was a bit far from the pool and where everyone else was.

“Are you out of breath?”. I nodded.

“I don’t- understand, I just don’t… get it. They”, I laughed, humorless, “I don’t wanna sound like a rebellious teenager, but they just don’t get me, you know? They don’t get any of it. They don’t”, I felt the tears running down my cheeks as the lump on my throat started to hurt more, “They never understood. And they just think I’m some sort of ungrateful slut who’s living the good life in the States, fucking older guys and getting tattoos-Harry, I- I can’t breathe…”

“Jen”, Harry wrapped his arms around me faster than I could tell what was happening and the warmth of his body, the smell of him, was all around me as I gasped for air and for some peace of mind. His arms made their way around my back, comforting me and, more than that, reaching for my bottom. He grabbed something from my pocket – my cellphone, I realized later, and threw it in the pier. Next thing I know, he’s taking two quick steps onto the water with me still in his arms and everything around me seemed to have disappeared.

The cold water was such a shock – along with, you know, falling – it must have had some sort of reaction in my brain, because when we emerged from the cold water of Lagoon Conceição, with Harry still holding me tight and close to him, I couldn’t see the white spots anymore. His face was so close to mine all I could see was the way the water dripped from his hair around his stupid blue perfect eyes and through his freckles and how it reflected the sunshine. I was gasping for air now from the shock, but it didn’t feel like I had any problem making the air stay where it was supposed to. And, hidden there, in the cold water, behind the pier, with the tide intertwining our legs, I could somehow feel his skin still hot from the sun and from playing football in mine as my shirt floated. I was so aware of his muscles holding me up and how my breasts were undeniably pressed to his chest…in a good way? On the fall, I had grabbed him so tight in fear I was just vaguely aware of the grip of my nails in his back…in a bad way? I wasn’t sure if it was the tide, how we were gasping for breath or if his face really was suddenly closer than it had been a second ago…and was it just me or were his lips so close I could actually touch them with mine with just a small move of my head? I could remember the touch of his lips from last time we had kissed, on my birthday, and it was like my whole body wanted more but something in the back of my mind reminded me no one was watching, so I had no excuse to do it. My heart started beating faster again, definitely in a good way, and I was sure he was staring at my lips. It was probably because I couldn’t hear anything since it felt like my heart was beating in my ears, but next thing I know a new shadow
made us aware of Clark who had just reached the end of the pier to check on us.

“Dammit, Clark”

“What?”

“Nothing”, Dr. Arrow, said, sighing, “Please, continue”

“Are you guys ok there?”, Clark asked us, as Harry loosened up his grip around me, getting some distance.

“Yeah”, he said, “We’re fine”. Clark walked back to the middle of the pier. “We’re fine, right?”, Harry asked when he left. “Are you fine?”. I looked around to the lagoon and to under the pier where the sunshine was less blinding. I took some deep breaths before answering.

“Yes, I think so”. The tears had stopped falling and I could breathe normally now, not to mention how great the cold water felt now that I could feel the heat of the sun again. “Why-How did you do that?”

“I did some reading on anxiety after you told me about your problems”, he said, holding to one of the pier’s columns to steady himself on the same place. “I read panic attacks were usual, and that you had to hold your breath to slower the heartbeat to stop it, so…”

“So you thought drowning me was the best way to do just that?”, I teased, smiling.

“No, I didn’t mean to-“, he stuttered. “I mean, we didn’t- I, we weren’t even down that long. I just thought, I’m sorry-“

“Harry”, I stopped him, laughing, “I’m kidding”. The contrast between the two emotions of the attack and the laughter was so bizarre it actually felt good. Harry laughed too, and I took another deep breath, looking at him, who was now staring at the mountains across the lagoon. He had a smile on his face too, and his cheeks had a nice pinkish glow that could either mean he was blushing or he should really use some sun block. Maybe both. I hugged him, glad to be able to wrap my arms around him again, his skin under mine was still hot despite the cold water. “Thank you, Harry”, I whispered, and he let go of the column to give me a proper hug, resting his head on my shoulder, as the tide brought our bodies closer again.

“Anytime, Ms. Silva”, he said, tightening his grip on my waist, his voice muffled since his lips were on my neck, making my skin even warmer. “Anytime”.

As I realized I was making the hug longer than it should be, I let him, thinking I needed to talk to someone, and deciding perhaps it was time to send Dr. Arrow an email.

“Why then?”, Dr. Arrow asked, his eyes widened, extremely interested now. “Why did you decide to write me just then? And why me?”

“Because I wanted to talk to someone, and you’re the only one who knows the truth about us…”, I noticed how smaller my voice got.

“What did you want to talk about?”, he asked, his voice so soft and careful I was almost sure he knew what I was going to say even before I knew it, like he had been waiting for it. I took a deep
breath, looking at my hands on my lap, embarrassed and already dreading the words I said next.

“I think I’m falling in love with my boyfriend”
Harry

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Harry’s POV*

I should start by saying that as ironic as it is I have no idea what I’m supposed to be doing here. I have so much to say, there’s so much in me, so much is happening, I don’t really know where to start. There’s so much you should know, there’s so much I want you to know, and I’m not even sure who you are, but I need to put this out there somehow.

I guess the first step is to tell you who I am – who I really am, as you probably already know my name and title – maybe even my job. But here’s who I am: I’m British; I’m ginger; I’m a younger sibling; I’m a soldier; I’m a traveler; I’m the son of a prince and a dancer; I’m rich; I attended the best boarding schools; I had nannies, cooks and drivers; I’ve had body guards since I was born; I have a very unique perspective in privacy; my presence could enhance the financial opportunities of any organization or place; I’m the grandson of a queen and as I get older I’ll be the son of a king, the brother of one and the uncle of another; if my immediate family died or made some terrible decisions, I could actually be king myself; I can’t have Facebook accounts, or an Instagram or Twitter; I can’t take selfies and share my weekends or my lunches with friends online; my cellphone numbers and email accounts are encrypted and given only to trust-worthy friends; I have a code name for security reasons and a team of advisors, secretaries and public relations and all I ever did was to be born.

It’s not an easy life, but is not like I’ve had much choice. And it’s not like it’s always been a burden – I’ve had my fun. I have friends, I party, I’ve fallen in and out of love countless times before falling in love for real and when that happened at age 20, it felt just like everything I had ever done: it felt easy, fun and fast. It felt fueled by energy and passion and rage. Oh, yes, I’ve always had so much rage inside.

I’ve never thought too much about things – I always had people who did that for me. To think if what I was doing was dangerous or anything and stop me from doing it.

When all we ever did was in front of photographers, I just assumed it was our normal and went with it. When my parent’s marriage crumbled, I was just glad we could all be happy apart instead or miserable together. When mom and dad started talking about their lives to the whole world, I shook it off as their problem, not mine. They talked to us about it, of course. Our parents; they prepared us for what we would hear; they talked about how sometimes, even though you love someone, is not enough. And you end up loving someone else too and hurting the person you’re with. They told us that was a bad thing, they had made mistakes they regretted, and that we should try and not do the same when we grew up. But I never thought too much about it.

When my mother died I did some thinking. I thought it was unfair and blamed God and asked ‘why?’ in tears in the shower to no one in particular. That was all I did, though. I blamed God. And after that, as I grew up, I just did whatever the hell I wanted. I kissed the girls I wanted to kiss, because, as I learned, girls wanted to kiss me. I drank when offered a drink and smoked when offered and I went places because people wanted me there. I never even thought of blaming my father or my family for my mother’s death and I didn’t necessarily saw anything wrong with how I was living because, as far as I was concerned life was pretty good… with the exception of the people that seemed to think they owned us.

As I learned more about myself, I also learned more about my friends. I learned a lot of them had
I started to think of why I had to take on so much bullshit and the only reason I could think of was being born. And then I did start to blame my father and my family for a lot of things.

I took a gap year after school to get as far away from my family as I possibly could; I traveled around, enjoying not having to do anything except what I choose to do, and I realized things about myself and my life I’m not sure I really wanted to. But most importantly, I met people. I met people who didn’t care what letters they had to write in front of my name, and I met people who had gone through the same losses I did, I met people who didn’t even know who I was, and I met people who had it so much worse than me. And as I learned more about myself and blamed so many different people for my problems and asked why me, I saw kids who could blame whole governments for theirs and all they wanted was a hug.

When I got back home, I found myself happy to see my family again. I found I truly missed them and everything about England and my little piece of the world that I didn’t care all that much about before. I felt I could find somewhere to throw the blame at or I could use my sad backstory for something good. So I took my time, and I did my own thing, and I learned what I could and I did my job and it was like I had a purpose and I could finally understand.

There was only one thing I cared about as much as trying to make my problems worth it: Chelsy. Chelsy and her blond hair, Chelsy and her sweet laugh, Chelsy and the way she touched me, Chelsy and how she pushed me and made me a better me, Chelsy and her ideas and Chelsy and everything she made me feel. Chelsy and everything that came with her: the possibility of a future, the chance at my own family and making it a better version of everything I had ever experienced. Chelsy made me believe there was hope for me. And Chelsy looked beautiful and then, one day, Chelsy said yes.

And then Chelsy got quiet and she avoided talking about permanent plans, and at first she decided we shouldn’t rush into anything. And then she wanted to keep her job, and then it was like there was only one thing keeping her from who she wanted to be and that thing was me. But how could I be stopping her from being who she was if who she was was the sole reason I wanted to be with her for the rest of our lives?

But of course, that’s what a life with me meant. It meant longer hemlines in your dresses, it meant a totally different career path – in charity. It meant lame headpieces and waving at people from a balcony. It meant spending every Christmas away from your family to be with mine. It meant protection officers following you everywhere. It meant paparazzi following you everywhere. It meant watching your every word. It meant looking perfect at all times or having to take on the critics. It meant being perfect at all times or take on the critics. How would anyone want that?

I still don’t understand why I thought of her – Jenifer, who at this point was just that actress I met in a gala once – in that Christmas day when I chickened out of the walk to church in Sandringham claiming a headache. I guess I just remembered how she said she envied me for having love all figured out. I wondered if she had heard the news. She probably did. I remember Googling Chelsy and seeing how the paparazzi had harassed her Christmas and thinking this wasn’t fair. This is why she left me. Because she didn’t want to be harassed, she wanted to be herself in peace, and she
couldn’t do it. They wouldn’t let her. No matter how much I tried to bring things back to normal, no matter how I perfected the art of fake smiling, they wouldn’t leave her alone and they wouldn’t let it go. She needed more than a break from me, she needed space from me, so I’d give her space.

I moved to the United States in February, and my social life quickly went from meeting my friends at a club to trying to cook with my protection officers and aide. It went from heirs and lords I had grown up with to American guys who had gone to Ivy League schools and were dedicating their lives to Halo. It went from taking a private jet to the beach to watching American TV shows with Jenifer.

It’s funny how trusting her came easy to me. She was a good friend and she understood. She understood the pain and the lack of privacy. She lead a public life, and was healing from a public break-up, so it might have been about that, but I guess mostly, it was about how we met. And how she said yes to going to my polo match for charity, but instead of just showing up and doing her own thing, she made me let her play. The Brazilian 22 years old actress who had never played polo in her life wanted to play just so she wouldn’t be bored watching. I don’t think I was ever as intrigued as I was by that.

I guess the easiest way to explain Jenifer is to explain what came with her: New York.

New York and how different it felt from London, despite not being all that different considering both cities were huge, iconic and cosmopolitan. But England was square; it was pastel colors and cloudy skies, traditions, long hemlines and ties. England was tea and inheritance and slow paced narrow streets. New York couldn’t be fit in a shape, it was up and down and all around, all at once, and going places and moving fast. It was all shades of grey and black with a pinch of yellow all of a sudden. Or red. Or pink. In some places, like Times Square, it was all colors at once with the gray background. Sometimes it was green. England was winter and autumn; New York was spring and summer. It was the sun you could barely see between the skyscrapers. England was inheritance; New York was self-employment and improvisation. It was start-ups and websites and apps. It was speed and productivity, it was therapy and parties. New York was fashion, and weird fashion, and new fashion and old fashion, all mixed together. New York was coffee and bagels and things like ‘cronuts’. New York was also Italy and China, and huge part of it was Brazil and India. New York didn’t feel like anything I had ever felt before, and I soon started worrying about the day I’d have to go back home.

Jenifer was New York; she was different than everything I had ever known, she was different than any other girl I had ever met, any other girl anyone had ever met, and I think the key word here, like New York, is fast. She talked fast, walked fast, thought fast, worked fast, planned fast; she pretty much lived her life in a pace I had never been used to.

Jenifer is Brazilian with an American citizenship; she’s young; a college drop out; an accomplished actress; a designer; a dreamer; she’s a workaholic; an over-thinker; she probably has a problem with alcohol; she has anxiety disorders due to her misunderstanding despite loving family and jerk ex; she has a light OCD; she’s constantly stressed; she hasn’t cooked in six years; she loyally follows about twenty TV shows at the same time despite having a heavy work load; she’s very present in every social media website and very responding to her fans; she’s on therapy.

And Jenifer was New York. On the sense of where England is inheritance and New York is self-employment, she found her way through one semester in college, and then did a TV show, and she could design clothes and manage all her money by herself. She could act, dance, sing, write, produce, draw, and God knows what else...

When Jenifer got really excited, she started to crumble words all together and her accent slightly
came back. Jenifer had a wall in her apartment that used to be white, but had hand-written quotes of her favorite books or songs or movies or TV shows written on it with her handwriting in colorfull crayons. It had words in English she thought were funny, it had words in Portuguese that she missed and abstract random drawings she did to relieve the stress. She told me when I moved in it had been an idea from her first therapist.

Thinking back now that I know about why she even had a therapist, I realize the whole fake-dating idea was probably not the best I’ve had. But as I said, trusting her came easy to me, which is saying a lot, considering the only people back in England I trusted were the people I grew up with. But nonetheless, I had the idea. And I tried it on Madeleine and when she bought it, I knew we could do it. And then it was time to see what the world thought of the British prince dating the Hollywood actress.

I don’t know when I started to notice she was more than that, more than a glamorous self-made millionaire Hollywood type, living the good life, partying and just trying to make it. But I did. And at some point, when I talked to my friends back in England, over the phone, about the actress living downstairs, the actress they, too, thought I was dating, just telling them those things wasn’t enough. ‘She’s not just an actress’, I found myself saying. ‘She’s a hurricane’

No, just ‘actress’ was not enough. Jenifer was more than that. Jenifer was a mix of cold coffee, coke, vodka and energy drinks to my warm sweetened English tea. Jenifer was upbeat music and ‘dance parties’ in the middle of the room. She was an ADHD twelve year-old off her meds on a sugar high and when you thought she couldn’t speak anymore words per second, she’d turn off.

She’d lie on the couch and stare at the TV for hours and turn from one side to the other until she fell asleep. She could pull all-nighters to finish work, and sleep until 1PM the next day and still get everything done. She read entire books in one day and gave you a full report by breakfast, with her full opinion, comparisons with other books she had read before, and the things she liked and hated, and a detailed explanation of the parts that had made her cry and why.

She always had her phone in her hand, always. She took it to the bathroom with her, and she had it with her at the kitchen. She had it with her at the gym, and she had it with her in her closet when she was getting ready to leave. At first I thought it was about how obsessed she was with work, but lately I had started to realize when she couldn’t reach her phone, she'd hold anything else. She'd hold the button of her sweater or the penny she had in her pocket, she just had to hold something. She had to twist it and crumble it and fold it a million times over just to see if she could. Just to keep control.

She had boxes in her closet full of fan letters and other gifts she had been given over the years – she told me once there was more on her LA house. She had a box with an issue of all the magazines that had put her on their cover ever since she started acting – except tabloids. I noticed one day that she always organized things in her own way: if there was a pen in her desk, she put it exactly aligned with her notebook. She’d let her closet be a mess for weeks, and then organize everything by season and color.

Sometimes she looked like a hipster high-schooler on a trust fund, sometimes she looked like a serious businesswoman on her way to court. Sometimes on the same day – sometimes at the same time. She could sing show tunes until her throat – and everyone’s head’s – hurt, and she could sing Blink-182 and Fall Out Boy songs and make you think she deserved a Grammy. She could rap and she could dance. She could call a New York cab. She could enjoy the silence and a slow walk in Central Park, but she didn’t have the patience to plant flowers on the vases on her apartment’s fire-scape.
But no, this girl, this girl was not just that. This girl did her own nails every week because ‘american manicurists just didn’t know how to do it right’. She was a perfectionist and a procrastinator. She was fireworks and sunsets. She was an Ed Sheeran song that mixed an acoustic melody with a powerful strong rap.

I can’t begin to explain when it started or how or why. Why I started to notice more, to look at her for longer. To see beyond her smile and laugh. To try and find the reason beyond each of her eye rolls and jokes and teases. I don’t know when it started, or how or why. But I know it did. Somewhere along the line, each time I looked at her, I looked longer. As she rushed through her ramble of whatever it was that time, I realized there was no rush, there was no reason I should take my eyes off of her. Why would I? Why would anyone ever?

Her skin was perfect ivory white. Her cheekbones were full. Her eyes were big and clear, light brown. Her hair was long and dark shiny black. Her nose was small and perky and her lips – God, her lips. Who the hell had perfect lips? Her lips were full and soft and the first time I touched them with mine, on a sunny warm Saturday in Morgan Bay, the first time I had kissed someone in many months, I realized something I had only realized before when I thought Chelsy loved me: I realized there was hope for me. There was hope that I could love again one day because Jenifer Silva’s lips made me feel like I wanted to. And it wasn’t weird, kissing her. I had prepared for weird, for apologies. But it was never weird. Because unlike the girls back in school, this girl did not want to kiss me. She wanted to forget the mistakes she had made, and she wanted to forget the guy that broke her heart, and she wanted to work and accomplish the things she knew she could with the talent she knew she had and being able to admit that was so brave I had to envy her.

Now, I know what you're thinking: no one is that perfect. And you're right. She had her flaws like everyone else, she's only human. But still, even when she woke up with morning breath, freezy oily hair and bags under her eyes you could still see it. If she gave you a smile and you imagined the frame around her face you could see how she belonged in a museum. I had spent a long time wondering if anyone would ever look at me twice if it wasn't for my status, but Jenifer? She had the face of a queen. She looked like she was holding the sky in place. She had the world in her light brown eyes and eternity in her skin and her lips held the secrets to all of life's questions and it was very easy to believe she was famous. It was so easy to understand why some millions of teenagers had decided to make her their muse. Because when you looked at her face you just knew it belonged somewhere people could see it.

At some point, Jenifer became more than a neighbor. More than the famous actress I met some months ago in a charity gala in London and that helped me find a place to live. More than the girl that put on her white pants and riding boots in a charity polo match. She became a friend, an accomplice and, of course, she became my girlfriend in the most unusual way ever: by logic thinking.

She likes to think the PR move was her idea, but I know she’d never have suggested it hadn’t I said I thought it was a good idea first. And I’m pretty sure it would never have worked hadn’t she made the plans and the decisions that needed to be made. As we should have expected, things haven’t always gone according to plan. The Met Ball right after people ‘found out’ about us was almost a complete train wreck. Running into her ex was worst. Not punching him was hard. Kissing her in front of him was amazing. That was the first time we kissed for real, the first time I gripped her back and she had her arms around my neck and our tongues met. The first time it felt more than a prop, more than a con. The first time it felt real. The first time I felt like I was dating an amazingly talented and gorgeous Hollywood actress a lot younger than me for real. And had to remind myself it wasn’t. It shoudn’t be.

At some point, in between the fake romantic dinner we had in my terrace when I gave her a puppy
for her birthday and we danced in the rain to no particular song, going to a club and meeting all of her friends and trying not to have a boner watching her dance to some sexy Brazilian song, and deciding going to Brazil to meet her family out of pure curiosity to see if they’d like me, she stopped even being the girl I was sharing the biggest secret of my life with. She became more than that. She became this… unstoppable force of nature who, for some reason, was choosing to spend her time with me.

Why would she? I kept looking in the mirror for why would she had ever said yes to doing this with me, this fake-dating PR move. Why me? The only reason I could come up with was my ttitle, it had to be my ttitle because, compared to her, I was just some lame, freakishly tall English ginger guy with constant red cheeks, a huge nose and a gap between his teeth. Without makeup, she could actually almost look ten years younger than me. And people noticed.

Being in Brazil and meeting her family proved to be one of the weirdest things I ever had to do because Jenifer’s family just plain simply didn’t care one bit who I was. They didn’t care who my family was. They didn’t care at all. All they cared about was her little girl who never went home anymore and who had been terribly hurt by her previous boyfriend. And, apparently, it was common knowledge they couldn’t trust her judgment in men anymore. I guess since David Cobb was about thirty years older than her, divorced and with a daughter her age, they just thought any guy she brought home that was more than three years older was the same type of men.

I didn’t blame them for being harsh on me, thought. I didn’t hold any grunges about it either. How could I when I knew I’d be doing the same thing if she was mine to protect? I was aware it was a very strange thing that at the same time I admired her fierceness, strength and independence, I understood her family’s protectiveness and surprised myself with thoughts of ‘yes, we must protect her, she’s too good for this world’. But her family seemed to think she was doing so much wrong, not just dating older guys, but also her work on TV and the little clothing she wore and how much she swore. I considered myself enough of an expert on her work since we had started dating – I had binge watched her show with the boys, and we were all already fans of the movies she had done before, a couple comedies and a Marvel Universe franchise, and the indie drama with Leonardo Dicaprio -, so I felt personally offended by this. Jenifer wasn’t just a child actress who got lucky, and she really didn’t got the part in Wild & Free just because we’re dating, I knew how talented she was, I knew how much she deserved recognition.

So despite being a little pissed at them for making her crumble things in her hands more, I smiled and was my most polite self, and I complimented her and made her my priority, realizing that wasn’t even difficult. And when her father crushed my hand in his and her brother gave me filthy looks and they almost broke my leg during football, I took it. I brushed it off as I knew I’d do the same if she was mine to protect, and some part of me, quicker than I could stop myself, wished she was.

I looked at her when that thought crossed my mind, fearing she could hear it, knowing that thought was borderline a betrayal of our unspoken fake-dating agreement, but she wasn’t there. It was a funny thing that unspoken agreement: we had gotten used to sharing a bed as friends, despite it having been awkward at first… Mostly because since we knew we couldn’t be with anyone else as we were doing this PR move (being caught was too big a risk, and none of us wanted a cheating headline to our name), we knew this was as much human contact we would be having for a while. So although it was awkward at first, we got over it. And it got normal. And we slowly stopped apologizing and justifying touching each other, and hugging each other as soon as we found ourselves alone. It was just known that when there were people around, we’d be touchy and coupley. We’d hold hands and be closer than we normally would because we were playing a part. If I’m being honest, with time, we stopped thinking about it. It just started to come naturally.
But Jenifer wasn’t there when I looked for her. I found her about 150 feet away, pacing back and forth at the end of the pier her family had from the end of their backyard to the lagoon. Lake? Pond? I signaled to her family my feet were sore, which wasn’t a complete lie, ignoring their judgmental looks and pretending I didn’t know they were teasing me just by the tone they used although in Portuguese, and made my way to Jenifer taking my shirt off, cleaning the sweat in my forehead with it. Although it was supposed to be autumn in Brazil, the weather was like any other British summer.

Jenifer had her hands in her hips and she walked looking at the ground, her shiny and long black hair falling like a silk curtain around her eyes and down her shoulders. She had sunglasses on, that she took off when I approached her, allowing me to notice how her eyebrows were frowned and how anguished she looked.

“I just, I don’t know, I feel like I need to get out of my own skin”, she told me, still on her frenetic pace, breathing heavily and looking very pale.

“Are you out of breath?”, I asked. She nodded, quickly starting to talk fast again, spitting words faster than I could make sense of her accent, about her family and how they didn’t get it. Of course she looked bad, with the level of judgment and questioning she was getting, even I probably looked bad. My mind went back to the few articles I had read a couple of months before, after Taylor Swift called me to let me know Jenifer wasn’t the type of person who was strong enough to handle ‘too much at once’, and that I should know she ‘had issues’, which she went on to explain very briefly. I was glad the wooden pier was long and the barbecue on the back of the backyard, because her family didn’t seem to notice anything was wrong, but it was very clear something was wrong. It was painfully clear she wasn’t okay.

“Harry, I-“, she cried, the way she said my name breaking my heart, “…I can’t breathe” If I’m being honest, I don’t remember having the idea. All I know is I’m glad I did. And I’m glad I remembered to save her cellphone. And for a second or two I was worried if we were even allowed to swim in that pond.

When we came out of the water, gasping for air and stamping our feet to remain on the surface, the tide slightly moving us around, her clear-brown eyes were so close to mine it felt like a punch in the guts. I still had my arms around her waist from the fall – afraid if I let go she’d crumble – and I was ridiculously aware of how smooth and soft her skin felt on mine since, with the tide, her shirt had lifted and I was basically bracing her nude back. Still trying to steady her breath, I felt the air fresh from her nostrils strike my lips and chin, throwing a shiver down my spine. I knew what this meant – the shiver -, and the realization hit me so hard I sighed, slightly, quickly closing my eyes and trying to focus on the resounding ‘no’ echoing in my mind. ‘Don’t’, I thought. ‘Just don’t. Don’t even go there’. But I opened my eyes, even more aware now of her grip on my shoulders and how she was staring at my skin – the skin of my cheeks, my forehead…- and at my lips. ‘Why not?’, I thought, realizing how her knee was in between my legs and how the tide kept bringing our legs together, rubbing in each other. She had nice legs, I remembered. Long and muscly and belonging in a catwalk. ‘Kiss her’, something deep inside of me whispered. ‘Wait, what?’. Her eyelids fluttering fast, water dripping from her eyelashes. ‘What’s the big deal? Just kiss her’, I was vaguely aware now of how I was tightening up my hold on her, thinking I was definitely crossing the unspoken agreement line. She looked at me again, sunshine reflecting the now almost golden tone of her eyes creating a thousand different sub-tones on them. Something in my stomach heated up despite the cold water and I was thinking that was just not right. Her lips were pinkish and full and their taste was still heavily engraved on my me from the last time we had kissed – on her birthday, because Clark, Nathan and Thomas were watching. ‘Kiss her’, the voice in the core of me recited. I remember the shiver that went down my spine that time, that I shook off as just
hormones, or loneliness, or alcohol. Anything, really, any excuse at all because I just couldn’t be having feelings for this girl. ‘Kiss her’, the voice repeated. Just not this one, not this girl. Not the exact one that came with a list of reasons why it could never work. ‘Kiss her’. Just not the one with the shiny black hair, clear brown eyes and pinkish full lips. ‘Kiss her!’. Just not the one breathing so close to me right now. ‘KISS HER’, the voice got clearer, more difficult to pretend wasn’t there. Just not the one whose boobs I could so deliciously feel against my chest. ‘KISS HER!’ Please not this one. ‘Kis- I CAN’T!’ I mentally yelled at myself. ‘Nobody’s watching, I have no excuse to!’. How long had I been holding her? How long had I been staring at her lips? Was I supposed to let go? Did she know something was wrong? Could she freaking blame me for staring? Who’s hair is that shiny?! I felt her breath against my skin again, and with it the whole new wave of shivers. ‘Maybe just a little bit’, I bargained with myself. ‘Doesn’t have to mean anything’. I breathed in, getting closer, knowing it would ruin everything, change everything, but how could I not when she made me feel so-?

When the sun disappeared, I pulled back, looking up, knowing something had changed. Clark wanted to know if we were okay. Well, I guess falling in the water all of a sudden was a bit weird, after all. I managed to let Jen out of my hold, telling him we were fine. Lying my face off. At least Jen seemed fine, she was breathing normally again. At least one of us was fine. I was not fine at all. I got a grip of the pier column to try and no get pushed by the tide back to the shore (I say shore, but there was barely any sand, just mostly grass). Across the wide Lagoon, I focused my eyes on the hills in the horizon as Jen laughed at my despair when she joked about me trying to drown her.

What had just happened? I almost ruined everything. If I had kissed her without anyone looking, she’d just assume I wanted to kiss her… because I liked her. Which is ridiculous, considering… well, all of the reasons why it was ridiculous.

Jen was an actress, her job was to put herself out there, in the media, and kiss other actors in movies and on TV. Jenifer had modeled for Victoria’s Secret a few years back, you could still see the photos if you googled it. Jen lived in the US. Jen wasn’t British. Jen was in the begining of her twenties, we’re in completely different points of our lives. I was supposed to be married right now hadn’t Chelsy been a bitch. Not to mention how much of a liability she was. Taylor was right, Jenifer had an anxiety syndrome, her levels of stress were on an all-time high, and she just had an anxiety attack, for God’s sake. She could never handle the life I led. She had a bucket list, a complicated history with older men, I’m pretty sure she had a problem with alcohol, family issues that needed solving, and the most wonderful smell on the world. Not that the last one mattered that much, but when she hugged me again, it was hard not to focus on it.

And as I sighed, I knew I’d have been such a jerk for kissing her right after an attack. Right when she needed a friend, not a complicated fake boyfriend who had been lonely way too long.

After she thanked me for helping her out, I climbed back to the pier and puller her up, and we sat there for a while trying to dry a little bit so we could go on with our day.

I stared at the landscape for a while, in awe. The lagoon was so big it really did look like a beach. We could see the hills surrounding us, the sand hills, or dunes, at east. The vast blue sky on top and the blinding sun. I tried to think what Brazil was.

Brazil was a slippery circle that you tried to grasp and reach all day long just to have it for a couple of seconds at the end and loose it again. Brazil was green. Even downtown, even in the big cities, Brazil felt green, all shades of it. Brazil was a smile to a complete stranger on the street. Brazil was calm and noise at the same time, it was a ‘let’s do it’ and a ‘not really’. It was orange juice and cold watery fruit. Brazil was improvisation on the weirdest ways, in all things possible. It was flip-flops as important fashion accessories. It was colorful hippy jewelry and curly natural hair. Brazil
was such a Jenifer.

She used my shirt, that I had left on the pier as well, to dry her hands and pick her cellphone up. She hit play in some slow happy indie song, and took a deep breath, probably still trying to calm herself.

“My dad called me fat”

“What?” she laughed.

“He said I gained some weight since he saw me last”

“He’s crazy”, she shrugged. “Are you really feeling better?”

“Yes”, she said, “I’m better”

“Are you wondering why it happened?”, I asked, trying not to look at her. She nodded, staring at the water beneath us. “You know…”, I started, “Family is… Messy. It’s complicated. Everyone’s is. I know mine is. That’s… normal”. She sighed.

“Does it have to be, though? Is there no hope at all?”, her tone wasn’t desperate or sad. It was just… normal. Almost bored. Maybe tired. As if she was tired of wondering that.

“I guess one day when we have our own family, we can make it different.”

“Yeah, maybe”, she stared at her hands.

“For whatever’s worth”, I said, looking at her now, “I love your tattoos”, she smiled at her hands. “You never told me what they mean, though”. I watched, happy, as her smile grew bigger when she breathed in looking excitedly at the ink in her body.

“This was the first, when I was still in college”, she told me, pushing down a bit of her black shorts to let me see the phrase she tattooed on her hip bones. “I was away from my family for the first time, living alone, so I wanted it to be in Portuguese. It means ‘the things that are worth are those that still haven’t been done’. It’s a line from a Brazilian novel written about the dictatorship we had here in the sixties”

“Cool”, I said, impressed. “Very mature for a first tattoo. I’ll admit I was expecting something more stupid and reckless, more drunk college girl, you know?”, she laughed.

“This one is more like it”, she pulled her feet up, showing me the big red rose she had in her inner ankle. “I got it during season 2 of The Mediator. We went to a party, a few kids from the cast, you know, Claire, Tyler, Josh, Matt, and things got really crazy… Matt got kicked out of the club, we followed him. There was a bunch of paparazzi we had to ditch by car. And after we did, we stopped at a tattoo shop and just went ‘let’s get tattoos’”, she paused, laughing. “Josh got a tramp stamp”, we laughed, “He removed it now, I guess. It was crazy. I got this rose, because I thought it was pretty. Next day our tumultuous exit from the club was all over the place. It was nuts…”

“Nice”, I smiled, “What about that one?”, she looked at the phrase a little under her right elbow, going around her forearm.

“We accept the love we think we deserve”, she recited, “From my favorite book growing up, The Perks of Being a Wallflower. I got it after David. Just a reminder to myself…”, she sighed.

"You do deserve the best love”, I said. She rolled her eyes, but her smile was kind.
"Do I?"

“Yes... Remember when we started the publicity stunt and you said it’d take a while to not feel like you were a bad person for doing this?”, she nodded, “I don’t think you were ever a bad person. I don’t think you could ever be. You should never let yourself feel bad for wanting to accomplish something and going for it. As you shouldn’t blame yourself for David”. She looked at me for a few seconds before smiling slowly, like in slow motion.

"You don't know all there's to know about me, you know?"

"I don't have to", I said. She smiled. "I still think you deserve everything you want"

“...I’ll try to remember that”. I looked back at the backyard, to Clark and her family, all distracted by the football game and not noticing us, and then back at her, trying not to think too much about what I had just decided to do... for science.

“Don’t look now”, I whispered, supporting myself with my hand a bit behind her, getting closer, still looking at the backyard. “But they’re staring”, I lied, looking at her, hoping, wishing she couldn’t tell. I looked at her lips again, the big, naturally pinkish lips, the unspoken agreement of pretend-dating coming to use again, knowing I didn’t have to justify what I did next thanks to it. So I kissed her.

I felt the skin and her lips on mine, soft between mine. And now I couldn’t tell if my skin was burning because of the sun or because her tongue was on mine. And I couldn’t remember if the agreement of public demonstration of affection for fake-dating purposes included how her hand went to my neck, pulling me closer. I couldn’t tell anymore if there even were any lines to cross, but I was sure I had crossed some. And I had no idea what I was thinking or doing or for how long we kissed, all I know is at some point we had to stop. So we pulled back.

She laid her head on my shoulder, crossing one leg under the other.

“We should go”, she said.

“Yes... we need some rest before the dinner thing”

“Yeah”

But we just stayed there, desperately looking for an excuse to extend the conversation.

“Tell me something you never told anyone”, she asked. And I took a deep breath, thinking, glad I didn’t have to come up with more conversation just so we could stay.

“I wanted to run away when I was fifteen”, I told her, instantly in shock I had actually said those words out loud. I really had never told anyone that. I hadn't even thought about it for so long.

“Everyone wanted to run away at fifteen”, she said.

“I actually made plans to”, I said, “I knew it had to be during the night. I studied the security schedule. I thought how I would take enough money from my account without anyone suspecting. I thought about where I would go, how I could not be recognized. I thought of dying my hair and buying some cheap reading glasses. I researched everything. I actually set a date”

“Are you serious?”", she looked at me. I nodded.

“When the time came, I just… couldn’t”. I packed a backpack, I put some food in, I had money, I
had left all of my credit cards and my cellphone in my room, I wrote a letter for my dad and Will…”. I knew she was still looking at me, but I couldn’t bring myself to look at her. “I was going to climb the fence at Clarence, Clarence House, did I tell you about it? Where I grew up? In between security shifts. I was gonna walk to King’s Cross, too scared to get a cab or take the bus, and take a train to France;... But then I just... sat there, on the living room, with my backpack and my hoodie all night long… I couldn’t bring myself to do it… I just went back to my room and changed normally came morning, and no one ever suspected. I hated myself for being such a coward”

“You’d get caught”, she said.

“Probably”, I laughed, “Now I know, back then I thought I was an idiot for wasting that chance, kept thinking I could still do it, but never did”

"Do you wonder what would have happened if they hadn't found you?", she asked. "They'd make this big surch all over Europe and just call you dead at some point? And you'd be living of, what? Working at a McDonalds somewhere", we laughed. "We'd never have met!"

I looked at her, chuckling, for the first time ever glad I didn't ran away at fifteen. “Tell me something you're embarassed of”, I asked.

She looked at me, although her eyes were somewhere else now. Somewhere inside her mind. Her cheeks got pinker and a long time passed before she spoke again.

“See that skinny guy with the cap?”, she looked back at the backyard and I did too.

“Your cousin? Yeah”

“I lost my virginity to him”. My face was such shock that she instantly burst into laughter.

“What?!”

“I was seventeen, it was the summer before college-“

“Wait”

“I had been into him for years”

“Wait!”

“I thought it was love at the time, some kind of modern day Romeo and Juliet-“

“Wait!”

“Because he lived here, and I was moving to New York for college-“

“I SAID WAIT!”, she laughed again. “That was not the kind of information I was expecting when I asked you that question”, she laughed more.

“I’m sorry”, she said, not looking sorry at all. I looked at the guy again. He was skinny and tall, with buffed arms and tanned skin, curly short dark hair and dark eyes. He had a nice enough figure and had been giving me angry looks ever since I got there.

“He's your cousin!”

“He is”, she said, blushing. “His dad is my dad’s brother”
“Jenifer?!”

“Don’t judge me, Harry”, she said, “Tell me you never made out with a cousin?”

“I didn’t!”

“Come on! I’ve seen pictures of your princess cousins, they’re, like, really pretty”

“I mean it!”

“Well… I did. More than that…”

“Oh, God”

“Look, it was the summer before college. My parents were moving back here. I had come too to, you know, see everyone before moving to New York, it had been right after I left my first time in Broadway, when I did Les Mis and got nominated for a Tony… I had had a huge, gigantic crush on him since I was like, twelve…”

“I thought your family was Christian!”

“We are! Some of us more than others… So I had this huge crush on him, I used to think he was the most handsome guy alive… and he skates, so, there’s that. I only saw him on holydays and vacations we spent here… So, one day-“

“I really don’t need to know the details, Jenifer”

“Okay”, she laughed again, “We both knew it wouldn’t last… with him here, and me going to college… so we just said goodbye and I went to college as a… wiser woman”. We laughed.

“Wow… okay. Some unexpected information… how is it that every guy in your life seems to be in love with you?”

“That’s a ridiculous exaggeration”, she said, with the sunshine reflecting the water dripping from her hair to her face, and making her eyes look golden, and the only ridiculous thing was how she didn’t seem to understand how absolutely incredible she looked.

“Tyler…”, I started, numbering the guys I had noticed giving her big eyes, “That guy…“

“Harry, that was seven years ago, he’s got girlfriend now-“

“Well, he is still giving me some filthy looks, so I don’t know about that… Hunter, Hunter’s brother…”

“Asher?”

“Yes, he definitely has a crush on you”

“That’s ridiculous. And Hunter has a girlfriend. Besides that’s not ‘every’ man in my life… there’s still you. You’re not in love with me…”

“…Yeah”, I sighed, and decided it was time to get up, “so, I guess we should go, huh?”

“Okay”, she said, and got up herself.

I watched her say goodbye to her family, explaining she was just going to guide us to her other
house where we’d be staying. I watched her suppress cringes and eye-rolls and squeeze her cellphone in her hand and finally, she held my hand so we could go back to the car.

I tried to ignore it, the feeling of not being able to run away from a thought, and the feeling of pride from holding her hand. The pride of being her boyfriend. I tried to stop thinking of the kiss on the pier, based on a lie, and I tried to stop wondering what would have happened if I had kissed her in the water.

As we made our way out with the boys following us, all I kept thinking was:

‘Please don’t let me be in love with this girl’

Chapter End Notes

So… This is a one-time kind of thing that at least for now I do not plan on repeating! I just thought now we know how Jenifer feels, we should know where Harry stands as well… I hope you like it =)
"That’s a pretty big tree”.

The biggest understatement of the decade was said by Nathan, who was standing at my right in the middle of XV Square, as we beheld Floripa’s famous over 100 years-old fig tree. It was the morning of my brother’s wedding to Livia Toledo in our home town in Southern Brazil and we were doing some sight-seeing before leaving the country to avoid the wedding all together because Harry had made me. My decision to leave before the wedding hadn’t been exactly popular amongst my friends, and I hadn’t even told my family yet, which I hold as a good decision considering they’re the reason why I wanted to just leave.

“So, according to the tourist guide…” Thomas started, “if you walk around it three times it encourages marriage?”

“That’s the legend”, I confirmed. The Fig Tree was told to have been planted in 1871 and nowadays it was about 32 feet tall with so many branches coming out of it it was hard to say where it ended and the other trees started. The whole square was covered in shadow. Some of its branches were so thick they had metal supports holding them up.

“And if you go seven times counterclockwise it means divorce”, Monica added.

“Do people believe that?”, Eddy asked, and as if they had heard him, a bunch of kids showed up out of nowhere and started to make the circle around the tree.

“Well, I’m not risking it”, Clark said, immediately following them, very discreetly, in a much slower walk trying not to appear to be willing to do it three times, making us laugh.

“See, these kids are being taught at that age that pursuing marriage is all there is,” Thomas said, “that’s why your family seems to think you should be on your way to the aisle by now-”

“Thomas”, Monica reprehended him.
And I didn’t. The night before there had been a family dinner to celebrate the wedding – kind of like a rehearsal dinner, except we didn’t really rehearse anything, since that is not a tradition in Brazil. My family had already met Harry a few hours prior, and had had very strong opinions about him, most of it seemed to be he was a great guy, just not for me. They all seemed to agree I was getting to an age where I should be with someone I could actually marry one day (bonus opinion: “I mean, you, being a princess? Could you imagine?” Cue laughter). But during the day, it was like these opinions could be muffled with the sound of the guitar my cousins were playing, or the football game. At dinner, we went to a really fancy place downtown right under the Hercílio Luz Bridge, with a great view of the ocean and the Bridge itself above us, which was the city’s biggest postcard. It was fancy and expensive, which means it wasn’t very loud, so now my family actually had to behave. Not to mention, Livia’s family was there now (and by that I mean her dad, stepmother, aunt, uncle, grandparents and a couple of cousins with their boyfriends – her mother had died when she was very young), and since it was their first time meeting Harry (and most of them, meeting me), they were a bit overwhelmed by it. Which basically means there was a lot of awkward silence moments as they all just kind of stared at us not so discreetly, waiting to see what these fine foreign specimen would do next. Also it was harder to control my urge to cringe loudly or roll my eyes while I was wearing couture.

“Well, who wants to bet dad will trip going down the aisle tomorrow?”, Livia asked, trying to lighten the mood, making everyone forget about us for a little while. As they went on, talking about nervousness and high heels and cracking jokes about it, I took a deep breath staring at my place setting wishing I could have a cheese-bacon.

Harry took my hand in his under the table, noticing this, and rested our intertwined fingers in his tight. I sighed, staring at our hands together, feeling his palm on mine and my heart skip about four bits. I wondered if he realized he didn't have to hold my hand since no one could see it under the table. I wondered if he cared, I know I didn't.

A funny thing happens when you find out you might be in love with someone you shouldn’t be in love with: denial. It's like your whole system’s defense mechanism against this rude invader called love. The second I realized I was having actual, real-life feelings for Harry (my actual, real-life fake boyfriend), my entire being just went ‘NOPE’ and I started to tremble with fear. Because the minute you start to wonder 'what if…' is the minute you go from enjoying hanging out with a good friend, to constantly second-guessing everything said person says or does at all times, which is what was happening now.

Every time Harry looked at me, or touched me, or talked to me, all I could think was: ‘Okay, think about it. Are you feeling it? Are you sure? What are you feeling? Is this really it? Can you try and stop it?’, because I wanted to confirm it. To make sure. I knew this wasn’t the kind of thing I could be wrong about, because, if it was true, if I was in love with Harry… I was basically screwed. For just so many goddamn reasons. So I tried to make sure, and every time I wondered about it, my whole mind just went ‘no’. It’s not true. There is no way I’m that much of a naïve stupid imbecile. But the thing is, Harry had kissed me just a few hours before that family dinner, on the pier in my parent’s backyard. Granted, he had kissed me because people were staring and we needed to look more like a couple… but still. It was a real kiss. And it was a nice kiss. It was the kind of kiss I wish we had had minutes before in the water as his arms were so strongly around me I was sure he could never let me go. But, nonetheless, he kissed me and it ignited things in me I had never felt before. Most of all, it ignited the desire to kiss him more. To kiss him again. To kiss him harder. To kiss his neck. To kiss his nose. To kiss his shoulders and arms and chest and that was
ridiculous! He wasn’t even my type. He wasn’t that good looking. So the denial stroke. ‘I probably only felt that because I’m lonely. Yes, feelings due to hormones. It’s not serious. I’m not really in love with him…”

“I have a question”, Harry said, squeezing my hand, staring at the Hercílio Luz Bridge in front and above us. I was staring at him.

“Shoot before they get quiet and start staring at us again”, I said, talking low to make sure that conversation would be just ours.

“Why isn’t that bridge used anymore?”

“It’s too old, they say it’s too weak for the car load”

“Well, there you have the question everyone here asks themselves… by one side, it would be too expensive. By the other, the Bridge is a monument now, so they don’t think it should be used, just kept as a momentum, you know? Besides one of the best parts about it it’s crossing the other bridge having this one as a view…” He smiled, and we stayed quiet for a while, holding hands, my head in his shoulder, staring at the illuminated bridge ahead. Our big group was seating in the restaurant’s terrace, pretty much alone.

“Is this an American thing?”, my cousin, Leo, – the one I had some history with, the one I had told Harry about – asked pointing at our glasses, staring judgmentally as if it was a crime not to drink soda.

“Drinking water?”, I asked, serious. He laughed, and got his attention back at some another conversation going on at the other side of the table. I looked at Harry, who had a smirk on his face. I got my glass and drank the whole transparent liquid inside in one sip.

“Slow down”, Harry whispered. I called the waiter, asking for more water. What it comes down to is thank God for Monica. She knew my family was alcohol-free and she knew the whole situation would be worst if they had this one more thing to criticize us for, so she paid the waiter some extra to give us vodka every time we asked for water.

“See that guy?”, I asked him. “He’s my father’s other brother, Adriano. He’s a Methodist pastor. We attended his church when I still lived here. He’s amazing. He’s the reason I still believe in God and in church, despite not going, you know? He doesn’t give a crap about tattoos or a person’s life choices as long as they love God and are good people”

“He seems cool”, Harry said.

“I’ve always wanted him to officiate my wedding one day…”. Harry looked at me, serious, almost… sad. I looked back at the bridge, and almost immediately uncle Adriano asked Harry about football – through Davi, our translator – and I had to remind myself not to fall for him again. There goes another reason: Harry can’t marry someone who’s not Anglican. Why am I thinking about marriage, though? I don’t want to get married that soon…

I am not in love with Harry. I am not in love with Harry. I am not in love with Harry. And as if I didn’t already feel bad enough about being pretty sure I was shamelessly lying to myself, I had my whole family right there to keep reminding me why I shouldn’t be in love with Prince Harry of Wales and not just that: they were also there to remind me of every single mistake they seemed to think I had been doing with my life.
It took all I had in me to smile politely as they questioned what I had been associating myself with (“That show you’re on is not right, it goes against the Christian view on after-life and heaven”; “That last musical you made with, you know, that ex-boyfriend of yours, do you really think it’s right for a nice Christian young lady such as yourself to fake those sexual noises on stage?”; “Are you going to have to do an adult scene on your new movie? I think you should say you don’t want to do it, what will they think of you? The way to success is not by sacrificing your principles”; “Now that you’re done with the show, when are you going back to college?”). Not to mention my cousin Thai, who was sitting to my right and took every opportunity to make me realize how much happiness I was losing for not getting married and making babies as soon as possible, sounding so concerned I still hadn’t met a nice man I could get married to down the road.

“I’m dating Harry”, I told her, in Portuguese, glad Harry was too caught up talking football with one of my only nice uncles to ask Davi – the translator - to translate my talk with Thai.

“Yeah, but, you know that’s not going to work, right?”, she said, in a low tone, condescending, “And you’ll never find a nice guy who appreciates you if you don’t start respecting yourself-“

“And how exactly am I not respecting myself, Thai?”

“It’s not that you’re not respecting yourself…”, she said, “It’s just you keep dating guys who don’t… and you keep kissing other guys when you’re acting, guys you barely know sometimes. And what happens is what happened last time-“

“I don’t get in a relationship with every man I work with”

“Well, but that’s not what men think… you think a guy who wants to marry you would like seeing you go to work to kiss other strangers and let them touch you and stuff-“

“Harry?”, I interrupted him midsentence – something about the world cup -, who looked at me, “Do you think I’m a slut because I’m an actress?”, he was surprised at the question, and looked at Thai, suspicious.

“Of course not”

“Thank you”, I turned back to Thai, “He doesn’t think I’m a slut”

“Well you didn’t have to talk to him…”, she said, embarrassed.

“Besides”, Leo invaded the conversation, “That’s the point. He doesn’t care because even he knows you’re not serious. You can’t marry him-“

“Right… Because I’m not princess material?”

“Because of his family, sweetheart”, Leo’s mom, who hated my tattoos and thought her family was perfect, joined in, whispery, “the things they did to his mother, oh, I remember… you don’t want to get into that. Vanessa, tell your daughter she need a nice young man who won’t want to change everything about her…”

“Oh, my! Good luck with that”, my mom said, the conversation getting so wild now half the table was paying attention. I saw Livia’s concerned expression a couple of seats away, that she shared with my brother. “I’m just glad she’s introducing them now…”

“I remember how poor Lady Di was tamed by those people…”, my other aunt, my father’s sister this time, whose daughter had had two kids from different fathers before eighteen, said. “Anyone would be crazy to want to marry into that family after that…”
"I mean, the fact royalty is still in existence is already barbaric", one pretentious cousin added.

“Not to mention they’re not Christians”, grandma added. “But seriously, honey, when are you going to get a real job? You’re not getting any younger… I’m sure Luiz could talk to someone at his job to get you something”. I smiled at grandma, overhearing my aunt two seats over going ‘… she shouldn’t be ashamed about it, though, we all make mistakes, she’ll find someone better’ and took a deep breath before throwing my napkin into my plate, standing up.

“Well, that’s it. We’re leaving”, I told Harry, taking his attention from the conversation he was having about football that now involved Thomas as well as Davi himself.

“….What?”, my dad asked. “We’re not even done yet”

“Oh, I’m done”, I told him, in blank nude Portuguese, as loud as I pleased, so everyone could hear me. I drank the rest of my vodka-water. “I’m so done”.

“Jenny, darling?”, mom asked. “They were just kidding, I’m sure no one meant harm. Plus Harry doesn’t even understand us”

“… I do, mom”, I told her, the whole table silent now. “I understand you. I understand each word out of all of your mouths”, I looked at them, all of them. “Each harmful, hurtful, toxic word. That’s all I’ve heard since I put my foot back on the country. I heard criticism, doubt, questions. So let me make something very clear since I have your full attention now. I’m not claiming I’m some sort of wise and mature adult, but I’m not a little girl anymore. I know what I want, and I’m getting it. What I want, right now, is to be an actress. Which is an art. I may not have done much of serious art so far, but I’m getting there. And, yes, it involves kissing guys and letting them touch me”, I pronounced the words bitterly, looking at Thai, “Handsome, beautiful guys. And I love it! You know why, Thai? Because I’m young. And that’s what I should be doing with my life, enjoying it. Now… unlike what you’ve been doing to me pretty much ever since you got married, I’m not saying my life is better than yours. I’m sure you’re very happy, you have plenty of reasons to be. Your husband is nice, your daughter is beautiful, and if she’s any indication, the three boys inside of you will be as well. You never were much of a working person, being a mom was always what you wanted and I’m happy for you. You never were much of a working person, being a mom was always what you wanted and I’m happy for you. I personally think you’re crazy for wasting your youth, but I’m not judgmental, so I’m not going to try and force my life-style onto you, because, unlike you, I understand each person is different and, frankly, unlike you, I’m not a bitch”

“Jenifer!”, mom warned me.

“And you”, I looked at her, “Both of you”, and at my dad, “You dragged me to a completely different country when I was ten”. I paused, feeling the tears in my eyes, realizing this is it. This is what I’ve been wanting to say for so long. I can’t go back now. “We had no family, no friends. No roots or any understanding at all. You never explained us anything. You never told us why. We had to guess. We had to put together the bits of conversations we overheard and try to make sense of it, which we still don’t. You never asked what we thought about it, never asked our opinions. You never stopped and asked if we were happy and if we wanted to come back. You never gave us a chance to show you we had opinions, we had questions that needed answers and maybe we should just have asked, but you never let us. You forced us to adapt to a completely different situation all because you couldn’t deal with your own marital problems”. I looked at my brother, who looked at his glass very concerned. The whole table was still silent and I still was talking loud, so they could hear us. “I was bullied, judged, played with, told who I should and shouldn’t be and guess what? I adapted. That is my home now. I’m not moving back to Brazil. Ever. And that is not because I don’t love you. That country is my home because you forced me to see it that way. So I’d appreciate it if you, all of you”, I looked around the table,
“Could stop acting like I’m some sort of un-patriotic traitor for choosing to stay there. I can’t make you like my tattoos, or my life-choices, but if I can’t be, at least, respected for them, you shouldn’t be surprised that I don’t come home for Christmas.”

“She’s in therapy…”, my father justified to someone sitting by his side.

“Yes, yes I am. I’m in therapy. Stop talking about it like is such a big deal. You wanna know why I’m in therapy, dad? Despite what you think, is not about my ex-boyfriend. Thanks for the support with that, by the way. Is about you. All of you. You drove me to therapy, that’s how much your words hurt me! God, you don’t even have to watch my movies or any of my work if it disturbs you that much. I don’t care anymore. But stop acting like I need some sort of intervention. I’m twenty-three years-old and I already have made more money than all of you will make in your entire lives combined. I think I’m doing fine. I tell stories, good stories, with my body, with my voice. I help people. I create things that I’m proud of, so I will not apologize for it. I’m twenty-three years-old and I already have made more money than all of you will make in your entire lives combined. I think I’m doing fine. I tell stories, good stories, with my body, with my voice. I help people. I create things that I’m proud of, so I will not apologize for it.

“I’m living my dream every day so worry less about me. And don’t judge me for the mistakes I made in the past, ok? I dated a bad man who betrayed my trust, that doesn’t mean all of my decisions need supervision now. I’ve been doing just fine for the last six years completely alone, so stop it”

“…We just want you to be happy”

“Great! Glad that’s settled!”, I said, “You want me to be happy? Just stop doing everything I just said you’re doing”

“What is happening?”, Harry whispered to me, in English, when I made another quick pause. I looked at him, taking a deep breath, and then back at my family, in Portuguese.

“Now if you still don’t think what you’ve been doing is hurtful, judgmental, and, frankly, quite sexist, well, you’re my family, and I still love you either way. Because I have to accept you for what you are, even when you’re toxic and harmful and the healthiest decision would be to cut all of you out completely. But…”, I looked down, trying to phrase what I was feeling in a way that would make them understand, “But the moment you chose to attack my boyfriend and his family, despite not really knowing them at all except for things you read or saw on the television, then we have a problem. Then we have lots of problems. Because, first of all, you of all people should know better than to trust tabloids and gossip. Second of all, you have no idea who they are as people and what their stories are. Third of all, this man,” I pointed at Harry, without looking at him, “This man was born richer than any of you will ever be, he could do anything with his life, he could do nothing and just live the good life, but he chose to be a soldier”, I looked at my dad, “He chose to protect people. You’d think you two’d have a little more to talk about than just what he thought of Las Vegas. And you know what he does when he’s not in the military? Charity. He helps more people. Wounded war veterans. Children. Children with cancer. Orphans with HIV. He does more Christian acts in a week than you’ll do your entire lives. He moved his entire life across an ocean to a place he doesn’t know or necessarily likes just because an organization asked him to. Because he believed in their work”, I looked at my aunt, “I’d be honored to be his stupid wife and I’d be damn great at being a stupid princess.” I looked at Thai, sad, “You used to be my best friend. I admired you. I still do. Now is like every time I see you, you have a different thing to complain about me”, the tears started falling now. “But this man”, I pointed at Harry, again, without looking, “This man has been a better friend to me than you. Because he respects me, because he makes me laugh, because he supports my work and likes my tattoos, and says I look beautiful when I make a bold fashion choice. Because, that’s me, people”, I looked around the table again. “I am my work, my tattoos and my bold fashion choices. This is me. If you don’t like it, fine. I get it. It’s too different
for you, small town conservative folks. But Harry has been nothing but polite, kind, nice and understanding to every single one of you since we got here and I’m so glad he doesn’t speak Portuguese, because I’d be ashamed to let him know the things you’ve been saying. I’m…”, I closed my eyes for a second, “God, I’m ashamed of you. And is not about the money, or his tittle. It’s about your words. It’s about how bitter and… And… God, and mean you all are”, I took another deep breath. “And I refuse to be a part of this any longer. Because when you insult him, you’re insulting me, and I’ve had enough of this…”, I looked at Harry, switching to English, “I said we’re leaving, why are you still sitting?” he got up, quick. By his side, Davi, Thomas and Monica stood too. Clark, Nathan and Ed were around the terrace or closer to the bar, and they headed to the doors.

“I’m sorry”, I mouthed to Livia and my brother, following them. I heard Harry say a quick and general ‘it was nice to meet you’ as he followed me out. I grabbed a bottle of vodka on the bar on my way out, and marched to the parking lot. I jumped inside the van, hugging the vodka bottle and closing my eyes.

They were all silent as the driver made its way out of the restaurant and down the street and back to the island. I opened the bottle drinking another sip for each tear. There were a lot of tears.

When we got out of Hill Lagoon, Harry told the driver we were going straight to my house – my house, not my parents’, my house in the fancier neighborhood where Harry and the guys were staying. I made them stop at a food truck two streets away from the house, and Monica get down and order nine cheese-bacons – one for each of us since we didn’t get to finish dinner. It smelled like my long lost childhood.

When the van stopped in front of the house – the three floors blue home behind the same blue tall gate, in a street corner right in front of the last bit of the lagoon, closer to the hill, on the opposite direction of my parents’ house – I didn’t move. Harry signed for the others to go – Nathan and Ed stayed behind the van, closer to the gate, the others went inside.

“What do you say we go eat in the pier?”, Harry asked. There was another small wooden pier across the street from the house. A couple of boats tied up to it. I grabbed the bottle of vodka, my burger and my clutch and followed him out. Nathan and Ed remained in the sidewalk.

I took my shoes off before sitting down in the pier. I tied my hair in a bun and took my rings off, knowing I’d get my hands dirty in the burger.

“Wow”, Harry went, staring at his food, “There’s a lot of stuff in here”. I smiled, looking at my own burger now. We ate in silence for a while, enjoying the taste of bacon and just glancing at the water, the stars and the hills around us. “So…”, Harry started at some point. “I don’t get much Portuguese, but… that sounded like a boss speech”

“It kind of was”, I said, chewing still, “I don’t know how I didn’t choke. I usually choke. I usually start crying so much I stutter… Sorry I had to drag you into this…”

“Don’t. That was awesome. I wish I could have leave-me-alone speeches”, he said. “I don’t. I usually just get lectures from my father”, he drank some vodka, “Usually in front of the whole team, it's really embarrassing”

“Team?”

“Advisors and stuff. They’re usually all there when I have to hear about what irresponsible thing I did now”
“Sounds horrible”

“It is. Worst part is, I’m gonna work with these people in the future, you know? I already do. They’re always gonna see me as the kid who transformed the basement in a club and smoked weed with his friends—“

“Wait, what?!?”

“Yeah. L-F is the worst—“

“L-F?”

“Edward”, he explained. "Lane-Fox"

“Oh, the private secretary?”

“Yeah. It’s been a while, though. Since my last lecture of shame. I’m responsible now”, I rolled my eyes, saying an ironic ‘aham’. “I am! I was supposed to be a married man by now… can you believe that?”, I glanced at him, and the way the tried to engulf the entire burger in one bite.

“…Harry?”, I asked, after another few minutes. “Do you miss her?”. He finished chewing, slowly, taking his time, looking at the lake at our feet.

“Yeah”, he admitted. “A bit. I miss her voice, though. Which is weird, because… She has a horrible voice”. I laughed. “No, I mean it, her voice is loud and obnoxious. But I’ve always loved it, for some reason…”

“It’s weird, huh?”, I asked, staring at his red cheeks. “The things we end up actually enjoying when we love someone”. He looked at me, making me go back to looking at my food.

“What do you miss about David?”. I sighed, looking at the sky, hoping the stars wouldn’t realize I wasn’t talking about David. “Although, he was pretty old. And you dated him, so I guess you probably miss something like, his wrinkles—”, he teased, making me laugh and look at him pretending outrage. “Or his baldness”

“He is not bald, thank you very much!”, I said, still laughing. “He must have almost as much hair as you do!”

“Almost being the key word!”

“Ugh, shut up”, we laughed.

“You know, Davi translated a bit of your speech”, he said. “The part when you talked about cutting them off completely. That it would be the healthier decision”

“I didn’t mean that”

“You didn’t?”. I sighed.

“… I don’t know. Dr. Arrow says that I shouldn’t feel guilty about cutting toxic things out of my life. That my health is what matters—“

“He’s right”

“Yeah, but… My family, they’re not so bad, you know? I mean sure, they could improve in a lot of stuff, but…”, I sighed, “It’s like that uncle I told you about, Adriano? He is a freaking pastor and
he doesn’t care about my tattoos or the things I do on TV. He always drives people home after the
services, even when they live in the complete opposite direction. And my aunt—“

“The one whose son deflowered you?”

“DEFLOWEROED?”, I threw my head back, laughing. “Yes, that one. She’s very caring, you know?
She gives kids from her neighborhood private classes for free. And her husband always gives
money to people when they need it and never brags about it or expects it back. And Thai, she’s so
responsible and helpful all the time, to everyone. And my father, I mean… Sure, he can be
completely clueless about what I do or why I do it, but he talks to everyone. Literally, everyone
that comes his way. He makes so many friends. And he has the greatest sense of humor and laugh.
And my mother is just really, really loving. She never said a bad word about my tattoos. She
actually likes it. They’re nice people, my family. Is it their fault they’re small minded? I don’t
wanna cut them off, I like them. You know, when they’re not being dicks”. He laughed.

“At least you can cut them off if you want to… My family is basically my job, I’m stuck with
them”

“I wanna go home”, I said. “Back to New York. We’re getting in a plane in the morning”

“Jenny—“

“I don’t wanna hear it”, I said, “I can’t do it to my brother and Livia. I can’t keep ruining their big
day. We’re leaving. In the morning. First thing”

“Can we at least do some sightseeing first?”, he asked and I took a deep breath.

“Sure… listen, do you mind if I sleep with you tonight?”

“Of course not”, he said. “Aren’t your parents gonna think-“

“Well, let them”, I said. “If they say anything I’ll just tell them that ship sailed a long time ago
when their nephew stuck his penis on me”. Harry almost threw up after laughing so much. "I
mean, before we left the restaurant, I was this close to just telling my aunt she should get down
from her christian high horse seeing as I banged her son in the back of a car seven years ago”

Harry laughed some more, and we went on talking for about another hour or two before going back
inside, where he gave me a shirt and one of his boxers so I could sleep since my clothes were in my
parents’ house.

The thing with trying to deny the suspicion that I was in love with him was that it was made so
much harder by wearing his clothes – being suffocated by his smell in them – and mainly, sleeping
with him. Trying not to fall in love with him should not be followed by deciding to share a bed with
him and trying to keep as much distance from him as possible. I tried not to look at him, who slept
shirtless, his flat stomach for some reason igniting feelings in me. I tried to pretend I wasn’t
suddenly feeling very hot underneath the blankets, up until the point I couldn’t pretend anymore
and had to take them out. I tried to pretend it was unconscious the way I kept sucking my stomach
in, or to display my legs in a sexy way – even though I knew he wasn’t watching. I was so focused
in trying to look good every time he actually looked at me that I almost didn’t hear anything he
was actually saying. We watched TV before falling asleep, I forced him to watch a Gossip Girl
rerun with me, just because I missed Manhattan.

“This show is just about hot rich teenagers born in privilege and their little drama lives-“

“Exactly, you can relate then”, I said, and he looked outraged, making me laugh. I pretended I was
paying attention to the episode, instead of picturing his hands running up and down my legs and
wondering how it would feel to just fall asleep in his arms. 'I'm not in love with him' was the last
thought in my mind before I finally surrendered to sleep.

Came morning light, I researched flight times and packed my things that Monica picked up before
Harry and the boys asked for us to go do some sightseeing, which is what brought us to XV Square
and the Fig Tree. I kept reminding them there was a flight back to New York at four. They kept
pretending they didn’t hear me.

“Clark, we don’t have time for this?”, Thomas called.

“Just another one”, Clark said, walking around the gigantic Fig Tree, making us laugh. After he
was done, we stopped for lunch at a small restaurant near the XV Square, making small talk and
laughing, so glad people still had no idea where we were. ‘I’m not in love with Harry’ echoing in
my mind everyday he held my hand.

When we drove back to Lagoon Conceição, the goal was to go back home and grab my luggage so
we could fly back to New York. I could tell Harry didn’t agree with my decision, but I just ignored
his glances at me the whole way back. Everyone else was just kind of sad we didn’t stay longer to
do some more touristic stuff. I was just kind of sad I didn’t have time to show my parents how
wonderful Harry was. Or to show Harry that my parents were really nice. I had been wishing we
could have eased up into the situation. Just us and my parents. Just us and my brother Lucas, and
Livia. Having everybody there, the shadow left by the last time I had been in Brazil, heartbroken
by the Broadway actor, the fact The Mediator wasn’t an example of Christianity, and their
aggressive love that just wanted me back home made it all crash down to pieces. I wished I could
have taken Harry to the dunes, to an actual beach, surfing…

“Can we turn left?”, I asked the driver, who followed left.

“Where are we going?”

“It’s just going to be a moment, I wanna see a place before we go”

“Nice view”, Harry said, hands on his hips, staring through his sun glasses into the horizon.

“Yeah”, I agreed. Placing my hands on the low brick wall in front of us, I jumped, getting my knee
up, standing on it.

“Wow”, Harry said, bringing his hands to shield me in case I fell. It wasn’t that high a fall, just
about three meters down the hillside, but he still worried. These little moments, these small
moments I could tell I had his full attention, were starting to be all I wanted and I hated it.

As I straightened myself up, holding on to a three branch above me and staring into the wide view
of the partial lagoon and the shore around it, I remembered the day of the Met Ball when he said I
was the most interesting person he knew. I could almost see my house standing in the wall, my
skirt was blowing just a little bit with the wind. We were alone there, our group, the residential
place was usually quiet.

“Calm down, I’m not gonna fall”, ‘In love, however’, I thought. He breathed heavily, finally
lowering down his hands, just to get some impulse and jump, himself, to my side.

“Wow, better view”, he said, and I laughed. Behind us, the small white construction stood silent
and calm, beholding its new visitors almost happy to have company.
“I’ve always dreamed of getting married in this church”, I told Harry. He turned around to take a better look at the place.

“Looks nice”. The white small building had yellow corners, an empty big wooden cross in front of it. It had a small wall surrounding its well taken care of garden, with small colorful flowers and a big tree. We were at the top of a big hill north-east of where my parents lived. You had to drive up a very narrow and steep brick road, surrounded by trees and small houses. In front of the church, the trees almost covered the view.

“Yeah, it’s a catholic church, though, not sure if they’d let me”

“Tell me”, he said, smiling, hanging at the branch as well, “Tell me about your wedding. And don’t pretend you haven’t planned the whole thing”

“Well…”, I laughed, wondering if this is the was the kind of information I wanted to share with the guy I might or might not be in love with. “Here. During the afternoon, not the night. A white carpet instead of a red one, to match the church, plus red carpets just remind me of photographers and premieres, so I just don’t really like them anymore. White orchid arrangements at the doors and at the altar, a trail of baby breath flowers by the sides of the carpet down the aisle. Bridesmaids in lilac Elie Saab. And by bridesmaids I obviously mean Alessa, Taylor and Selena. The groom in a cream, maybe beige suit, not necessarily a tie. Definitely a vest, men in vest just look better. And the music!” I turned to him, excited, realizing the way he was looking at me… almost sad. “The music is something else; I don’t want any boring cliché classic music at my wedding. Not that classic music is boring, I actually love it. But it just, I don’t know, there are so many songs that have a deeper meaning to me, I want them to be the soundtrack of my wedding you know? So I want the wedding-godparents, sorry, bridesmaids and groomsmen to walk down to, like a violin or cello version of Keep Holding On-“

“Keep Holding On, what’s that one?”

“Oh, you know, uhm”, I cleared my throat, and then sang, “You’re not alone, together we stand, I’ll be by your side, you know I’ll take your hand… If when it gets cold and it feels like the end, there’s no place to go, you know I won’t give in. No, I won’t give in… Keep holding on, ‘cause you know we’ll make it through, we’ll make it through…”, I stopped. “But without the words, just to the sound of violin or cello. Or both, both is good. And then I want to walk in to an also instrumental version of-“, I looked at him.

“What? Go on”, he was smiling at me.

“Well, you’ve watched Tangled, right? There’s that song at the end, I See The Light. It’s beautiful. So I want to walk down the aisle to it”

“Sing it”, he said, and I rolled my eyes.

“I’m not gonna sing it”

“Just do it, Silva, come on. Pleeease”, he said, childish, poking my back with his finger, and I laughed.

“God… ALL THOSE DAYS!”, I yelled at his face, in melody, scaring him for a minute, making myself laugh again, I started singing teasingly, “Watching from the windows! All! Those! Years! Outsiiiiide looking in!”, I sang, dramatically, right to his face, who was rolling his eyes trying to contain a smile, “All that time, never even knowing just how blind I’ve been”, I dramatized, throwing my hand in my forehead, singing the parts way too high, “Now I’m here blinking”, I
whispered the next part, “in the starlight!”, he laughed. "Now I’m here suddenly I see, standing here”, I let go of the branch, starting my own interpretative dance to the words, pretending to have just walked into somewhere, singing louder now, higher, the words slowly going from shouts to an actual song, “it’s aaa-aall so clear, I’m where I’m meant to beeeeeeewwww”, I heard the boys from somewhere around the yard of the church whistling to my reach of a high note and a laugh broke it, “And at last I see the light,”, I went on to the chorus, singing it seriously now, “And it’s like the fog has lifted, And at last I see the light, And it’s like the sky is new,”, I reached the high note, pretending to be on a Broadway stage, “And it’s warm and real and bright,”, I gave a spin, up in the wall, my skirt floating around a bit, passing in front of Harry, who now had gone from very entertained to seriously worried I was going to fall again, “And the world has somehow shifted,”, I walked a couple steps to his side, before turning back to him, “All at once everything looks different, Now that I see you,”

“Go on”, he said, smiling.

“That’s the instrumental part. You know, na na na, na na, na, na, na nan a”, I sang on, doing a couple more spins further away from him in the wall, keeping my balance, very much enjoying the concerned look on his face. “All those days chasing down a daydream,”, I threw my leg up in the air to my back, and lowering my torso with a hand up, in an attitude derriere – a ballet move from my ballet days, “All those years living in a blur,”, I brought it down to the rhythm of the words, taking an impulse with it to turn straight to the other side, still standing in just one leg, in a half-attitude turn derriere, my purse fell in the ground. “All that time never truly seeing, Things, the way they were.”, I walked back to where he was, “Now he’s here shining in the starlight.”, he was looking at me like I was made of gold… or was I imagining things? “Now he’s here suddenly I know,”, he grabbed my hand when I got close enough, like he wanted to make sure he could catch me if I fell, “If he’s here”, I walked past him again, our bodies close due to the narrow wall, “it’s crystal clear, I’m where I’m meant to go,”, I was back in my old spot now, and held on to the branch again, “And at last I see the light, And it’s like the fog has lifted.”, I knew he was looking at me, but I looked ahead, choosing to ignore it, pretending I wasn’t trying to sing my best now, “And at last I see the light, And it’s like the sky is new, And it’s warm and real and bright, And the world has somehow shifted.”, I gave in, looking at him, who had his eyes on me, resting his face on the branch. His blue eyes catching me off guard as usual. “All at once everything is different, Now that I see- “, I finished the song, clearing my throat, looking away from him, “you.” The boys – and Monica - clapped from around the yard. Harry joined them. I made a dramatic ballet curtsy as low as I could get, thanking them in a comedic way to try and push my own tension away.

“Oh look who’s nailing the curtsy”, said Thomas, winking at Harry from a distance. He pretended not to hear it. I sat down in the wall, trying to remember what we were talking about before I burst into song.

“So, yeah, just, you know, as an instrumental version”.

“It’s a good song”, he said, sitting by my side, and I noticed how small his voice was.

“Yeah”, I nodded, thinking what to say next.

“Did you talk to your brother?”, he asked, “Or Livia? After what happened yesterday?”

“I texted him. Saying I was sorry I ruined his dinner”

“Did he reply?”

“Yeah”
“What did he say?”

“I don’t know, I didn’t read it”

“Jenifer”, he said, disappointed. “Hey Eddy? Can you throw me that?”. Eddy picked my purse from where it had fallen and threw it to Harry, who opened it up to find my cellphone. He typed in my password – since when did he know my password? – and went to my messages, looking at me before clicking in my brother’s name, as if asking permission.

“Whatever”, I said, looking away.

“Well, this is useless, this is in Portuguese”, he complained. “What does it say?”, he asked, handing over my phone. I hesitated a bit before picking it. A lot of missed calls from mom and dad. A couple from Thai.

“It says… it says ‘I’m sorry’”

“And what did he answer?”

“No, that’s his answer. He said he’s sorry”

“For what?”

I sighed, clicking in his number and hearing the dialing tone. How much can I ruin his wedding?

“Hey”, he said, picking up.

“Hi, Lucas”, I stood up on the wall, turning away from Harry, not wanting to see him look at me talk Portuguese.

“Where are you?”

“At a church”

“The church?!”

“A church, not your wedding’s church. That one up the hill from mom and dad’s house, you know?”

“Ah, yeah. Mom said you didn’t sleep home”

“Yeah”

“Were you with Harry?”

“Yes”

“…Okay. We were worried”

“I’m sorry I ruined your dinner”

“Don’t be”, he said, and I heard doors opening and closing, like he was looking for somewhere private. “Ro?”, he used my real name’s nickname.

“Yes?”

“I’m sorry”
“What for?”, I heard his heavy breath through the phone, patiently waiting for him to gather the courage to say whatever it is he wanted to say, knowing he didn’t like talking about his feelings. “I mean, if it’s about Harry, relax. You were one of the kindest ones with him yesterday. And you’ve always been cool with my job and stuff. I could have used less tensed looks, but—“

“That’s not what I mean… I’m sorry I didn’t help you more when we were young”

“…Oh”

“I’m sorry I didn’t push mom and dad for answers. I’m sorry I didn’t- I’m sorry I didn’t stood up for you more”

“Lucas, that’s okay”

“It’s not. Growing up I- I was just mad for being thrown into another country and I didn’t realize that just because you liked it there it didn’t mean you had it any easier than me. I’m sorry. I was a shitty brother. I should have protected you from th- I should have stood up for you- I just. I was so busy feeling sorry for myself I didn’t realize you were going through the same things”. I breathed it in and out a couple of times, trying to push the lump in my throat back down, before answering.

“It’s fine”

“…are you going back to New York?”

“There’s a flight at four”. We remained quiet for a bit, my answer not being affirmative or negative. Just… an information.

“Everyone feels really bad, you know? Especially mom and dad”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah... And Livia is still expecting you at the hotel to get ready with the girls”

“I know”

“Stay”, he asked.

“I’ll think about that. I’ll let you get back to your preparations, alright?”

“Alright. See you…”

There was another few minutes of silence after this, as I decided what to do. I sat back down with Harry, my phone still in my hands as I turned it around and around in my hands, relieving my stress.

“What did they say, Jen?”, he asked. “Last night. To make you explode like that? What triggered it?”

“Just the usual… Doesn’t matter”. He looked at me, and I wondered if he was going to ask again.

“We should go back now if we want to make that four o’clock flight”, he said, turning his legs back to the garden. “What do you say, Silva?”

“You know, my brother and I used to come here before we moved out”, I told him. “When Thai came to visit, we’d bring her. We pulled our bikes all the way up, played around and raced back down. See this?”, I brought my leg up, showing him the scar behind my knee, “I fell once, lost
control of the bike and went straight to the floor, the pedal was forced against my leg. I cried like a baby. They made me laugh and my brother carried me the whole way back”. I looked down, back at where our house was. My parents were probably in there, getting ready and trying to call me. Getting grandma ready.

“That’s sweet”, he said, and I smiled.

“It is”, I looked at the sky, remembering riding my bike around these streets with my brother and Livia just one or two years before, when I had come home for Christmas, thinking how cute it was how much smaller she looked close to him, and how he seemed like such a nicer person since meeting her. I remembered how she came to see me almost every day when I was hiding here from David the year before, bringing movies and chocolate bars and pretending she didn’t see the allergy-triggered red marks on my skin. “Livia has been a sister to me for a long time… Damn it”. Harry looked at me.

“There’s still time, you know. The wedding is at six. If we bring you to the hotel right now you can still get ready with them…”

“But what about my parents? I can’t just show up and pretend nothing happened”

“You can go, be there for your brother and sister, and talk things out with your parents afterwards, in the reception. And the rest of them, let them suffer a bit, let them understand you had a point in everything you said…” I thought about it for, like, three seconds before following him down the wall and rushing everyone back into the car so I could go back to the house, get my things, and rush to the hotel where Livia was staying.

The church my brother and I grew up going to was in a small part of the island, a few miles before Hill Lagoon. It wasn’t big, but it had a modern architecture, and its benches were set in a triangular position pointing at the clean altar. They had a retirement facility that they helped support right next to it that was pretty fancy and had the loveliest private garden on the back, with a small lake and ducks inside. The party was going to be in their salon.

I was there already when Harry arrived with the boys. The bad news: a couple of paparazzi had shown up now – Brazilian ones. Apparently someone had twitter a picture of me arriving at the hotel where I got ready with Livia and her cousins – who were kind enough to not just accept my apologies about the dinner, but not bring the subject up any longer than I wanted to. Livia said she was damn proud about my leave-me-alone moment, but said she deserved a good wedding gift for it, which I agreed to, regretting as soon as she said what she wanted.

I drove to the church with her cousins and step mother, and was waiting inside by the doors to just make my entrance from there and not let the paparazzi get me more than they already did. As my family got there, most of them just nodded at me with a sympathetic smile, keeping a respectful distance. Some came to talk to me – Leo pretended nothing happened; His mother apologized for making me feel uncomfortable; my dad’s sister apologized to, and then wanted to know if I had told Harry what they were saying about him the day before;

Someone stumbled against my legs, and I realized it was Luiza.

“Hi, sweetie”, I said. She was wearing a tulle white flower girl dress and smiling at me. “Where’s mommy?”. I looked around just in time to see Thai coming to get her.

“Hi”, she said. “You never came home… I wanted to talk to you”
“Yeah, I saw you tried to call me”

“Jen, I’m sorry”

“It’s fine”, I told her. “I just needed to get things out of my chest, I’m sorry I did that in such a… dramatic way”

“You know I love you, right? I do. You’re one of my best friends. It’s just… you’ve always been- Growing up, you and I were the same. Shy and trying to get over this self-consciousness that kind of ruined everything. It was you and me against the world on it… Dreaming about our wedding day and a future where we wouldn’t feel so diminished. And one day you came back from the States for Christmas and you weren’t like that anymore. You were this smart and talented person who so clearly was meant for bigger things, laughing loudly with the others and cracking jokes, saying it wasn’t that big of a deal you met Leonardo DiCaprio… I never felt that I wanted your life or that I didn’t like mine; I just started to feel like I had to let you know that. That I was just as happy as you”

“But that’s what I said yesterday. We’re different, so we want different things and that’s okay”

“I know that… now”, she chucked. “I’m sorry”

“It’s okay, really… I kind of want to hug you, but I’m not sure I can get around the tree of them”, I pointed at her belly and she laughed.

“Are you calling me fat?”

“No at all!”, we laughed.

When my father arrived, the first thing he did was to say I looked beautiful, just to follow up with the question ‘couldn’t you have covered this up a bit more?’, gesturing at my neckline, that left a big opening between my breasts, closing up a bit under them. At least it had black lace covering it… He hugged me to say he and mom had talked. He apologized for ‘confusing my childhood so much’, saying ‘adults have issues too’, and they just had a lot to figure out at the time, but they just wanted us to be happy.

“I know that, dad. I just could use some less criticism of me and my life choices”

“When did we ever criticize you?”, I almost laughed.

“Well, for started, you called me fat yesterday…”

“I said you gained weight!”

“Which is the same thing!”

“It is not!”, he held my hand, “Jenifer, do you have any idea how you looked last time I saw you? In person, not on TV or some magazine cover. The last time I saw you, which is when you came here after you broke up with that other guy… And I don’t even mean the allergy reaction… You were pale and had bags under your eyes. You were so skinny we could almost see all of your ribs. Your mother and I talked about getting you help for anorexia-“

“I did not have anorexia-“

“Good, but that’s not what it looked like”, he stared at me, serious. Was I that skinny? I remember not having much of an appetite back then. And I definitely had to buy new jeans after I went back
to California. “And then you go back and call us once or twice a week and always just says you’re fine, we don’t know what’s going on, we’re not there to see if you’re eating right… You are the first and last thing your mom and I talk about every day. We worry about you. So when I say you’ve gained weight, I’m happy you did. That’s what I mean. That I’m glad you’re here and that you’re back. Because I was expecting to see that other girl when you got here, the skinny, sick, and depressed one, and I love you either way, but I’m just glad I don’t have to see her anymore. I want to see my daughter, not her”. He finished his sentence, and looked around. Like Lucas, he wasn’t that comfortable around touchy-feely talk. Someone waved at him and he cracked a smile, waving back, still holding my hand. My father had this great smile with dimples that I didn’t inherit. When he looked back at me, I still wasn’t sure what to say. There had been so many mistakes, so many miscommunications, and at the end of the day, there was still so much love. I hugged him, closing my eyes, letting him try to tickle me for a bit, and he went on to talk to someone.

I knew Harry had gotten there before actually seeing him, just by hearing the paparazzi go crazy outside –yelling his name with the terrible Portuguese pronounce. He got into the church in a hurry, finding cover by my side, Nathan and Thomas with him. He was looking very good wearing a dark blue suit with a dark blue shirt and turtle tie and a dark gray vest. He looked at me, without a word, and then again, looking surprised.

“Oh, hi-hi”, he stuttered, giving me a peck in the cheek, spraying his clear blue eyes upside down me like he had never seen me before. “You-You look… amazing.” The way he pronounced the word, his accent catching me off-guard in the middle of all the Portuguese, made me feel like I actually did look amazing. I suddenly felt really self-conscious – especially considering how most of the church was looking back to look at us.

“Thank you”, I said, looking down at the Elie Saab black dress. My hair was up and I was wearing the golden locket my parents had sent me for my birthday. I wanted to say something else, but I really couldn’t. Not while he was still looking at me like… that. God, he looked good in a vest.

“And you’re wearing a vest….”

“Oh, yeah”, he looked down, “I mean, I just… I had it… so… thought I’d use it….”

“And someone said she liked men in vests earlier, so…”, Nathan added by his side, looking around as Harry looked at him, looking a bit mad. “Who said that?”, he joked. Harry’s cheeks were suddenly a lot redder than usual. What was happening? What was happening?

“I talked to some people…”, I said, trying really hard to stop feeling like I was back in seventh grade and the boy I liked had just passed by. He took his eyes from my cleavage and back to my eyes, clearing his throat.

“Yeah?”

“Yes… I think… you know, looks like everything is… well, not okay. But… looks like it will be”. He smiled, genuine.

“Good”, he nodded. “That’s great”

“Yo”, I heard my brother, who was just coming through the doors. “I feel like a celebrity with these guys outside…”, he joked.

“Hi…”, I said, “yeah, sorry about that”

“No, I like feeling like a celebrity”, he joked, making me laugh, and looked at Harry, “Hi”. They shook hands, and I kind of felt like things were a lot better than the day before. “Ro tells me you
wanted to go sandboarding… we’re leaving for the honey moon tomorrow, but you should come
back on the summer so we could do that”
“…Yeah”, Harry smiled, hesitant. Would we still be together in the summer? “That’d be great”.
“Livia texted me saying she asked you for a favor”
“Yes, I said I was gonna make it up to her, now I kind of regret it”
“Oh, don’t act like you don’t like to sing”
“I love it, but I just don’t want the guys outside to make it a story”
“We’ll close the doors after Livia is in, relax”
The wedding planner called him, so he went back outside.
“What’s that about?”, Harry asked.
“Livia was gonna go down the aisle to a song… but she asked me to sing it instead. Since I owe her
one, or two, considering how long it took me to pick a dress, I agreed”
“Wow, you’re gonna put on a show twice in a day”, he teased, with a smirk, about my performance
earlier. “It’s good, though. Your family will get to see your Tony award talents”, I smiled.
“Don’t go around saying that, they might introduce me this way”, I joked.
“I’m glad you worked things out with them”, he said, “Or… that you are working things out”
“Yeah… I don’t wanna be the kind of person who has to cut her family out”, I said.
“Then don’t. They were just trying to protect you, you know that. You don’t even live here
anymore. Just… make sure they respect your decisions and put up with the bad looks at your
tattoos for Christmas. That’s it, that’s all you have to take. Besides… you shouldn’t jeopardize
everything because of a fake relationship that’s doomed to end sooner or later”. I looked at him,
who was looking ahead. He looked at me. “What? It’s pretty obvious they said something about
me to make you explode like that yesterday… you were putting up with everything just fine, and
then you had to defend me, Davi translated the end of the speech, which is how I know”
“I’m sorry… They just said something about your family”, I said, “Your mom and… and how she
was tamed. They don’t even know you, Harry, I’m so sorry. I just couldn’t take that… And is not
just that, you know? It’s how they just assume this isn’t going to last, you know? The two of us.
Because you are who you are and I am who I am, and it just sounded so mean. I couldn’t hear it
anymore. I understand this isn’t real, but the thought of them not actually thinking that if we
were… They were just…”
“They were right”, he interrupted, his voice hard. I looked at him, who was staring straight ahead.
“I mean, that’s why we started this, right? Remember what I told you? When I was trying to
convince you? We are the perfect wrong couple. We have every reason why this would never work
long term, which is why everyone is so drawn to us”. I looked away from him, and I had to throw
my shoulders back to breathe again. What was that pain in my throat? Oh right. The horrible and
obvious truth in his words.

We are wrong for each other. That is why we had started this in the first place. The age thing, my
career thing, his career thing, being from different countries, there was just too much involved. We
knew this would never work, everyone knew this would never work, which is why there was such a hype about us. Even Thai knew it. ‘Then why?’ I wondered, ‘Why am I allowing myself to be so vulnerable next to him?’.

I was hoping he would look at me, smile at me, make some joke to break the tension that was suddenly clouding everything else around me, but he didn’t. He just looked down at his hands, looking like he had the weight of the world on his shoulders.

“Even that wedding you described, you know? Even that sets us apart…”

“What do you mean?”

“Did you watch Will’s wedding on the telly? They say mine doesn’t have to be that big… they say it can actually be a private affair if I push it hard enough. Still, would be some chapel in London. Photographers at the doors. The public showing up to see us – as they do to every other thing in my life. Red carpet. I have to face the wall until my bride gets close. She has to wear a British brand. Classical cliché music. Important people from the church of England to officiate it, you know, the guy who baptized me, the archbishop, or whatever. A curtsy to gran at the end. A stroll around the city afterwards. Maybe wave from the balcony in Buckingham. Official photographs to be released. Everything as it’s supposed to be about the British monarchy, following tradition”, he looked at me now, serious, a little… angry? “You see, if this”, he gestured to the two of us, “was real… we could never get married here. Your uncle couldn’t officiate us. You’d have to quit acting and move to London with me. But because you’re so… famous, you know, high profile, they probably would make us have a wedding like Will’s. Try and bust the economy again. They’d call you a summer breeze to the boring old monarchy while destroying everything that makes you… you”, I could feel the tears so burning hot in my eyes now, I had to try and wipe them before they fell, looking around trying not to let him see it. “So, don’t worry about me, Silva”, he said, trying to use a lighter tone now. “And don’t worry about what your family said. They only said the truth. And it’s not even real, anyway, right?”, he faced forward again.

“Right”. I said, cleaning my throat. Of course he was right. I knew he was right. But why did it hurt so much to hear it? Why did I allow myself to even consider being in love with him? ‘I’m not in love with him’, I chanted in my mind, again and again, as he said he was gonna go find a seat.

A song started, I held one of my brother’s best friend’s arm, and walked down the aisle followed by Livia’s cousins and others of my brother’s friends. We sat down in the space reserved to us, and watched the song change to another one, a hymn, as he walked down with my mother, who was obviously already crying. I smiled at her as she reached where we were, trying to soothe her and let her know we’d be okay. When I got the sign from the wedding planner, I got up and walked to a corner of the altar, picking the acoustic guitar and waiting to see Livia in the doors, when she showed up, I started the melody giving her time to set her dress straight and hold her father’s arm. She looked stunning and simple, and my brother had the biggest smile on his face watching her make her way to where he was.

“You were in college working part time waiting tables, left a small town, never looked back”, I started, trying really hard not to relate the words to me, to Harry, and to what I was feeling, failing miserably. “I was a flight risk with a fear of fallin’, wondering why we bother with love if it never lasts? I say ‘can you believe it?’ as we’re lying on the couch, the moment I can see it. Yes, yes, I can see it now”, somehow in between all the guests standing up to watch Livia walk down the aisle, I found Harry’s eyes, who were going from her, to my brother. “Do you remember, we were sitting there by the water? You put your arm around me for the first time”. I had to remind myself this song had nothing to do with us, with Morgan Bay and the day we sat in the sand, kissing for the first time to let the world see. This song is not about us. “You made a rebel of a careless man’s
careful daughter. You are the best thing that’s ever been mine”. This song is clearly not about us. He’s not mine. He’s not mine. He’s not mine. “Flash forward and we’re taking on the world together, and there’s a drawer of my things at your place. You learn my secrets and you figure out why I’m guarded, you say we’ll never make my parents’ mistakes”. Harry’s eyes found me from where he was sitting, and, because the aisle was small and Livia was almost at the altar, I had to cut half the song, going to the bridge and trying to ignore how sad Harry looked as he stared at me. “And I remember that fight, two-thirty AM, when everything was slipping right out of our hands, I ran out crying and you followed me out into the street, braced myself for the ‘goodbye’, ‘cause that’s all I’ve ever known”, I looked back at Livia, almost here now, trying to remember this is not about me. About us. This is not our song, because there is no ‘us’, or ‘our’. He is not mine. It’s not real. I’m not in love with him. I’m not in love with him. I can’t be, this would never work. “Then you took me by surprise, you said, ‘I’ll never leave you alone’. You said, ‘I remember how we felt sitting by the water. And every time I look at you, it’s like the first time. I fell in love with a careless man’s careful daughter. She is the best thing that’s ever been mine’”.

‘Except he is’, I thought. As far as the world is concerned, he’s mine and mine alone. He is mine, all mine. All of him. His ginger hair and his blue eyes, his broad shoulders and his accent, his hero complex, trying to save the world and his stupid jokes and bad puns and his smile. He’s mine. Then why can’t I touch him when I want to? Kiss him when I want to? Why do I have to look to check if there’s people around? What’s the point in allowing these questions to even find place in my mind if we all know it would never work? Why does it feel like someone’s hand is inside my chest ripping my heart out?

“You made a rebel of a careless man’s careful daughter, you are the best thing that’s ever been mine”, I went on, seeing how he looked, sitting there in between my family and friends, in a church in Brazil with paparazzi outside, with his aide and protection officer by his sides. Somewhere along the line, he stopped looking so alien to the scenario. It was like his hair matched the other’s, it was like he belonged there... Or maybe I just didn’t have enough of a clear mind to judge. “Hold on, do you believe it? We’re gonna make it now. Oh, I can see it, I can see it now”, I finished the song, looking away from Harry, putting the guitar down. I sat back where I should, and I watched as my uncle Adriano made everybody laugh and cry as he married my brother to my new sister. And as I tried to ignore it, as I tried not to think about it, I could see it now. Of course I don’t have a clear mind to judge, how could I?

I’m in love with him.
The addictive melody was playing, up and rhythmic, coming from God knows where and making my blood pulse to its beat. I don’t even think you can hear music in dreams but I’m sure there was a song in it, as well as Harry, looking at me in a way that made me tremble with anticipation, waiting for whatever was next, trying to understand how we got there. He kept staring at me, his hand still holding my arm, stopping me from leaving, his body facing me as we sat on a couch. I saw his eyes switching from mine to my lips and the whole world was suddenly very quiet. He leaned in, his grip on my arm getting tighter. I couldn’t stop my hand from stopping him. His eyes never left my lips. But I had to be sure. I needed to know what was happening.

“What are you doing?”, I asked, in a whisper. “We don’t have to… there’s no one watching us”. “I know”, he said, his voice was deep. Did he always have this amazing accent? Why was he still looking at my lips with his stupidly blue eyes? “That’s the point”, he said, before leaning the rest of the way in until his lips touched mine, strongly. I don’t understand how fast my hand reached the back of his neck, and his hair, but it was suddenly there and our bodies were closer than ever as he held me, desire, lust and love mixed together as his arms closed a grip around me.

In a split second, in my half-sleep unconsciousness, I allowed myself to dive into it, simply because it just felt so, so good. I thought, trying so hard to hold on to it and not wake up, since this will probably never happen anyway, what’s the harm? Just a dream. I focused on what dream-Harry was saying, that he was in love with me. He was in love with me? He wanted to kiss me. There was nobody watching me, he was kissing me because he wanted to. He. Wanted. To. Kiss. Me. Me. Me. Me. He wanted to kiss me. I don’t know how or why, but his tongue was in mine now and it wasn’t a pretend. It wasn’t a con. It wasn’t a PR move anymore. It wasn’t about Chelsy or David or my career, it was about me, about us. I kept reminding myself ‘this is real, this is real. He’s in love with you. He loves you. He is in love with you’.

His other hand was gripping my waist and made its way up my back under my shirt until it reached my bra strap. Was it possible to feel everything I was feeling? Was this normal? Was this right? The weakness in my bones, the chills all over my body? The way my palms felt so hot? Was I supposed to be breathing? Because I don’t think I was. At least I don’t remember breathing anything in that wasn’t the smell of his skin, a mixture of shaving cream and the L’Occitane soap from the bathroom. My entire skin was so hot I worried he’d think something was wrong with me. My left hand gripped his arm now; then his shoulders; and his back; hard, without letting go, no stopping, scratching it bringing us closer and closer together like I’ve wanted for so long. With an impulse, I threw my right leg to his side, sitting on his lap, and I felt how his arms hugged my waist now. And how one of them went for my tights, and my ass, cupping it, gripping it, squeezing it, putting himself in between my legs, closer and tighter, making me feel like I was going to explode. ‘This is happening. This is real’, I kept thinking.

His hand was under my bra strap now and I felt his thumb striking the side of my breast, I pulled his hair down, lowering my hands and breaking the kiss just long enough to take my shirt off. I took a second to look at him, who had such adoration on his eyes as they ran over my skin it overwhelmed me a bit. His hand left my leg, and both of them gripped my waist again, his mouth found my neck, making a trail of kisses until my earlobe, following through my jaw line back to my lips. I was wondering if I could lie on my back and pull him on top of me. I wanted his weight on me I wanted his skin in mine. His shirt had to go. I started to pull it up, my palms feeling his skin,
my nails scratching his back, my waist moving on top of him to the rhythm of the song when I realized I was… moaning. Just a little bit, just barely. And the sound was breaching through the dream into reality and I knew I had to stop.

I kicked the covers out, breathing in the smell of softener from the blankets that felt so wrong compared to how I remembered the smell of his skin, and jumped out of the bed, going for a cold shower to start the day. The dark blue Arkansas sky outside the window had almost no stars at all and the thin pink line in the horizon told me the sun was about to come up. In the bathroom, I plugged my iPod in the speaker box and opened the app to listen to some local radio and finally looked in the mirror as the song filled the room in the small house I had been calling home since the middle of May after my brother’s wedding, when I went straight to Arkansas to shoot Wild & Free.

In the mirror, the blond version of myself startled me again. It had been just about a month and I kept forgetting I was blonde now. Not platinum blond, you know, posh-Beverly-Hills-born-and-raised-rich-girl-blond. More like… Soccer-mom-golden-natural-blonde-with-fading-made-at-home-with-a-pharmacy-kit-highlights. It was a bit shorter now, too, but with that I got used quickly. I put it all up in a bun and got into the shower, as the song shifted to another, with an overexcited announcer welcoming the ‘Selena Gomez’s new hit Come and Get It’. I smiled as I got into the water, to the addicting ethnic beat background to one of my best friend’s voice. It was a weird feeling, dancing to your friend’s voice in a random radio in a small town in Arkansas. Especially remembering her struggle to have her own creative hand on the album and to release it as soon as possible. I started to move my hips to the song, careful not to move my feet too much and trip. Hate the way I love you, all day, all night, maybe I’m addicted for life. Harry came back to my mind, and I could still feel the way his hand stroke my back, and my legs, in my dream. And the way his lips framed mine and I wondered if his tongue, if his kiss, would feel different if they were real, so I closed my eyes, feeling the hot water sliding over me and I hovered my hands through my hips and waist, and started dancing… for him.

You wanna know the thing that sucks the most about love? Forget music. Seriously, forget that you ever got to listen to a song and go ‘oh nice song, that’s my jam’. No. Now every time whoever’s singing says the world ‘babe’ your mind will automatically go to that one person you can’t take the hell away from your mind. Or even just ‘you’, there you go. Suddenly their ‘you’ is yours ‘you’. And when you’re in love and that person loves you back, well, congratulations. Well fucking done. Apparently you are a successful adult who has it all figured out, huh? No if the person you’re in love with doesn’t love you back, that’s already pretty bad, ‘cause that’s it. Now music is ruined for you. But wanna know what’s even worst? When you’re in love with someone and you know that despite having so much in common, you can never – ever – in a million years make it work. Even if they loved you back. And I mean forever. Long term. Seriously. Yes, I mean marriage. Being together till death. If you know there’s no way in hell you can ever be with the person you’re in love with even if a miracle happened and he loved you back, well, good fucking luck to you. Because I know how much that is hurtful and confusing and infuriating at the same time. And I know how hard it is to stop thinking about how unfair life is.

I got my bath done and Sel’s song ended, the announcer named the Tegan and Sara’s song Closer as that day’s good morning hit and I shook my head, closing the daydream away. “You’re pathetic, Jenifer”, I told myself to the ‘all you think of lately is getting underneath me all I dream of lately is how to get you underneath me’ as I dried myself. I picked some leggings and random shirt in the big suitcase I had yet to unpack and turned off the damn radio after the part ‘here comes the dreams of you and me, here comes the dreams’ - it was too risky to let random songs make me think of someone I shouldn’t think of, and, after putting on my espadrilles, I went to the kitchen deciding it was time to push Harry out of my mind and prepare for work. ‘Just one
more thing’, I thought, finally picking up my cellphone.

Six (6) missed calls from Mr. P.

The words, those stupid generic, completely empty words made me sigh. I cleaned the notification, and the one that followed, about a couple of voice messages – I just couldn’t listen to his voice right now -, and went to the texts. Most started with ‘hey, I tried to call you, but couldn’t reach you again’ and went on with whatever he had been doing at the time, or however his day was – I guess we just got really used to telling each other things. He mentioned watching a movie I was in with the guys, and said I was adorable. Great, just what I was aiming for. He made fun of the ridiculous headlines of how I dyed my hair blonde because that’s his type. He mentioned how it’s getting hotter every day in the city, and asked if it was hot in Arkansas too. He mentioned the charity polo match he organized and attended for Halo in the Hamptons – saying their number 4 was even worse than I was. And finally he said that I should pick up the phone next time Taylor called me, because apparently now her first reaction when I don’t, is to call him. He said she called asking if we were going to her 4th of July party. The last line of the text said: ‘PS: Vodka says hello and she misses you’, and then one last text was: ‘PPS: Just to be clear I meant the dog. Although I’m sure Vodka the beverage misses you too’.

I realized I was smiling when I finished reading it and I had to shake my head in disapproval of myself. I had texted him literally five days before, and now this. Didn’t he have any other friends in the city? I knew for a fact he did, because there was an article on Perez Hilton last week about him going out for drinks with friends – of course the whole theme of the thing was ‘Jen Silva goes blonde to keep Prince Harry interested now she’s out of town at work’. I assumed that’s the one he was talking about.

Here’s what happened after my brother’s wedding in Brazil: The paparazzi (and, with them, the world) found out we were there on the day of the wedding, getting a lot of pictures of us getting to the church and leaving after the reception – that had happened in a salon in the back of the building. That was great for our plan, of course: ‘He went to meet her family? He was her date in her brother’s wedding? Wow, they must be really serious!’. Next thing you know all the tabloids and newspapers are saying he was there to ask my parents for their blessing to propose (I mean, RIGHT?!). We remained in the country for about one day after that, in which we had a barbecue with just my parents, my brother and Livia this time, so they could make up for how terrible the previous meeting had been, and things were actually kinda great.

We played Uno, we canoed, we swim, took pictures, we talked and talked about work and New York and my mother made me the favor of showing him all of my embarrassing childhood pictures (you know what I’m talking about, the ones before Hollywood, with braces and no breasts and 90s and early 00s clothing). The morning after that we got into our rented van and drove off to the airport (insert more paparazzi pictures here), where he got into a plane back to Manhattan – with Thomas, Eddy, Nathan and Clark -, and I got into a plane to Arkansas with Monica, who stayed long enough to install me in the small house the production company had arranged me and then went back to the City to see her son.

What started next was the part of the story I like to call ‘Detoxing’. You see, I had told Harry when I went into filming mode I had to really get into my character and that our working hours went from 7:00am to, like, 11pm, so I wouldn’t be able to talk to him a lot, which wasn’t that much of a lie. I did have to focus on the character and those were my working hours, but I could be talking to him a lot more than I was. I just decided at this point if I had any hope of saving our friendship – and our PR con - the one thing I needed was to stop being in love with him. And for that to happened, we needed space. So I was avoiding him as much as possible.
We hadn’t actually talked since I came to Arkansas. We texted - I still had to let him know everything was normal – but never at the same time. I waited a few hours after he texted, only replying when I knew he couldn’t so we didn’t start a conversation. Like on that moment, for example, that was a good time to answer, especially considering how long I went without writing back. It was weird to think we had talked every day since January and it just reminded me how much I had let myself grow attached to him.

‘Hey Mr. Prince, everything i-‘, I went back, erasing Mr. Prince, knowing that was an over-affectionate nickname that held a lot of feeling to it since I had been calling him that since we first met… and now I sounded like Dr. Arrow and hated myself some more.

‘Hey Harry. Sucks we keep missing each other. Things are pretty crazy over here but nothing out of the ordinary. These kid actors are really good, though. You need to see it! Arkansas is boiling from 11am to the moment the sun goes down, but nights are still pretty chilly. A few things: 1- Polo: So what you’re saying is I’m a natural? I knew it already. I really need to try this polo thing again, I think I can really get into it with some practice. And by get into it I mean kick your ass of course. 2- The movie was called ‘how to be popular’ and it was a huge hit alright? Well I made out with Austin Butler in it so I think we all know who’s the winner here. And in all seriousness now, what’s with everyone calling me adorable? 3- I did see something about me going blonde for you, but it was on Perez Hilton. I guess everyone’s thinking it. 4- Do you wanna go to 4th of July? We could go I guess. You should see Rhode Island, is awesome. But you should know there’ll be a lot of people there, we’d have to the actual couple thing… Anyway, let me know. I gotta go to the location. I’ll talk to you later. Give the boys a kiss for me. –J

PS: So what you’re saying is my new look does nothing for you at all? Cause I’ve been told I look pretty smokin’, watcha think? [PHOTO]’

It was a good text, and I attached a picture of me faking a sexy face with my blonde hair falling to one side of my face – I took my shirt off, using it to cover my breasts leaving my nude back show, but as a joke. A joke that had nothing to do with the fact I wanted to know if he was at least a little bit attracted to me now I was blonde. But anyway, it was a good ‘everything-is-normal’ type of text, especially considering what I really wanted to write was something in the range of:

‘Dear Mr. Prince, fuck you. Fuck you to hell for being so cute and nice and funny. Now thanks to you I hate a bunch of songs. Songs that are really nice and that I used to like a lot. So thank you for making me relate every single one of them to you or to this fictional love story we have in my mind. Thank you. Thanks a lot. Now go fuck yourself and leave me alone to rot in my pathetic attempt to not be in love with you’

I looked in the mirror one more time, putting my shirt back on, taking a deep breath, and going for the routine I had grew used to since we started filming. ‘Time to go back to Claire’, I thought. Ever since I had gotten to Arkansas, ever since the very first table read with the whole cast, this big, dense cloud of pure weigh had placed itself on my shoulders and would never leave no matter how hard I tried. I went to sleep thinking about Claire and I woke up thinking about Claire. I could see her pain and her tragedy and I could feel it in me. In my bones and in everything I did. I couldn’t eat without wondering ‘how do you make your four-year-old son understand his dying? How do you go on with your life?’.

The only thing that had proven effective on trying to get out of character was Harry. The only other person I did not want to think about. One mental visualization of his blue eyes and Claire was just a sad distant memory and, although Harry was a good thought – if you ignored the constant pain of knowing he only liked me as a friend and even if he did we could never be together - , it also made me feel guilty to leave Claire behind. How do you ignore someone’s pain? How do you ignore that
much pain? How does a person move on from it? How did she? Oh, she didn’t. It was all over her book: she never did. It had been a few years since Vannessa Thompson – who wrote the book Claire was based on – had lost her son and he was still her first thought every morning. And she still saw him in her other children and cried in her car alone demanding God told her why. No matter what I did, my mind was always either filled with how much I missed Harry and how much I felt for Claire.

And I did miss Harry, I missed him so damn much it was ridiculous, I missed him every single day. I could still see every little freckle on his big pointy nose in my mind like I had seen him just yesterday. I could see his thin purple lips and the way his eyes went from blue to turquoise in different lighting. But I also missed the way his big, rough hands touched me and the way his arms always ended up around my waist when we had to sleep together, even when we tried to keep as much distance between us as possible as we went to bed. I missed the way he said my name, rolling the ‘R’ in Jenifer, and almost not pronouncing the ‘N’ in Jen. I missed his stupid dimples and his stupid smartass smirk and the way his almost transparent blonde eyebrows rose in his forehead when he laughed. I missed his laugh. Every time he texted me I felt so good inside, just realizing that he had thought of me, even if just for one minute, and every time I almost – almost – wrote back right away. I almost – almost – sent him a text all of a sudden that read: ‘I’m in love with you’. Or even just: ‘I miss you’. I actually wrote the words once, deleting it right away as if he could see it just by me thinking about it.

I was living the saddest, most energy consuming role of my life and all I could think when I thought of Claire - and how much pain she went through with her child - was perhaps I don’t love Harry all that much. Perhaps this is what I need: time without him to realize that I was fine before he came along and so I don’t need him. I can go on without his stupid orange hair and his stupid blue eyes and his stupid world that is too good for me. I’ll be damn fine without him.

It is heartbreakingly worrying how fast all of that perseverance vanished from me the moment I saw him on a July 3rd coming out of his jet in an airport in Rhode Island. The Maryland sun was blazing in the sky that day, when I saw Harry again for the first time in almost two months since we came back from Brazil. I had been waiting in the Rhode Island airport for about twenty minutes for his jet to arrive, and I had spent every single one of my pathetic minutes wondering if I looked okay. I turned around once more to check my outfit on the tinted windows of the car - I was wearing white lace shorts and a sleeveless light blue social blouse with white Keds with no socks. The Panama Hat on my head helped my sunglasses keep the sun from blinding me and my recently turned blond hair was falling down my back. That was it, nothing I could do to make it better now that I could see his plane coming. I took a deep breath, turning around looking at the surroundings of the airport once more.

One of the things that always amazed me about the American landscape was how little mountains there were. I know is not the type of thing people usually notice, but in Brazil there were so many mountains and hills all around that the lack of it here made it seem like the general horizon was a lot more open and wild. It made me feel like the sky was bigger and deeper and scarier all while being even more beautiful. There was barely a cloud up high as I saw Nathan step out of the private jet, followed close by Harry, Clark and Ed – all sporting light shirts, looking more casual than ever in their ever-so-Britishness. Summer had finally arrived in North America and we weren’t about to waste any of the little time we had to not wear coats and jackets. Harry walked fast, passing Nathan in a hurry, marching in my direction with a big smirk on his face. He was wearing jeans, a white polo shirt and sun glasses and looked like everything I had been dreaming on from the moment I accepted the fact that I was in love with him. And, oh, I had been dreaming a lot. And just like I did in those last two months I knew the moment I saw him it was time to put on a show, to go into
character, except this character wasn’t Claire. It was Prince Harry’s girlfriend. ‘Except’, I realized, looking at him, ‘is it really just a show now or is it me taking advantage of our PR move because I’m in love with him?’

At some point Harry just started walking so fast to me I couldn’t help it. If I had had time to think about it I could have reminded myself to stop, but I couldn’t. I just got up on my feet and ran to him. I did, I just ran. Can God please just send a lightening to strike me dead before I embarrass myself even more? The good part about the fake-dating thing, though, was that it was the perfect excuse I had for this. The guys were watching, so for all Harry knew I was just pretending to be the girlfriend in love who missed him. It didn’t escape me for one minute that was basically the truth, except I wasn’t pretending anymore. I was – technically - his girlfriend. I was in love with him. And I had missed him so much. The truth the guys believed was I was a good friend, who turned into a girlfriend. The truth he believed was I was a good friend, who was pretending to be his girlfriend. The truth I knew was I was a good friend who was pretending to be his girlfriend, who had fallen in love with him for real and was trying to hide it. Could my life just be simple for once?!

Harry dropped his backpack on the ground when I got near; he held up his arms and wrapped them around my waist, picking me up and swirling us around slowly. We didn’t speak. I had my eyes closed, feeling the fabric of his shirt, his back bones under my arms, his muscles around my waist; the smell of his shampoo, his cologne, the joy of being under the same sky again. God, I loved him. I breathed it in for a second, excruciatingly slowly, like I could smell all that I felt and I felt a lot. God, I loved him. It was like I could hear the sound of the wall I had been building between us for the last two months break into dust. It was like I could hear the sound of him invading my heart again like a wave. God, I loved him.

When he finished spinning us, he stopped, but never lowered me down. He didn’t loosen up his grip, not one bit. He just stood there, hugging me tight, his head hiding in my neck. When I opened my eyes, I could see the guys reaching us now, all smiling at us and very quiet. God, they must think we’re such teenagers in love. Harry is almost freaking thirty. I’m a successful business woman. What are we doing with our lives?

“Hello, Mr. Prince”, I said, my voice soft, not being able to stop the smile on my lips any more than I was able to stop myself from calling him that. He sighed, loudly, and finally raised his head, looking at me. His lips broke into a big smile and I noticed the little gap between his teeth and how unusual it was that I loved it. God, I loved it.

“You love it”, I teased.

“I really don’t”, he said, finally putting me down and bringing his arms back, “But I still missed it”

“Sorry lovebirds, airport security is kicking us out”, Ed told us as Nathan and Clark put their bags on the trunk. ‘Okay’, I thought, ‘so not enough time to use the time we haven’t seen each other as an excuse to kiss him’.

“We’re going”, Harry said, “Just one more thing”

And then he kissed me. All of a sudden his arms were around me again and his lips were framing mine for the first time in almost two months, as they should. I gripped his hair between my fingers, arms around him neck, pulling him closer, and let myself fall into the new old feelings that came with the kiss – the simple, hard kiss that was over way sooner that it should. When his lips left mine in a slow, almost painful movement, his forehead remained on mine for a few seconds and
then he winked at me before grabbing my hand and pulling me to the car. When did he get so good at pretending he loved me? I mustn’t believe it. I can’t believe it.

When the discussion came down to who would drive I volunteered, having picked the car myself I was excited about it. Not to mention the British squad hated our driving hand, and Eddy was Manhattan born-and-raised and therefore only drove when it was required of him for work, which was pretty much never.

“God, you’re so blonde”, Clark mentioned, after I took my fedora off, throwing it to Harry who was sitting on the passenger’s side.

“I know, right? How do you guys like it?”, I asked, all smiley, swinging my hair in the middle of the car so they could see it. Nathan smiled at me, impressed.

“Looks nice”, said Clark.

“Very British”, Eddy joked.

“I don’t know, I prefer the look from the picture you sent me”, I looked at him, confused for a moment. He winked.

“Oh”, I recalled the picture in the bathroom mirror in Arkansas, with my shirt off covering my breasts, making a seducing face as my blond hair covered one side of my face allowing my nude back to show. “Well, that one’s not appropriate for all audiences”, I joked, smirking at him, who laughed.

“Okay, TMI”, Nathan called. Harry grabbed the hat and put it in his head.

“…No”, I said, looking seriously at him.

“What?”

“Harry, what did I tell you during our fashion-talk after you moved to Manhattan?”

“You said I had to throw my hats in the garbage where they belonged, but this is your hat”, behind us, the guys laughed.

“I told you to stop wearing blue suits with white shirts and blue ties, I told you you needed to stop wearing oversized everything, and I told you your hats looked old and threadbare, to be precise, you can still use caps if they look new, but fedoras are not what God intended for men. Take it off”

“Whatever happened to wear what makes you confortable?”

“They make you look like a douche, take it off”

“Fine”, he took it off, smiling. Sitting behind me, Eddy unzipped something and next I knew I had Vodka on my arms.

“Oh, baby, I missed you! Hi!”, I said, my voice going an octave higher as she shook herself around my arms, licking my neck and face whenever she could reach. “Oh, did you miss mommy? You did? You did! Did daddy take good care of you?”

“She just ate in the plane”, he said, reaching her with his hand and striking her fur lovingly. “Good thing about private planes is she doesn’t need to be sedated since she was with us the whole time”

“Seriously, I hate to stop the family moment, but we should go before they actually kick us out”,


Nathan said.

“Okay, let’s go”, I gave her back to Eddy for him to put her back on the travel bag. “Next stop… The address on my phone that I haven’t memorized!”

“Loving the confidence”, Harry joked, “You do know where we’re going right?”

“I just said it, it’s on my phone… Here”, I handled him the phone opened on maps with the way to Taylor’s house highlighted, “Be my Spock”

“…that might have been the most romantic thing you ever said to me”, he joked, making us laugh again. God, I loved him.

“So I guess it really is summer already, huh?”, I asked. “Taylor this view is amazing!”

“I know, it’s what made me really want this house”, she said, showing me and Harry the terrace on the first level of the mansion she had bought in Rhode Island a couple of months before. Walking in, with lemonade cups on our hands, Harry and I actually had to pause for a minute, overwhelmed by the immensity of the dark blue Atlantic so close to us.

Taylor’s house – or mansion - had about 8 bedrooms and 10 and a half baths, numerous open and full of light living room spaces, a gigantic garden, a pool and a view to at least 700 feet of shoreline from where it stood on Watch Hill. It had been built on the 1930s and had an area of more than 11,000 square feet, a 36-foot-large parlor, a huge modern kitchen, a big adjoining family room, a recreation room, a wet bar, a roof terrace and multiple balconies that opened out to the Atlantic. Outside, it also had a five-car heated garage for one side and an uneven B-shaped swimming pool with marble terrace overlooking the ocean and an adjacent pool house/gym. So, I guess you could call it a mansion.

“Here, take a picture for Instagram”, I threw her my phone, and rested the pink lemonade glass on the floor, getting impulse and jumping on the thick low wall securing the terrace. From a couple of feet away, I heard Harry gasp.

“What is it with you and walls?”, he asked, sounding mad. He didn’t come closer to me this time, like he did in Brazil, he just stared worried… and mad.

“Relax, she did ballet, she has good balance”, Taylor said.

“Yeah, well, I’ve seen that. How’s that supposed to make me feel better?”

“Are you afraid of heights?”, she asked him, entertained.

“He flies helicopters for a living”, I said, and then looked at Harry. “He just worries too much”

I walked ahead, where a section of the wall was replaced with a thick white grid and I tried to steady my way to its middle.

“Jen, please don’t”, Harry cried.

“Relax, the bar is thick. Quick, Taylor, take a picture”

“You want more sky, more sea or both?”

“Both is good”, I said, posing with my hands on my hat and my blonde hair falling down my back.
“Ok”, she said.

“Ok, down now”, Harry said, making me giggle.

“Relax, Mr. Prince. If I fall you’ll—”, I lost my balance for a second, from the wind, and jumped back to the terrace. Quicker, Harry grabbed me before my feet could even fully let the grid or touch the ground, “…Catch me”. I smiled and he tried to maintain a serious I-told-you-so face, but failed, smiling back, shaking his head after a while. “Thanks”, I told Taylor, getting my phone back and editing the picture (subtitle: #summer); considering people already knew that we were there, there was no reason to stay off the internet, so I posted the picture right away. We had seen the paparazzi miles away from the entrance to her house when we arrived – she even warned us about the stairs up to the front door being the ‘picture zone’. She had warned us because I joked with Harry if he walked any slower – he was in front of us – he would hit me in the face with his big butt, to which he maturely responded with promptly stopping and pumping his butt on my face, to which I promptly responded by grabbing both his butt cheeks with my hands. We joked about it after Taylor told us about the picture zone, imagining what the headlines would read: ‘Jen Silva grabs Prince Harry’s butt on Rhode Island as they celebrate the colonies’ independence’. “It’s the downfall of the monarchy!”, Harry had shouted, dramatically, making us laugh.

“Is Sel coming?”, I asked Tay when we went further down the terrace to look properly into the sea.

“Nope”, she said, “She went to Cabo with…”, she didn’t finish her sentence, but made a face I already knew way too well to need any further explanations. “You know…”

“Damn it”, I said, “Can’t believe they’re getting back together”

“Who?”, Harry asked.

“Sel and Bieber”, I said.

“Oh, we don’t like him?”, he asked, the word ‘we’ making me smile.

“We like him”, Taylor said, trying to remain impartial. “He’s a nice kid. Nice voice. He just—“

“We just don’t like their relationship”, I explained.

“Hey, I thought Alessa was coming”, Taylor said.

“Oh, she’s in South Carolina with Josh. I think they might break-up”

“That sucks”, she said. “Why?”

“Well, it’s a long time coming thing… But the bottom line is, she got accepted for a doctorate in a fancy university in Paris, Sorv… something”

“Is it Sorbonne?”, Harry asked.

“Guess”, I said, “You know it?”

“It’s one of the biggest universities in Europe”, he said, after taking a sip of his lemonade. “Only really good people get in”

“Yeah, well, Ally is getting her doctorate there starting this fall, but the problem is… Remember in my birthday party how I introduced you to Mandy and her fiancé who just set the date of their wedding? Well, Josh thought that with Mandy getting married and moving out, she had plans to
“moving in with him”

“Didn’t they talk about it before?”, Tay asked.

“Who the hell knows?”, I said, “I don’t think she thought she’d get in at Sorbonne, but she did. Now she has to explain to Josh that she’s moving to Paris instead of being one step closer to the altar that he’s practically building himself…”

“And you think they’ll break up over this? Why?”, Harry asked.

“Well, she’s gonna be living in France for at least a year”

“One year can go very quickly”, he said.

“Jenifer doesn’t believe in long-distance relationships”, Tay said.

“Oh”, Harry answered, looking back at the sea.

“I just don’t think it makes sense. And the relationships that do make it through it are the exceptions to the rule”

“No, I get it”, he said. We stared into the sea for a while, before Taylor broke the silence as she cleaned her throat.

“Are you gonna miss her?”, she asked.

“Well, yes, of course”, I said, “But we’re used to it, I lived in LA for six years as she was in Manhattan, so… We’ll be fine.”

“So friendships are an exception to the rule?”, Harry asked.

“They are when you’ve known the person for so long”, I replied.

“Ok-ay”, Taylor said, sounding weird, “Well, I should show you guys to your room so you can change… We’re going on a boat ride before sunset, so we gotta hurry, let’s go”, we made our way back inside, leaving our cups and picking our bags, heading for the stairs.

“Hey, tell me, other than the boat ride, what are the plans for the weekend?”, I asked.

“I’m glad you asked!”, she smiled, “After the boat ride, we’re staying in the city for dinner. Tomorrow at 10am we start the scavenger hunt – themed fourth of July, of course, please dress accordingly – and then there’s the hidden talent show at night”

“Dress accordingly?”, Harry asked, “You are aware I don’t own any America shirts?”

“Get creative then”, she said, simply, opening up a door on the second floor to our room, which was a small and cozy suite, with a narrow king size bed with fluffy white blankets and a small window near the door with white wooden frames and an amazing view to the ocean. It also had light blue walls and a built-in white wooden closet.

“Please let me know if you need anything”, Tay said, as laid our stuff on the bed, “There’s towels on the bathroom, along with soap and everything else. Other than that, make yourselves at home. We’re leaving for the pier in ten!”. After she closed the doors, Harry jumped into the bed.

I had a sick feeling in my stomach that was only made worst by the sound of the door closing, and then the sound of Harry’s body slamming the big, fluffy mattress. I don’t know why but I had
completely forgotten that Harry and I would be sleeping in the same room. Just being alone with
him in the same room was already too much for me, how could I keep on pretending everything
was normal and okay as we slept in the same bed with his smell intoxicating me?

“Are you ok, there, Silva?”, he asked, sitting back up and taking off his shoes. He looked at me
again. “You don’t look very ok”

“Yes”, I answered, breathing in before talking and going into my best acting mode. “A bit tired of
the flight here, and sleep deprived for the past two months, but I’ll be alright”

“You look…”, his eyes dropped to the bed again, “weird”

“I’m fine, Harry. I told you, just tired”

“Yeah, I imagine you’re working a lot”, he said, and got back on his feet as we started to find our
swim suits. “Considering you haven’t had two minutes to call me… or even send a proper text”

I stopped what I was doing and looked up at him, who was focused on going through his bag. Did
he just sound… mad? Sad? Was he sad I didn’t pick up the phone to call him in the past two
months? I started breathing heavily, feeling the air thicker and trying to weight my possibilities
from here. What should I say next? How do I respond to that? Harry scratched his nose, pausing
what he was doing for a second.

“Yeah, well, fourteen hours of work every day is something I’m used to”, I said, simply, my voice
coming off bitter than I had planned. I fished my bikini from the bag and went to the bathroom.
Did I come off as rude? Why was I rude? He was just asking why I didn’t call more, that’s actually
nice of him.

“You had to stop to eat. And to sleep”, his voice found me in the bathroom, “Hell, to go to the
bathroom. You could have just… texted me, you know? Just a ‘what’s up’ would have been nice.
Just a letter ‘A’”. I took my shirt off, changing into the navy blue bikini. “I would feel personally
offended if I didn’t know you haven’t called anyone for the last two months…”. I stopped what I
was doing again.

“How do you know that?”, I asked.

“…Richard called me”, he said, and I put on my bikini in a hurry and stormed out of the bathroom.

“What?!”

“He was worried”, Harry, already in board shorts, said, “He wanted to know if I had heard from
you. He mentioned he talked to your publicist as well, and she also didn’t hear from you”

“I was working!”, I shouted, “I was focusing, that’s all!”

“Okay”, he said, “Calm down. I get it, I’m just saying…”

“No, you don’t”, I said, and then again, in a whisper, “No one does, apparently”

“Alright, Jenifer”, he sounded exasperated, “Explain it, then”

“I-“, I stopped, realizing the lump on my throat. I will not cry over this. I will not cry over this. “I
just… Listen. It’s not just-”

“What?! What is it?!”, he walked around the bed to come stand in front of me, “I’m not trying to be
rude, or mean, I just genuinely do not understand this acting thing and why did it stop you from
telling me anything other than ‘everything is fine’ for the last two months!”

“It’s not just about repeating some lines when I have to!”, I said, “It’s about being a completely
different person!”, I took a deep breath, trying to keep my voice low, “This character, she… She is
thirty years old, she married her high school sweetheart, they had twin boys and then another boy
three years later. When they’re youngest son was two they found out he had cancer. They fought
relentlessly for another two years, in and out of hospitals, all over the country, getting second
opinions, explaining to their other kids what was happening, asking them patience, trying to keep
things normal and praying for a miracle before they went to bed every day.”

“Why are you telling me this?”, he shouted, “I know what you’re movie is about, Jenifer, the kid
got sick, it was terrible and then he died and it was even worst. What I’m trying to understand it
why did this stop you from picking up your phon-“

“Everything is just too happy right now.”

“What?"

“Everything!”, I said, again, “Everything is too happy. It is part of my routine for the last two
months to cry every day and night realizing, sure, this story is sad, but the worst part is that it is
real. And then how can I talk to Richard? Richard, the leader of the Artchet cult, four kids, four
perfect, healthy, happy kids, growing up in California without ever learning the meaning of ‘daddy
issues’, how could I just talk to him when I could feel it in my soul the pain Vanessa, my character,
still feels years after her son died”

“Jenifer”, he said, his voice softer, “This is a character. It’s gonna pass”

“I know, for me, it will”, I said, “But for her it won’t. And right now, I am her. I have to be, that’s
my job”, I turned away from him, going back to my bag and picking a dress.

“Exactly”, he said, “Shouldn’t you be used to it?”, I took a deep breath, closing my eyes.

“…That’s the first time I play a character like this… this sad, and this real, so, no, this is kind of
new to me”

“And if you don’t like it, don’t you think maybe you should try to do something else?”

“Harry”, I warned him, “Don’t”, he looked at me.

“I just don’t like to see you like this”, he said.

“Like what?”

“I told you, you look weird. Like you’re keeping something inside of you that’s way too big-“

“God, just”, I sighed, suddenly exhausted, realizing there was something was too big I wasn’t
telling him: that I had feelings for him. “I. Just. Told. You. This is it. Vannessa, or Claire, as we’re
calling her in the movie, she is what I’m keeping inside of me. God, you really don’t get it. You
don’t get my job at all”, he sighed, scratching his head, going back to where his bag stood. “It’s a
good thing you’re not my actual boyfriend”, I said, more in a reminder to myself than to him, but I
quickly knew it had been a mistake.

Harry didn’t show any reaction to what I had said, he just kept going through his things. He found
another shirt, took off the one he was wearing and put the new one on. I remembered what he had said on his first day in Manhattan, as we laid on his bed and he told me Chelsy was dating someone new.

‘She’s someone else’s girlfriend now, but because we were engaged for a month or less, her life will never be the same. She’ll be married with kids one day and the birth will be on a social page on the news, and they’ll still be calling her ‘Prince Harry’s ex’. I hate it, it’s like I break things even when they’re not mine to break anymore. It makes me hate me.’

It was the truth and I knew it, it was like he had a curse on him and every girl he dated would be forever put on this list of ex-girlfriends to be brought up again every time the press could find a way. These girls, even Chelsy, God, even me, they’d be somebody’s mother one day, but they’ll always also be the prince’s ex-girlfriend.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean-“

“I’m ready, I’ll meet you downstairs?”, he asked, before jumping in his flip flops and leaving. I sighed, closing me eyes, wondering for the millionth time what was I doing with my life.

The greatest thing about spending 4th of July at Taylor’s was the whole atmosphere of the group. Taylor was in the middle of her Red tour around North America, so all of her dancers and most of her band and back-up singers were there for fourth of July. About twenty people in total, including her family, her longtime friend Abigail, Ed Sheeran who was opening her shows, her parents and her brother Austin. They were all so smiley and happy – and loud – and, of course, they all looked like they had just stepped out of an Abercrombie & Fitch catalogue in a sugar high – very good looking, fashionable and, as I said, loud. I knew a few of them – she had the same band since she was sixteen – but all of the others were really chill about Harry and me, which was great. We instantly felt part of the crew and the conversations flew easily.

Now, when you take a bunch of people who are loud and who want to have fun and put them on a boat in the middle of Summer, trust me, they’re getting louder. On the boat, as we rode around the Atlantic on the Maryland shore, there was music playing, more lemonade, and just the usual randomness of dancing and jokes all around that filled every Swift holiday.

Harry and Ed – or, as everyone started to call them after they heard me say it, the British Squad – were resting on one of the sides of the boat, enjoying sun light, and it made me very anxious to wonder if he had put on enough sunscreen.

“Everything cool?”, Taylor asked, taking my eyes from Harry. “I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have said that thing about you not believing in long distance relationships earlier”

“What?”

“I was walking down the hall before we left the house, I hear you guys… kind of, arguing?”

“Oh”

“You hadn’t talked about it, had you? What you’ll do when he has to go back? I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have said that”

“Tay, don’t worry”, I told her. “It’s fine, really”

“For whatever’s worth”, she said, looking up to where he was, “I think you could do it if you
wanted to… you guys are kind of perfect together”. It took all I had in me not to laugh.

“What makes you say that?”

“Have you seen the way he looks at you?”, she asked, sounding obvious. “He clearly loves you a lot”

“Let’s not start with the L word, ok?”, I said, keeping the relationship casual as it was the original plan.

“Why? Listen, I’m serious. The way he looks at you, it’s like you’re the only thing in the world that matters…”, I looked at Harry, chatting with Ed and one of Taylor’s dancers. “I’m sorry for believing when there’s love, long distance should be possible… But I have to. In our line of work, who could have a normal relationship? We all have to do some long distance with the amount of traveling we do”. I sighed. Of course she was right. I just wished the problem was as simple as believing or not in long distance relationships.

“Come on, let’s go over there”, she held my hand, pulling towards where Ed, Harry and her dancer were talking.

The problem of not knowing if Harry was upset at what I had said was that he could be, he could not be, and he could simply not care at all, and I had no idea of what would hurt more.

“What about you guys?”, Ed asked when we approached them, pointing at me and Harry. I stared at them, confused, going to lean in the boat’s side beside Harry.

“We’re discussing first-dates”, one of Taylor’s dancers said. “They’re mocking me because I said I took this girl I have a crush on for a bike ride on the park on our first date”

“Oh, Jen loved our first date”, Harry bragged. “I’m really good at first dates”

“…I did”, I said, looking at him, smiling slightly at the thought of our first date having officially been dinner in my place – at least as far as his POs were concerned.

“Nice, what did you guys do?”, Ed asked, and Harry’s smile left his face very quickly.

“Oh”, he muttered.

“Uh… We”, I looked at him, trying to buy some time, “Well, Harry-“

“I put a lot of effort into it”, he said, like it was no big deal, going on his own acting mode.

“He did. He took me to Coney Island”, it was funny the way he suddenly was very confused probably not having any idea what Coney Island was. “I was confused, but when we got there, turns out he rented the entire amusement park for us!”

“Oh, wow”, everyone said, impressed. Harry looked happy at that.

“Tell us the story!”, Taylor said.

“Well, we went around playing all the kids rides that had cars way too small for us, and it was hilarious and sweet… And we played the games and stuff, no lines, and then we went on the ride, just the two of us, and, of course, we went to the ferris wheel and they did that thing where they stop you at the top and stuff”

“I could have beaten her at all the games if I wanted too, but I let her win a few, romantic I am…”,
he told Ed, making me a little annoyed now.

“Well, you did win me a big stuffed bear”, I said.

“Aw”, Tay went.

“Yeah, and then he dropped it from the ferris wheel”, I finished it, making Harry look at me.

“Only because”, he said, “I was too distracted by you leaning in to kiss me. She kissed me first, couldn’t control herself”, he told them.

“In the ferris wheel, how romantic”, Ed said.

“Doesn’t the ferris wheel in Coney Island have grids, though?”, dancer guy asked.

“It does?”, Taylor asked him.

“Yeah, I know the Santa Monica Pier one is open, but in Coney Island I think it’s closed… Isn’t it?”, they looked at us. I honestly had never been to the Coney Island Park.

“Is it?”, I asked, looking confused.

“Jen, you’re confounding the moments”, Harry said, lovingly hugging me by the waist, bringing me closer to him. I let out a giggle, feeling the skin burn where he was touching me in a good way. “This one loves to blame me for things… No, we went for a walk at the beach and started dancing and I put the bear in the sand-”

“Oh, that’s right!”, I said, gently slapping his chest now, looking at him excited. “Yes, that’s what happened. We went to the ferris wheel afterwards and we didn’t ever notice we had forgot the bear until we got down from it-“

“Because that’s when you kissed me”, he looked at me, a bit triumphant and still smiling, “Yeah”

“Oh, and you danced in the beach at night… That’s sweet”

“What was the song?”, Ed asked. Harry and I looked at each other and then back at him.

“One of yours”, Harry said, “What’s the name again, babe?”

“Uh”, I thought about it. Do not say You Need Me I Don’t Need You, Jenifer. “Well, that’s a funny story… We actually danced to…”, Harry gave me a side eye, and he squeezed my waist, as if saying Say something romantic, for Christ’s sake. “You Need Me I Don’t Need You”. Harry closed his eyes in a barely noticeable sigh of frustration, the other three looked very confused.

“But…”, Ed started.

“You see, what happened was, uhm… It’s just kind of an inside joke”, I said.

“We didn’t have music, but she has a great voice-“, Harry said.

“You do, weren’t you nominated for a Tony once?”, dancer asked.

“One of those up and coming star ones”, I said.

“So I told her, sing!”, Harry went on.
“I told him to give me an idea, because I couldn’t think of any songs…”

“And I told her, go with the first song that pops on your head”, Harry was staring at me again, the smirk coming back to his lips.

“And I had that song on my head the whole day”, I pointed at Ed, “Because that’s my get psyched jam”

“Thank you?”, Ed said, making us laugh.

“And so, you know, kind of jokingly, I started singing it”

“She means rapping it. She’s a great rapper”, Harry told them.

“We are. Harry joined in mid-way through it!”

“Well, now that I’d like to see”, dance guy said, and we laughed.

“And I thought I was the only ginger British rapper out there…”, Ed joked.

“Oh, my God. You guys could be a duo, like the ginger Macklemore and Lewis”, the dancer said, and we laughed again.

“You should rap it for the hidden talent show tomorrow!”, Tay said.

“That’s not gonna happen”, I said.

“Yeah, let’s not do that”, Harry agreed.

“But anyway, after we were done laughing at our own horrible rapping,”, I said, “we just kind of slow-paced to nothing for a while… it was nice”

“Well, you’re dating now, so I guess it was”, Ed said; Harry looked at me smiling, and I couldn’t help but smile back, in a silly way, like we had the key to the meaning of life with us but were not about to share it with anyone. “But I need to get you some more romantic songs…”, we laughed, and Harry squeezed his hand on my waist again.

Taylor went on to change the music that was playing, and dancer-guy and Ed eventually went on to a different topic of conversation with the people sitting close to them, and I asked Harry to help me get sunblock on my back. On a low tone, as his hands made a gentle – almost too gentle – pattern on my skin, Harry asked:

“What was that about?”

“I almost ruined it, I’m glad you’re getting better at improv”, he giggled.

“You Need Me I Don’t Need You was bad, but I meant more… the whole thing. Wasn’t our first date just technically dinner at your place?”

“Yeah, well… the guys aren’t here, so I just thought I’d- I don’t know”

“Go on…”, I sighed.

“I just…”, I turned to him, who still had sun block on his hand. I picked it on mine and started putting in his cheeks, where I knew his skin got redder. “I never had… You know.”
“What?”

“A nice… I just. Listen, I don’t have a nice relationship story”, I said. “I just don’t. All my first dates either eventually ended in really bad break-ups or were just so uninteresting I try not to think about them…”, I got more sunblock on my hand, starting to rub it in his chest, leaning in so our hips were together. “Mostly they’re just hook-up stories. So I just thought I’d make up something nice, since it’s not true anyway…”, I got more sunblock, moving down to his ribs, feeling his bones under my fingers. “And since you seemed so keen on impressing people… Gotta do it right, right?”

We stayed quiet for a while, as I just focused on getting his sunblock on. He had one of his hands on his pocket, and the other still on my waist. I could feel his eyes on me and wanted to look up and check if he was really looking at me, but I felt very self-conscious all of a sudden. I focused on getting the sunblock on all of his stomach and chest equally, spreading it very slowly and just maybe enjoying it a bit much.

“Are you mad at me?”, I asked, just to break the silence.

“No”, he said, and took a deep breath. “Are you mad at me?”

“No”, I said, looking up at him, finally. I hadn’t noticed until that moment – the moment I realized I was enjoying the proximity too much – how close I was. In fact, he was leaning against the boat’s side and I was so closed I was leaning on him. I had to actually lean back a little bit to be able to get the sunblock over his stomach, but if I just stood normally I could feel his breath in me – and with that I could also feel pretty much every inch on my skin burning out, and I was pretty sure the sun had little to do with it. I started reaching for his shoulders and what I could reach of his back, even though I couldn’t see it, bringing myself even closer. I watched his chest go up and down as his breath got heavier, seeing at the side of my eyes he kept staring at me.

“I’m sorry I came on too strong earlier”, he said. “You’re right, I don’t get it. I don’t get your job, and I’m sorry. I know how much that can suck”, I nodded. “I’ve been in the military for years now, I started my own charity when I was twenty-two, I work really hard on organizations in Britain and doing diplomatic work representing my father and my grandmother and still it took me moving here and getting a nine-to-five job for people to say that it is nice to see me”, he did quotation marks with his hands, “finally doing something”. I smiled.

“Yeah, I get that”

“I know you do, because of your family”, his hand went from my waist to where my arm was, stopping me from getting sunblock on the sides of his torso, making me look at him. “I don’t want to be like your family, I want to understand”. We looked at each other for a while, and then I took a deep breath.

“I don’t wanna go back”, I said. “To Claire, that’s how we’re calling the character so she gets detached from Vanessa Thompson. I don’t want to go back to Claire. It hurts too much, it’s too difficult. I’m tired. Part of me just wants to stay here and enjoy summer with my friends and laugh and sing loudly like the normal twenty-three years-old I am”, I took a deep breath. “But every time I feel that way, I also feel so guilty”

"I would tell you that you don’t have to go back if I thought that would help… What scenes do you still have to film?"

"We’ve done the really bad ones already, like the car scene and death scene…”, I said. “But they’re still a lot of really bad ones to go… Like the closet scene, which is basically her meltdown
scene. After her son dies, Claire knows she’s going to have one, and she waits for it, she never goes into his room, knowing it would trigger too many feelings, so she plans a funeral and calls family. And one day someone asks her something and she has to go in and she does without even thinking about it. So she comes out immediately and starts yelling at people saying they made her go in, but she wasn’t supposed to. She runs to her room and locks herself in the closet. Her husband is at the door, asking her to let him in, that he knows she is hurting more, because she is the mother, she carried him inside of her, nursed him, but that he was still his son too, and he’s hurting too. She doesn’t open the door. The love of her life, and she couldn’t let him in”, I stared up to the water, and closed my eyes, hugging Harry and leaning my head in his chest, “she falls asleep, he grabs a toolbox and opens the door… and puts her on the bed. He asks if she thinks they’re ever going to be happy again, she says no.”, his arms closed up on me, “when I was reading the book I kept thinking towards the end that something else was going to go wrong, you know? That she was going to say they got divorced after the kid died. They say a lot of marriages end after a child gets sick. But they survived it. They have a baby daughter now. They say he sent her, the kid. I always thought my mother did something wrong when she followed my dad here from Brazil, you know? That he’s the one that should have fought for us to be together, that she shouldn’t have tried so hard. I wondered if our family would still be together if she hadn’t… but maybe she was the brave one. She was just fighting for the love of her life”. Harry lowered his head, resting it on the top of mine. “So you see, everything is just too happy right now. Because… how can I just sit here and eat and play and watch the fireworks when somewhere millions of families can only think that their child would have loved to see the fireworks too…”, he sighed. “And I know what you’re going to say, people hurt all the time, all over the world, I know that. I keep reminding myself of that… doesn’t seem to help…”, some time passed, I broke the hug, going back to spread sunblock on his skin. He kept staring at me. “I’m sorry, this got really gloomy all of a sudden”, I chuckled.

"Never apologize for telling me about your work”, he said, and stopped my hand again, “And, Jen, never apologize for caring too much about people… That shouldn’t make you guilty… That only makes you wonderful"

He had chills splattering across his skin and, when he talked again, he took a deep breath before speaking, fast, like he just wanted to get the words out.

“…I missed you”. I stopped what I was doing and just stared at my hand where it was on his shoulder for a couple of seconds. And then I looked at him, just looked at him with his ginger hair looking almost as blonde as mine with the sunshine reflected in the water below. His turquoise eyes stared deep into mine and I could count the freckles on his nose at this distance and I hadn’t realized I was biting my lips over how much I had missed him. God, I missed him. How I had missed him. It had been less than two months and I couldn’t manage what? Two hours straight without thinking about him? And every damn song on the radio seemed to be about us. And every night I had to calm my trembling breath over Claire’s cloud of pain with thoughts of his arms around me, or his chest under my head, his heartbeat on my ear. It was so unsettling how easily I had lost all the progress I had achieved on those two months, all the progress on trying to not be in love with him. Right there, with his skin on mine, and the smell of sunblock, and sounds of laughter and music, and the sunshine on the water, and boats with paparazzi roaming around us, all I could think of was, ‘I missed you too, Mr. Prince’. Don’t say it, Jenifer. You can’t say it.

“Well, of course you did”, I teased. “I’m the most interesting person you know, remember?”. He broke his serious expression into a smile, and I went back to getting sunblock on his skin. I was pretty much done now, but I wanted to keep my hand on his skin, so I just kept spreading the amount of sunblock that was already there.

“Right, on the Met Ball. I said that, didn’t I?”
“Trust me, I remember”. And then he looked at me again, the same way as before, with an air of smile on his lips, his eyes, focusing on me more than in what my hands were doing. “You need to stop looking at me like that, Mr. Prince”, I told him.

“Like how?”, he asked.

“Like you’re picturing me naked”, I whispered, looking him in the eyes. Despite blushing, props to him for not breaking eye contact.

“Maybe I am”, he said. I giggled, shaking my head and closing the bottle of sunblock.

“Is it the hair?”, I teased, making him laugh. “I heard you have a thing for blondes”.

“You know it”, he joked. “I thought I was supposed to look like your boyfriend, especially with those guys out there”, he signaled with his head towards the paparazzi on the boat nearby on the water.

“Well, you’re a better actor than I remember then”, we let the silence fill in the space between us now, and I tried to think of anything else to say. Or an excuse to leave. Or anything, really, that would mean a break from standing there next to him, wishing with all of me that he would kiss me.

Harry took his hand out of his pocket, and framed it with the other one on one of my wrists. I felt the cold metal on it.

“What is this?”, I asked, when he took his hand off, revealing a golden bracelet with a white strap in the middle, and a letter H on it. I immediately recognized it as Hermès – the same brand of the watch I had that everyone in the media kept saying had been a gift from Harry and had our initials and the date we met engraved on it.

“June 12?”, he asked, “Is it? I read it was Valentines’ day in Brazil… So I thought… You know, you’re Brazilian… And everyone already talks about it, so…”, he opened the bracelet, twisting the letter H to the sides, revealing the interior. It read:

February 9th – J & H

“Is this the date you moved to New York?”

“I thought it would be more symbolic than when we met… Since that’s when I had the idea for this…”, I closed the bracelet again, smiling, and took a deep breath before hugging him again, close. Tight. Not wanting to let go this time.

“You’re wonderful, Mr. Prince”, I said. Feeling him close his arms around me after a moment of surprise with the hug. “Thank you”.

There was so much more I wanted to say. Like how much I wanted to kiss him, and how much my heart ached at the thought of him ever leaving the country, and how much I wanna believe in long distance relationships as long as he is the one in it with me. I wanted to tell him how much I had missed him for the last two months, and yet, I knew I couldn’t.

I sighed once more, feeling the smell of summer on his skin – the mixture of sunblock and salted water – and I kept asking myself was he aware that he was making it so much harder for me not to be in love with him?

Chapter End Notes
Merry Christmas!!! Hope you're having a good end of year with lots of loved ones and good food! I'm at my parents' house without internet access so this is probably the only update I'll make until I'm back home in Sao Paulo (which will be by the 13th of January, 2015). Sorry!

Coming next: Jen and Harry have a great 4th of July. Then Jen and Harry have a terrible 5th of July.

Much love, Nat.
I wish I could explain the magical way sunshine scattered, in a pinkish-orange tone, through the skyscrapers in Manhattan that evening and how the landscape almost made me feel better about that day, but I don’t think I could do it justice. Turning my back on the couch, I looked back inside the house through the glass doors of the terrace where about ten people sat on the couches in front of the TV – on on TMZ Live – or pacing around the room on their phones or tablets, trying to keep the situation under control. Even Clark, Nathan and Eddy were there, getting the door or everyone drinks, trying to do what they could. I couldn’t see Harry anymore, he was probably still in his bedroom, cuddling with Vodka to try and channel his anger out. I mean the dog. Cuddling with Vodka, the beverage, was my way of channeling my anger out.

Arriving straight from London just a couple of hours earlier, his private secretary, Edward Lane-Fox, was sitting in a leather chair in the corner, holding a glass of scotch, not one bit happy with the situation he had arrived in. Harry didn’t seem very well when he did, which is why I had made my way to them at that exact moment, wondering who the guy I could at that point only call ‘angry looking British man’ was.

“Hello”, I said, then. Angry British man’s eyes went from my head to my toes in pure unaltered judgment. He didn’t say anything.

“Jen”, Harry started, “This is my private secretary,-”


“Please”, he said, in the heavy British accent, “Call me sir”. By his side, Harry closed his eyes and let out a sigh. “Lane-Fox, being strict. LF will do if you’re looking to save time. Although, ideally, I’d like to believe there is no need for us to grow attached to one another”

“Edward”, Harry let out in a warning sigh. I was in shock.

“A nude photograph”, Edward said, his teeth not moving, turning to him. “After the last nine months we’ve had-“

“I know”, Harry said, hands on his hips. “Jen could you excuse us for a-“

“Do you think this is a game?!”, Edward asked him. “Don’t you remember the amount of hard work we had to do to get you through the Vegas scandal?”, he was whispering now, exasperated, nonetheless. “I’ve been telling you you need to be more open to media exposure for years, but, Harry, do you think this is the way to do it?!”

“I didn’t plan this!”, Harry returned his tone.

“You came here to work, but back home all we hear is about you going to clubs and parties-“

“Uh, excuse me?”, I interrupted. Edward took a deep breath before looking at me.
“Yes?”, he asked. I wasn’t sure why I had called the attention to me, I guess it just seemed so ridiculous that Harry had to hear all of that, but the moment his stern face was on my direction I was suddenly overcome with feeling very small. Edward sighed. “You must be the actress”

“I-uh, I guess you could say that. I mean, I’m an actress, not sure if I’m the-“

“Are you that actress?”, he pointed at the television, still on TMZ Live, where Harvey Levin was saying something as a selfie of me and Harry taken in Brazil in the pier on my backyard fluttered across the screen. A selfie no one was supposed to see.

“Yes, that’s”, I started, my voice disappearing on my throat. “That’s me”

“And Harry”, he added.

“What’s your point, Edward?”, Harry asked.

“My point is usually how this would have gone is, and don’t pretend you don’t know this, Harry, the two of us would only have met in about two years from now, assuming, of course the relationship had survived that long, but you’re a particularly problematic one, aren’t you? So we had to fasten things up”, he spoke softly, casually, not full of anger or bitterness, but with just enough enunciation so that anyone could tell he was being perfectly polite and reasonable, despite still extremely mad. By his right, Harry was rolling his eyes. “So, Miss Silva, is it? Or do you prefer Ferreira?”

“Just Jen is fine, actually”

“See? This is how the rules of conversation goes”, he said, “Until one tells me that it is okay to use a first name, I stick to the last name. I’m gonna stick to Ms. Silva, if that’s alright, as I said I’m looking forward to not having the need to grow too comfortable in this relationship… as I was saying, we have established that you are an actress, but if you’re not ‘the’ actress, as you say yourself, which actress are you?”, he asked. I blinked, mouth opened.

“I… am not- I don’t know”

“Are you the actress with Harry on that Instagram video wearing America shirts and chanting U-S-A over and over again like spoiled college frat brats?”, I was startled. “Are you the one in the personal photographs going around on the internet? That embarrassing number of selfies I don’t even want to know how you made him take with you considering he hates taking photos? Do you happen to know how much he hates social media?”

“I can speak for myself, Edwar-“

“Are you the actress in that nude photograph that leaked earlier today? You do have flawless skin, I’ll give you that, but I don’t see the need to show the entire world-“

“Drop the judgmental tone, Edward!”, Harry exploded. Around the room, everyone stopped talking for a couple of seconds to look at us, the only noise being Harvey Levin’s voice in the TV going: ‘we still haven’t heard from the reps of any of the involved…’. “This isn’t helping anyone”, Harry went on, “They’re dealing with it”, he signaled at Janine and Richard in the center of the room who had gone back to arguing over… something. “And it is not her fault”

“Well, it has to be somebody’s fault”, Edward said. “And I only see one person involved in literally every problem you’ve put yourself into since you left England”

“Drop. It.”, Harry said.
“Fine. Let’s drop the subject and pretend that everything is going perfectly for you here in America. Let’s pretend it was a great idea to travel across the ocean-”

“You know why I came”, Harry said, calmer now. “Don’t act like you didn’t agree with me”

“Don’t act like you don’t remember I had reservations about this”, Edward returned. “And apparently I was right, but hey. I guess we dropped that subject”. They stared at each other for the longest second before Edward spoke again. “Do Americans have scotch or is that too much to ask? I had the longest flight”, Harry looked at him for one long second before turning and walking to the mini bar.

“Well, this went well”, I joked. Edward was looking at his nails, not outlining any hints of a smile.

“He was never too good at being forced to admit to be making the wrong decisions”, he looked away from his hands, at me, very sharply.

“What kind of decisions do you believe he is making wrong?”, I asked, as if I didn’t know he was talking about me.

“I’m sorry, it’s in my job description not to discuss business with… strangers”

“I’m his girlfriend”, he scorned.

“So I hear…”

“what is your job anyway?”

“My job…”, he fixed his posture, hands on his hips, looking at me, “is to make sure that guy”, he pointed at Harry, who had his back to us, “becomes the best person, the best royal, the best soldier and the best philanthropist that he can be. I have seen him grow, Ms. Silva, from a revolted teenager into a kind-hearted good man, I have seen him thrive on his own merit, and I have seen him broken and drunk on the floor asking me why bad things happen to good people. I have seen countless girls like you come and go, maybe not with the same job as you, but with same innocence on their eyes. Always excited and energetic, ready to fight the life he brings as long as things go their way and they get something good out of it. All of them always leave as soon as they start to lose things more than they win. Time and time again, he’s the one who always stays behind with one bigger mess than the last one for me to clean up”

“I am not Chelsy Davy”, I told him, crossing my arm on my chest.

“Absolutely you’re not”, he said, “She had many faults, but none of them were the clumsiness of taking revealing photographs in a bathroom”. My jaw dropped.

“What could I have possibly done so wrong for you to not even try and pretend to be polite… sir?”, I asked him, a bit outraged.

“Let’s be honest, Ms. Silva, and save us both some time. You don’t want this”, he looked me in the eyes. “This life. His life. Seems exotic and interesting now that he’s living in your favorite city, with a job you can understand, playing your game, by your rules. Letting you dress him up and take him around as you please, and even I’ll admit he could make this” he looked around the penthouse, “his permanent life if he wanted, but I happen to know he doesn’t. And when he gets back to his actual life, his game, his rules, you might even try and follow him, but he’ll be wearing a hat and a tux, and you’ll want to go out and party, but he’ll have to sit through two hours of an Anglican service in honor of his grandmother or something like that and at some point you will get bored out of your mind and you will leave.”
“…you don’t know that”

“So why pretend like it is possible to treat this relationship like you’re just getting to know each other? It’s never just that”

“You don’t know that either”

“So, what? You’re considering to spend the rest of your life with him?”

“You’re saying he wouldn’t want that?”

“Oh, I’m sure he would love that. You are, after all, the kind of girl he likes. Which is why it always is a bit of a torture for him to consider spending the rest of his life with someone, knowing what he would have to ask them to give up… He always goes for the free spirited ones. But, no, I’m saying you wouldn’t want that. Not when it would deprive you of everything you love most”

“I-“, I looked back at Harry, and then back at him. “What makes you so sure you know who I am?”

“Because I read your file”, he said, “Harry didn’t bother reading it to the end, you know? But I did. That is part of my job, to make sure if he doesn’t know who he’s dealing with, that I do. You know which file I’m talking about, right? The one we made before he moved here. The one with every possible information we could gather about you.”

“I’m used with people meddling in my life”

“Oh, don’t be fooled. This isn’t your typical tabloid research, this is a monarchy you’re dealing with. We have contacts. We managed to gather a lot of information from when you were… young”. I didn’t answer him, after a while, he spoke again. “You know what I’m talking about, I’m sure. All the information those people”, he looked at Janine and Richard, “have spent a whole lot of money and time trying to keep locked into your closet along with all of your other skeletons so you could still pose as the one child star that didn’t go the same way as the others…”, he looked at the television. “Hm. I guess that’s not working out very well… So, I don’t think the girl in the file I read would settle for anything less than an adventurous life, and he cannot give you that. Don’t get me wrong, I’m not saying you’re a bad person. And I do believe maybe you really like him. I know he likes you, he won’t shut up about it. But let’s try and keep the damage to a minimum, shall we?”

“What is it that you’re trying to say?!?”

“What I’m saying, Ms. Silva is closets have keys. And one day, maybe not today, but one day all your skeletons might come out and when that day comes, I will not allow you to drag him down with you”.

“Jenifer?”, Monica called my attention back at the TV, where Harvey Levin was talking about new texts messages being released from Jenifer Silva to… Tyler Alvin.

“Oh, no”, I said. “No, no, no, no, no…”

“Another skeleton from your closet?”, Edward asked, as if his point was proven right before our eyes. As I stood there watching my whole life be brought up out of context for the whole world to see, I couldn’t help but long for the previous two days, when it felt like everything was so into place.
“Boy, I do not want to be there when you tell your family”, Harry joked, when I told the table at dinner on the 3rd of July that I was going to audition for the Victoria Secret’s Fashion Show in New York in three days.

“Yes, well, as I said nothing is confirmed yet. And I still have to finish Wild & Free, which should be by the end of this month, considering I’ll take another break in a few days to go to Comic Con for The Mediator’s goodbye panel, and some other work stuff”

“Hey, did Sel answer you text?”, Tay asked, coming back to her seat by my side. I grabbed my phone from my purse. “If she did, when you talk to her again ask her if she has a date for her birthday party yet, because depending on when it is we might not be able to go”

“Isn’t this a bit early to start planning?”, I asked. “Her birthday is at the end of the month”

“I need time in advance to see my show schedule”, she said, “You’re coming, right? To Sel’s birthday, if we’re free?”, she asked Ed by her side, as I looked down at the text history with Sel. I felt Harry pinch my arm slightly, and smiled, already knowing what it was about. Harry seemed to be convinced Taylor and Ed Sheeran were in love with each other, a theory to which I answered, when he first told me about it, ‘welcome to the Sweeran club!’.

“He’s on tour with her”, I whispered, “She’s being nice. I told you, Harry, I asked about it, she says they’re just friends”

“Well,” he sighed, “that’s what he said too when I asked, but I’m not buying it”. I laughed, focusing on my messages with Sel, the first one I had sent after Taylor told me she wasn’t coming to Rhode Island but, instead, was enjoying a trip to Cabo with Justin Bieber. To the whole world, they had broken up a while back. To them, it was true to some extent, but they had recently reconnected and said reconnection included enjoying as much private holydays always from paparazzi’s eyes as they could. The opinions of other being what destroyed the relationship the first time around.

‘Hey bitch, what’s this story I hear about you trading us for Bieber? Wth happened to sistas before mistress? -J’, it’s what I had sent.

‘I cannot tell if you’re drunk or someone just stole your phone right now LOL Sorry babe, Cabo wins. See you on my birthday tho? Party on the 21st! J says hi –S

“Tay”, I called her, who stopped mid-laugh at something Ed had just said. “Her party will be on the 21st… and Justin says hi”, I added, with a fake smile.

“Ugh”, she rolled her eyes, making me laugh.

“I know, right? Tell me he’s not coming”, I said.

“Here, let me answer”, grabbing my cellphone, she started to type, with me reading and laughing by her back.

‘Selena Marie Gomez, you know we love you and support you in your choices, but tell me Justin is not coming to your birthday party you just know he’ll show up high on cocaine with at least two of his pseudo-rapper friends and make the whole thing uncomfortable for everybody. No offense though. Love you –Tay and J’

Laughing after pressing send, she returned the cellphone, that I threw back in my purse without looking as fast as I could as to not see a response.
Having come to Rhode Island straight from Arkansas, I didn’t have any of my America themed shirts for 4th of July. Knowing Taylor was big on theme-dressing I had bought a new one at the airport. A black one with a waving flag on it, at least twice my size. With the help of a scissor, I gave it a deep V neck, and cut off the sleeves, a bit more than I should have, leaving way too much space under my arms so the sides of my bra were visible. I wore a red lace one and called it a day, finishing my look with some brown sandals, sunglasses and the bracelet my boyfriend had given me the day before as a late Brazilian valentine’s day gift.

Harry, who predictably owned no shirts like this and was unaware of Taylor’s tradition of having us dress up, was at a dead end. Luckily Steve, who was in Tay’s band, took patriotism very seriously and owned a collection of such shirts, so he let Harry borrow one. The one he took, however, was a Captain America one, thinking it would be more neutral in case paparazzi spotted us and decided to make news about a member of the Royal Family supporting the colonies or some none sense like that.

That afternoon was spent running around Taylor’s gigantic backyard in the sun, to the sound of everything on the radio – from country to top 40 -, finding clues of her scavanger hunt, laughing together, making dancing breaks whenever the song playing was too good to focus.

Like when we heard the familiar string guitar line that was followed by ‘when life leaves you high and dry I’ll be at your door tonight, if you need help, if you need help…’ one of that summer’s hits, Gone Gone Gone by Phillip Phillips was a personal favorite of pretty much everyone. Harry was caught off guard when everyone dropped what they were doing and started singing at the same time. Someone somewhere turned the volume up and the game stopped as people turned to each other to voice over the lyrics and dance.

“Give me reasons to believe”, I turned to Harry, in the beat of the song, pointing one arm in his direction at a time, moving my shoulders to the rhythm, waiting for him to give me his hands, “that you would do the same for meeeeee…”, which he didn’t do. He just stood there, with his hands in his jeans shorts’ pockets, laughing at us. “And I would do it for youuu, for youuu”, I went to him, and held his hand anyway, stepping away, and closer, and away, and closer dancing to the song, pretending we were dancing together, “Baby I’m not moving on, I’ll love you long after you’re gone… For you, for you”, I made a twist, still holding his arm up, and he laughed.

“I don’t dance, Silva”, he said, smiling.

“I thought we had already established that’s a lie…”, I said, and he laughed. Suddenly, he pulled me close fast, taking the other hand out of his pocket, he held my waist and, looking me in the eyes, started to dance with me, just a couple of seconds after the shock of closeness made my heart skip a beat.

“This is kind of like that dance you taught me in Brazil”, he noticed. Took me a few seconds to notice he had said something, with his eyes on mine and all.

“Forró?”, I asked, “You’re right, the beat matches”, his arm on my waist, my hand on his shoulder, our hands – and hips – together, we started to step from one side to another, front and back, to the rhythm, smiling at each other for both nailing the steps and the memories of some clumsy and painful dance lessons back at my brother’s wedding.

We were just vaguely aware of the group of people around us, cheering us on, singing at the top of their lungs. Harry let one of my hands go, spinning me around, making me laugh.

“You’re my headstart, you’re my rugged heart, you’re the pulse that I’ve always needed, like a drum baby don’t stop beating…”, at the bridge, with a stronger beat, he picked me up, putting our
faces close, and started spinning to the rhythm, faster and faster, until we almost fell down, laughing and going back to the dancing until the end of the song, when it slowed down, as did our pace, until we were just swinging around slightly, still looking at each other. “Like a drum my heart never stops beating for you, and long after you’re gone, gone, gone, I’ll love you long after you’re gone, gone…” he twisted me around again, once for each gone, and in the third, he lowered me down by my waist, in a dip, making me laugh, “… Gone”

“I thought you didn’t danced”, I teased, in a whisper, our eyes too close while I still hanged by his arms.

“You know me better than that”, he said, smiling, as our friends cheered around, talking about the song, jumping and commenting on the next one that started to play. When Harry brought his lips closer, and our noses touched, I turned my face to the side just in time to change the act into a kiss on my cheek. I knew it wasn't a big deal, despite my heart not having gotten the memo, apparently. Still, I couldn't help but avoid it. After a sigh, he quickly put me back up.

“Oh, my God, you guys look so cute!”, Taylor said, coming closer to show us a picture on her camera, that she took of us dancing, when Harry had lowered me down. “One day you two will get married and I’ll show this picture in my maid-of-honor toast and I’ll say I knew it from the start”, she said, dreamingly, and laughed. After a second we did too, awkwardly. “Oh, sorry.”, she said, serious, “I keep doing that”, she turned around, and left.

We got back into the game, and as people were answering questions about American history and American pop culture and doing a shot for each wrong answer, with the rest of them shouting U-S-A, U-S-A, Harry and I sat on the grass to watch.

“Would you do it?”, he asked, after a while. I looked at him.

“What?”

“Say you loved someone very much, but the only way to be with him was to give up your career and move to another country…”, he said, “Would you do it?” he was staring ahead, to the sound of that Tegan and Sara song, and to the chanting of U-S-A, U-S-A and the frustrated screams of people who got their answer wrong. The sun reflected on his hair, making it look even more orange this time in contrast to the navy Captain America shirt he was wearing. I knew he was speaking hypothetically, and I knew he didn’t mean him. Still, he was the one in my mind. After all, he was all I could see. I wanted to kiss him so much it made me want to answer 'yes, I’d do it for you', but I couldn’t.

“I don’t know”, I said, knowing it was a lie. Knowing I was trying to make him feel better considering whoever married him would have to do that, knowing I was only saying that because I was trying to hold on to the hope that maybe we could do it. “No”, I said, finally. “Probably not. I’ve defended feminism so much in the past it would be hypocrisy of me to believe I couldn’t have both. I believe in a world where I could…”, for some reason, I felt a knot on my throat, and a big weight on my shoulders, as if I was committing some big sin by speaking my mind. As I looked ahead, clapping with the others as our team got awarded another right answer, trying to swallow the knot down, I realized I had just voiced the biggest reason we could never be together.

“That world you’re talking about sounds pretty good”, he said, and got up, "too bad is not the one I live in”.

“You see, with the exception of Tay’s parents, her brother and her friend Abigail, most people here
are her band, dancers or back-up singers, you know?”, I was explaining to Harry as we ate our
pizzas in the biggest living room of the house that night – which still couldn’t fit everyone, leaving
a few of us sitting in the floor. “So, it was obvious that they all were talented, that way a normal
talent show would have been very predictable, considering they all see each other’s talents every
night on tour. So they came up with hidden talent show, where everyone gets to show a side of
themselves the others don’t usually see… They say you’re successful if the others are either left
impressed, touched or laughing. The only ones who are aloud singing or dancing are people who
don’t work with that kind of thing…”

It was the hidden talent show night, and Abigail, Taylor’s best friend from her school times, was
finishing a monologue of a rap song with helium voice. Extremely impressive. Harry and I were in
a corner, laughing until I almost choked.

“And now, ladies and gentleman… and royalty”, Ed stood up, leaving his plate at the coffee table,
“we call ourselves the ginger duo”, Harry, handing me his plate, got up on his feet to the room’s
cheers, completely ignoring my surprise face.

“We do not call ourselves that”, he joked, making us laugh, taking a folded piece of paper out of
his pocket and walking to Taylor’s piano in the corner.

“Ed, you can’t sing, it’s not fair!”, someone shouted.

“Who says I’m singing?”, he answered.

“Ladies and gentleman”, Harry started, as he tried to straighten up the paper in the music rack.

“And royalty!”, Ed added, clearly a little drunk.

“I’m the royalty, why should I say that?”, there was a general giggle around the room. “As I was
saying, you guys can’t sing or do anything like that since you do it all the time, but since I’m a
soldier slash charity planner, I decided the rule doesn’t apply to me”

“Woo!”, someone cheered.

“So, I took lessons when I was a child and then never again, so, I’m sorry for hurting your ears.
Behold, a song by me, and an interpretative drunk dance by my good friend Ed”, we clapped.

“Jenifer, what’s happening?”, Abigail asked.

“I have no idea”, I said. Taking three deep breaths before starting, Harry eventually brought his
hands to the keyboard and started to play a very simplified version of a familiar melody.

“Hey there Delilah, what’s it like in New York City? I’m a thousand miles away, but girl tonight
you look so pretty. Yes, you do”, there was a general ‘aww’ around the room as everyone either
recognized the song and/or showed appreciation to it. Ed gave him a few lines to show off his
musical skills - or maybe he was just stalling -, and then started to spin around, pretending to be a
bird and mimicking ballet moves or, frankly, I don’t really know. I wasn’t looking at him. I only
know he was doing something funny because I could hear the others laughing, but I was
completely focused on another British ginger.

“Is someone filming this?”, I asked, aimlessly, trying to find my phone and failing. In fact, I didn’t
have to worry, since everyone was.

“Times Square can’t shine as bright as you, I swear it’s true. Hey there, Delilah, don’t you worry
about the distance”, he got his eyes up from the keyboard just for a second, just to look at me, I
don’t even think anyone noticed, and looked back down to make sure he didn’t mess up any chords. “I’m right there if you get lonely, give this song another listen, close your eyes. Listen to my voice, it’s my disguise. I’m by your side. Oh it’s what you do to me”, he repeated the chorus as Ed danced around the room, starting to walk around people and stepping where he wasn’t supposed to, or just purposely ‘dancing’ on top of them, making everyone laugh harder. At some point in the second chorus, he tripped in the coffee table and fell on top of Taylor and Liz, her back-up singer, and just laid there. Harry stopped playing, a smile in his face looking at him.

“I’m not a great dancer”, he said, to the sound of everyone’s laughter. "My dream is dead now"

“Harry, go on”, Taylor’s mom said. “You sound wonderful”

“Yeah”, one of the guys in the band said. Harry wasn’t about to be signed by a label or anything, his voice was very shaky and small, but it was still rough and deep and I think everyone was just impressed by how different this was from his usual persona.

“Alright. Ahem… A thousand mi- No, sorry”, he laughed, “A thousand miles seems pretty far, but they’ve got planes and trains and cars. I’d walk to you if I had no other way”, I felt a knot form in my throat again, “Our friends would all make fun of us and we’ll just laugh along because we know that none of them have felt this way. Delilah, I can promise you that by the time we get through the world will never ever be the same… And you’re to blame”, he looked at me again, in a quick move. I felt my hands shaking. “You’ll know it’s all because of you… We can do whatever we want to”, I closed my eyes, trying to keep that line in my head, wishing we could do whatever we wanted to… No conditions, or buts, or consequences. No future to worry about. “Hey there, Delilah, here’s to you… This one’s for you. Oh, it’s what you do to me…”, Taylor and her singers joined in, doing some different voices and harmonizing the last chorus. Harry stopped playing by the middle, and they finished it acapela. No one spoke for a second or two, just smiling at each other.

“This was really pretty”, Tay said, to the general agreement of the others, who erupted in clapping.

“Well, done, Harry!”

“That was awesome”

“See, mate, I was holding you down”, Ed said, and Harry laughed.

“Yes, let’s go with that”, he said, and walked back to sit by my side again, folding the music sheet and returning it to his pocket. I looked at him the whole time. He picked his plate from my hand and took a bite of his pizza. “Well, I am never doing that again”, he said. I watched the whole time as he chewed and got a sip of his beer. “Are you just going to look at me the whole time?”

“How-When-“, I sighed, “I didn’t know you played”

“I don’t”, he looked at me, “I had lessons when I was a kid. Royal families, you know, big on artistic skills. I was terrible, so eventually I switched to just painting classes”

“You can paint?!?”

“That’s a whole other story”, he said.

“Oh, my God!”

“Sshh”, he looked around, “You’re disturbing the performance”, someone else had started their number.
“I’m seeing you at a whole new light here, okay?”, he laughed. “Harry, that was beautiful!”, his red cheeks showed he was embarrassed, but the grin on his face showed pride. He ate another bit of his pizza. “You said you didn’t play since you were a kid, but if you didn’t know about this, how did you learn the song so fast?”, I asked. He stopped chewing, his eyes widening just a little bit. In a slow movement he put the plate down and finished chewing.

“I, uh, never said I didn’t play since I was a kid”, he said, “I play sometimes. Just didactic classics, you know? I printed the sheet music on Taylor’s computer after Ed asked if I wanted to do something together earlier today”

“So you already knew this song?”

“I- No. It was… A couple of months back I decided to check if I could still do it, so I just picked a song and tried to learn it. We have a piano on the penthouse, you’ve seen it, right?”

“I’ve played it”

“Right. Yeah, so-“

“But why this song?”

“I just, I don’t know”, he said, “I couldn’t think of any, so I decided to check the ones you talked about in Morgan Bay, remember? Your favorites. This one was the easiest to play, it’s just the same chords over and over”. He went back to eating and I still couldn’t stop looking at him. Eventually, I looked back at the center of the room where Taylor’s dad, Scott, was declaiming a poem.

“Sixteen”, I looked back at Harry who, surprised, almost dropped his beer, “I named sixteen songs that day. Three for each of my favorite artists, with ties on number three, how did you remember?”

“Right. Because you’re an over-thinker who doesn’t have simple answers to things… I don’t know”, he shrugged. “I just did. I didn’t remember all of them, just most”

“You couldn’t possibly-“

“Hey There Delilah, Good To You, Cirque de la Rues, or something like that. Masterpiece Theater, Falling in Love, Bubble Wrap, Big Bad World, You’re Not Sorry, Mary’s Song and Transylvania… And Innocent, by Taylor. I remember you said Innocent was amazing. And it was. Very… fitting. Reminds me of you… And me”, I just stared at him. “How much was that… Eleven? That’s pretty good, right? Do you remember mine?”

“Knocking on Heaven’s Door”, I said, almost without hearing myself. “That’s a classic”. He smiled at me.

“Rosangela Jenifer!”, Taylor yelled, and my head snapped in her direction, “It’s your turn!”

“Oh”, I left my plate on the coffee table, standing up and picking something from the hallway. “I feel very nervous about following these last two very beautiful, deep and serious acts with my silliness”, I said, coming back to the room with about five hula-hoops, to which everyone gave me funny looks. “But it’s worth mentioning I take hula-hooping very seriously”, they laughed, and I proceeded to swing one in each arm and then one in one foot, getting increasingly creative from there on, to much of my friends’ entertainment.
We watched the firework show after this, and Taylor had bought a bunch of fireworks herself so we could do our own show after the main one, over the city, was over. There was more music and dancing in the grass and a lot of beer and lemonade, and Harry and I ended up lying in the grass over the hill in her backyard overlooking the sea. We could hear the laughter and the music – Anything Could Happen, by Ellie Goulding – and the sky was still being lit up in color by the fireworks. My head was in his chest and his arm was around me, since people could see us and we were supposed to be a couple. But the tip of his fingers were stroking my arm, close to my shoulder, very slowly giving me chills, and I couldn’t help but overthink it. He didn’t have to do it, he didn’t have to cuddle me, it wasn’t the type of big movement people would notice. No one was looking at us that close. But, lately, every one of his movements, every one of his looks, every one of his words, sent me in a painful game of does-he-like-me-or-not.

He smiled at me, he likes me. He looked away when I smiled at him, he likes me not. He put his arms around my waist, he’s pretending to be my boyfriend. He gives me a bracelet with our initials engraved on it, he’s making a private joke. He makes a private joke, he likes me? He’s mad I haven’t called, he likes me. He doesn’t get my job, he likes me not. He tried to get my job, he’s being a good friend. He holds my hand even under the dinner table when no one is watching, he likes me. He sighs, letting my hand go, he likes me not. It was a painful dance, and it was all I had. I wanted more than anything to stop thinking about him, so I asked about work.

“Work is good. I keep wishing I could do better, you know? I feel like these events we’ve been doing are all just Band-Aids. Temporary solutions for a problem that’s… too big”

“Well, then make a big solution”, I said, “Think big, think huge. How can you raise a lot of money?”

“I have no idea, that’s my point”, he said.

“What about me? Us. We’re attracting attention, we should use it to raise money for Halo. Should make it count for something good, right?”

“But how, that’s what I’m saying”.

“You know one of the jobs I did with To Write Love On Her Arms was hosting a beneficial concert with Forever The Sickest Kids a few years back. They needed money to finance the anti-bullying campaign in schools all over the country, and having me there helped. Look around you. There’s Taylor Swift and Ed Sheeran right there”, being way too cuddly, I noticed. “Celebrities attract attention. How can we get a lot of-“, I stopped talking, looking at Tay and Ed. “A concert!”

“A concert?”

“Like the one I hosted for TWLOHA, but better… Like… You said Taylor wanted to work with you?”, I asked, “What if we asked her if she could do like, a charity pocket show. All money raised goes to Halo. And we could invite Ed. They could sing together, like they’re doing on tour. We could talk to Selena, too… Actually, I have a bunch of friends who work in music, I could talk to them for you. And Richard and Janine work for a lot more too…”

“You know a few years back we did something like this for my mother’s death anniversary”

“See? You already know how to get it started!”

“But this kind of thing takes money…”

“Yes, well, you’ll need a budget… But don’t forget you’re you, and if you talked to, I don’t know,
the mayor, or the governor, I’m sure they’d give you some kind of permit to get it done somewhere public… And oh! You could put up, like, a website live streaming the whole thing worldwide”, he narrowed his eyes, thinking about it, “and you could hire some kind of live stream host”, I said, “someone funny, to keep it entertaining in between shows”

“That takes even more money to pay the salary-“

“It doesn’t need to be someone famous”, I noticed, “there’s a ton of standup artists who would do it, or even YouTubers, maybe even Asher! If you hire a famous YouTuber they’d bring their fans to watch it as well. We could ask Asher about it… AND! If you’d put like, a link in the live streaming website, people could donate from home. Any amount of money they could!”. I stopped talking, very proud of my idea, as Harry thought about it with calm. We ended up deciding to try and plan this carefully later on, after he could take the budget issue out of the way.

We ended up falling asleep in the grass late at night after the others had decided to make a fire and s’mores, and someone woke us up by 2AM so we could go back to sleep in the room.

I decided to wake up before I absolutely had to on July 5th because the smell of beer and smoke on my hair was driving me crazy. As I sat down on the bed, looking around, I realized Harry and I hadn’t done anything but crash on the mattress when we came up a few hours back. We didn’t shower, brush our teeth or even changed out of our clothes. The room was still as messy as I had left it the night before when I had got dressed for the firework show and couldn’t find my phone. With a sigh, I started to wonder if I’d even have time to shower and pack before we had to go to the airport, so I decided to check what time it was. Looking at the empty nightstand, I remembered, frustrated, that I had yet to find my phone. Deciding the beer smell was more urgent to deal with, I fished some clothes from the floor and went to take a bath.

When I came out, Harry was sitting on the mattress looking like he had just woken up, staring at his phone looking concerned, without moving one muscle.

“Good morning, Mr. Prince”, I said. Harry dropped his arm on his lap, giving me his full attention. He gave me a smile, but his eyes were still concerned.

“Hi”, he spoke, his voice rougher than usual having just woke up. “God, I need a bath”

“Yeah, tell me about it. I feel like new”, he gave another smile, without taking his eyes from me. “I’m gonna pack now. The good thing is we’re taking your jet, or else we would never make it in time to a scheduled flight”. He laughed, humorless. “Harry, are you okay?”

“Thomas just called to tell me to check this out”, he handed me his iPhone, opened on a TMZ link. The first words that I read:

JEN SILVA’S NUDES TO PRINCE HARRY LEAKED!

I felt like my stomach fell all the way to my bladder.

“What?!”, I shouted, surprised stamped so loudly in my face the smell of beer was definitely not the worst part of my world now. “I don’t even have any- I never even-“

‘Jen Silva is having the time of her life in Rhode Island for 4th of July with friends Taylor Swift, Ed Sheeran and royal boyfriend Prince Harry, but bliss is about to end as, following the footsteps of many other former Disney stars, TMZ has obtained exclusive access to nude pics of the Mediator and Avengers actress!

The pictures surfaced on the internet earlier today and were allegedly sent to boyfriend of five
months Prince Harry.

Silva’s rep hasn’t answered our call for comment.’

Welcome to 5th of July, 2013. The new worst day of my life.
The worst day of my life started with a shower and ended with the purchase of a plane ticket, but what happened in between was the most exhaustive follow up of bad news I had ever lived through.

For starters, I now was just another Disney child star that had 'fallen' to perdition and was now being dubbed a 'slut'.

The worst part? My so called 'nude' wasn't even that good. It was the picture I had taken in Arkansas to send Harry via text, as a joke, when I wanted to know if he was attracted to me now that I was blonde. It was in front of the mirror on the bathroom of my provisory house, I had my shirt off, that I used to cover my boobs, my hair to the side leaving my back visible. Nothing else.

That was my nude: my back and some side boob. You couldn't even see my actual boobs. I had literally shown more skin on red carpets before, but, of course, nobody cared, and it was still being called 'a scandal'.

But what really pissed me off was the complete and utter confusion in my mind. Not knowing what was happening and how that was possible and how a picture that I had taken in my private and locked device and that I had just sent to one person could now be seen by so many people.

“Did you-?” I asked him.

“No!”, he said. Of course not. He’d never send it to anyone. “Jen, no!”

Then, when I realized I hadn’t seen my phone since we had dinner two nights before, it started to make sense.

I will be old and grey and I will still be wondering if the moment after we texted Selena was really the moment my cell fell out of my purse and into the ground and into the hands of someone who didn’t have the least interest in returning it. I will never know if this person, whoever it was, worked on the restaurant or was having dinner. I will never know if he or she did it all by themselves or if they sold it to one of the paparazzi outside of the restaurant waiting to get pictures of us.

All that I know is that I looked for my phone before going to sleep to check the time, and couldn’t find it, thinking it was on my jean’s pockets. All I know is I forgot to grab it before leaving for the scavenger hunt on the next morning and, during the day and the hidden talent show, when I wanted so bad to take pictures, I was reminded that I needed to go up and get it, but never did, because I was lazy. All I know is on that night, when I tried to find it before the fireworks’ show, I couldn’t, and Harry whisked me out of the room saying it was probably just lost in our mess.

All I know is we packed and headed for the airport as soon as we could. All I know is the frustration of wanting to talk to someone, wanting to go online and check on things, change my passwords, call Avast Anti-Theft Security and tell them to shut the phone down, but even when I just wanted to check the time, I was reminded, like a slap on my face, that I didn’t have my phone anymore. Harry lent me his so I could get in touch with Monica, who had all my passwords and called Avast for me immediately. She had Janine call Harry’s phone, and she told me to get to Manhattan as soon as I could so we could deal with this. She hopped on a plane herself as fast as she could – Richard too – and they would meet me there. She told me to dress simple and nice, to wear sunglasses and avoid paparazzi at all costs.
"Talk to no one!", she said. "This is a code red situation"

We hopped on the jet under the lenses of the group of paparazzi that came to pry on us. Apparently one of Tay’s dancers had posted an Instagram video of the quiz on the previous day, of the group shouting U-S-A over and over, and me and Harry were visible on it for about 4 seconds, shouting with the others. So they knew we were there. Arriving in New York, Thomas had sent a helicopter to pick us up from the airport, because apparently the entrance of the building was packed. Harry didn’t even know the roof of his apartment was a heliport, but he found out that day. Everything after this is just one gigantic ball of blurred shouting, orders, phone calls and shame. That and, of course, many personal pictures that were never intended for the public eye. Pictures we took in Brazil in the pier in my parents’ backyard, laying down under the sun and smiling, just the two of us. Videos of my brother’s wedding party, of me trying to teach Harry how to dance some Brazilian rhythms. Pictures of us playing with my cousin Luiza and videos of the boys playing football. An embarrassing number of selfies.

At my side, in Harry's penthouse that we used as HQ for crisis control - because it was the closest we got to from the heliport - as the pictures were leaked one after the other through fake twitter accounts, I could hear Harry’s frustrated sighs and I could see the skin on the knuckle of his hands going whiter as he pressed the couch, angry.

“I’m sorry”, I said, my voice soft, almost a whisper, as I remembered how reluctant he always were whenever I made him take a picture.

“This isn’t your fault”, he said, but he didn’t look at me.

“Still, it’s my cellphone. My pictures. I know how you hate being exposed like this, Harry, and I’m sorry”. He took in a deep breath.

“I know”

“No one was supposed to see it”, I said, “Even the picture I sent, you know that, right? It was a joke. Tell me you understood it was supposed to be a joke”

“I know”, he said.

“We have a lot more to worry about”, Richard said. And we definitely did.

With Harry and me, Monica and Thomas, plus Eddy, Nathan and Clark, the house was already packed, but when Janine and Richard arrived, with their own personal assistants, it got even worst. Ever since then they were all in their cellphones calling people, or on notebooks making sure they were the first to know if there was something else released.

“Jenifer”, Janine called me, “I know you’re upset, and rightfully so, but we need you on game mode right now”

“Fine”, I said, standing up. “You want me on game mode? Here’s my game mode. Someone needs to get sued over this!”

“I’m with her”, Rich said.

“Who are we gonna sue? @tkus506?”, Janine said, “It’s a ghost account! Whoever created it knows enough to cover it up so that we can’t get an IP address or anything certain!”

“Twitter already suspended that account, actually”, Monica said, “Someone is creating new accounts for new releases”
“I’m on the phone with Twitter HQ”, Janine’s assistant said, “To suspend the new one”, I sighed. From what felt like heaven, Eddy showed up with a glass of vodka that he gave me.

“Thank you”, I told him, exhausted.

“I just got an email from the tech assistance”, Rich’s assistant added, “They say Twitter will still have the accounts’ information, and it could be possible to trace the IP address and get a court order to find it and the responsible for it”

“Do it!”, Janine and Rich said at the same time, the first time I saw them agree on anything.

"Okay, I’m on the phone with Josh and his team", Richard explained to me with a very intense look.

"My lawyers", I told Harry and the others, quickly.

"They're doing what they can about twitter and the release, but he says it is very important that you make a list of everything”, he enunciated the word very sharply, "E-very-thing that is on your phone that could put you in trouble. We need to be one step ahead on this"

"For now they seem to be focusing on the pictures since it's what attracts more attention", Janine said.

"Jenny", Richard called me again, "Think, long and hard, what is on that phone?!"

And so I did. I looked at my hand, pretending the phone was in it, I pretended to unlock the screen and look at my wallpaper - a picture of Vodka playing in the water in Brazil. If swiped to the left I could see my music player, calendar and to-do list.

"My to-do list and calendar have the dates for the end of filming for Wild & Free", I said.

"Not good, but not terrible", Rich said. "What else?"

"Assuming they managed to hack my password and are seeing the phone like I saw it, they would have access to my bank apps-"

"Already called the banks and told them to block any financial movimentation untill further notice", Monica said.

"Text messages, galery, clearly, they'll see my wishlist on Etsy, that'll be embarassing... They could post or delete my Instagram and twitter accounts-"

"Blocked those too", Monica added.

"Email accounts-"

"Mon?", Rich called.

"On it", she said. "Already changed the password for Gmail, Google Drive, Docs-"

"Yes, but if they had the phone they wouldn't need a password”, I said.

"If they have an USB cord they could just connect the phone to a computer and access the files in it remotely, they wouldn't even need to hack the password", Janine's assistant said.

I closed my eyes in frustration.
"I deleted every file on your inbox that could lead to a law suit", Monica went on, trying to keep it positive.

"What on your inbox could lead to a law suit?", Thomas asked.

“If they have access to my PDF files, they’ll have my scripts for Wild & Free, the Sidney Sheldon movie I have an audition for in a week…”

“That one hasn’t even been announced yet”, Richard complained.

"Which would mean the public would know how the movie is going to be before the studio even announces they're making it, it could mean millions of dollars in marketing wasted and a disinterest for the movie once it comes out", I explained. And then I remembered the part I had been trying to pretend wasn’t so bad. “That’s not all”, I told Richard.

“Tell me you did not have the script for Winter Soldier on your phone”, he said.

“I was studying my lines, Richard, that’s what I do!”. Richard got up from his chair and started calling someone.

“… I can’t even begin to explain the damage! If people see the script for Wild & Free the ticket sales will drop by the time it’s released!”, he shouted as he waited for someone to pick up, "But, God, Marvel. Marvel is the worst! They have tons and tons of clauses in their contracts about security breaches, spoilers and God, if the script gets released and it’s our fault- Hello, this is Artchet for Whedon. I’m a rep of Jen Silva. We have a crisis that may or may not by coming in and I need to alert him about- Yes, I realize he's busy man, tell him he'll want to hear this from us”

“I got the back up file of your contacts and already alerted them to be wary of any calls from your old number, I explained the situation and said we’re forwarding your new number as soon as possible”, Monica said.

“Whedon is comprehensive and sympathetic of your situation”, Rich said, getting off the phone, “I apologized in your name and all, but he says he can’t control the legal department. He says, however, he’ll vouch for you if it comes to it… I mean”, he shrugged, sighing, sitting in the couch.

“I’m gonna be fired”, I said.

“You don’t know that”, Monica said.

"I'm gonna be so fired", I went on. "No one is gonna hire me anymore"

“Maybe they won’t even release it!”, Rich’s assistant added.

"Yes, Marvel sends these things with criptic tittles and the character's names in initials, maybe even if they find it they won't know what it's about", Monica added.

“Can things get any worse?”, I wondered.

Spoiler alert: they could.

Things were already bad at this point, what happened next was the epitome of it. Whoever had my phone managed to get his/hers hands on my text message history which I’m assuming was pretty boring, until they found the text Tay and I had sent Sel at dinner. With that, twitter, tumblr and the media had a full day now knowing that Justin Bieber was on cocaine, and he and Selena Gomez were not only back together, but her best friends detested him. And it was all my fault.
That was when Harry gently grabbed my hand and pulled me to the terrace.

"Jen", he started.

I felt the summer breeze in my face and tried not to throw up. "Oh, God, Harry. I'm done. So done. My career is over. I'm damaging your image too. Marvel is gonna sue me so bad my grandkids are gonna need lawyers"

"Jen?", he called again.

"I wonder if I could go back to college", I pondered. "I mean, I could, right? I'll move back to Brazil. Bury myself in some really small town until people forget who I am. Shouldn't take long"

"Jennifer", he said, shaking me by the shoulders. "I know things are terrible right now, but I need to know if there's anything in your phone that could lead anyone to believe our relationship is fake"

"Oh, God, there's that too... Oh, my God!" I hanged onto the glass handrail looking over the city trying to keep on breathing.

"Think, Jen, did you say anything to anyone?"

"Of course not!", I said. "I only talk about this with you! And you're saved in my contacts as 'Mr. P', for Mr. Prince, so I don't think they could know..."

Harry picked his phone to look at our text log, and I remembered the other detail I only had in my life because of him

"There's tumblr, though"

He looked up, looking concerned. "What about it?"

"I have the app on my phone", I said, slowly, not believing the stupidity in my own words. "I have an account"

"Okay?"

"I follow a lot of royal blogs-", he rolled his eyes in desperation, "I needed to keep up with how people saw us to control the PR stunt!"

"And now this is what's gonna end us!", he said.

"I mean, I don't reblog anything", I said. "I just like stuff... But oh, God, if they can figure that out they'll paint me to be some royal social climber who's been stalking you, won't they?!"

Harry didn't answer, and my heart remained on beating on my throat in a bad way.

By the time Mr. Lane-Fox, or as I was now calling him – at least in my mind- Mr. Lame-Fucks, arrived in Harry’s penthouse that’s where we stood. Harry was mad. Richard wanted to kill someone. Janine was ready to cut a bitch. Monica was on game mode. Thom, Nathan, Clark and Eddy were around the room helping however they could. I hated myself. The only being in the penthouse that seemed to be on a good mood was Vodka, locked on Harry’s room, playing the day away.

So, of course, after the texts, and after Lame-Fucks, I was pretty sure that was it. 'That’s what rock bottom looks like', I kept thinking. And despite Monica’s optimism and Richard’s reassuring sarcasm directed at LF, and the glass after glass of Vodka Eddy kept bringing me, I still wanted to
jump from the terrace.

And then, surprise, surprise, things. Got. Worse.

Tyler hadn’t really answered my texts since he told me he was leaving the show to try and forget me, and therefore my phone – that was programmed to delete old texts to make room for new ones – didn’t see the need to delete the old texts. This meant the few last exchanges between us included jewels such as:

‘I don’t regret what I said last night, though. I never will. I love you.’, from him, and:

‘I hope you know how much you mean to me’, ‘I hope we can still be friends’, ‘I’m not ready to say goodbye to the show… and to us’, ‘Are you mad at me?’, ‘Tyler?’, from me from the process of the morning after, through his decision to leave the show, to complete silent treatment until the day of my birthday in April: ‘I’m sorry I hurt you. I really am. I miss you’.

The moment these texts were leaked I knew I was screwed in every possible level. Lame-Fucks looked at me with that ‘I’m-right-you’re-wrong’ face; Richard, Janine and Monica immediately assumed the texts were also being taken out of context, and looked at me waiting for an explanation.

“We slept together”, I told them, after not being able to ignore their looks anymore. They looked at Harry, who thankfully remembered to act uncomfortable and a little jealous. “Harry knows, it was before we knew each other. Alessa, Tay and Sel know too. And my therapist. But that’s it, unless Tyler told someone”. I heard LF’s victorious sigh nearby.

“Okay, let’s move on”, Janine said.

“You slept with him?!”, Rich asked.

“Yes”

“Tyler Alvin?”

“Yes”

“Your co-star on Mediator and on Broadway last year?”, he went on.

“Yes”

“Is this why he punched David the night the news broke that he was cheating on you?”, Monica asked, more curious than judgmental, unlike Richard.

“No, it happened after I came back from Brazil and we had started shooting season 6”

“The Tyler Alvin?”

“Richard! Drop it!”, I said. “Yes. We slept together. It was one night!”

Janine sighed. “People will think that’s why the show ended”, she said.

“It is”, I said.

“It is what?”, Janine asked.

I looked around the room, uncomfortable. “This is why the show ended”, I said. She looked at
me, jaw dropped. “He said he was in love with me, I said I wasn’t ready for another relationship, he said he needed space to get over me so he quit. And I had to quit because the show would suck without him and I knew it”

"Oh, my God", Monica said, with a bit of a smile on her face, "this is like a telenovela"

“Oh, you’re gonna have to make a statement”, Janine said. “The fans will demand to know if this is why they lost their favorite show”

“Oh, God, the fans”, Monica said. “They’re going to lose their minds! They’ve been shipping the two of you off-screen since the pilot!”

"I mean, have you read the internet?", Janine's assistant asked, also smiling. "A lot of them think there's a conspiracy theory to hide the relationship, they actually believe you guys have been dating for the longest time, or at least are in love with each other"

"It's been one of the biggest reasons for the disagreement in the fandom, the ones who believe you're in love in real life and the one's who think they're crazy", Monica said.

“I can’t say anything without talking to Tyler first”, I said.

“Then do it”, Janine threw me her phone. “And do it fast”

And just like that the sun was going down as I sat on the white leather couch in Harry’s terrace, having just talked to Tyler Alvin about the big elephant in our relationship’s room.

Tyler had been very polite and supportive about it, he knew it wasn’t my fault and even apologized for not having dealt with his feelings in the most mature of ways. He told me, however, he was seeing someone. Someone not from the industry, and he had told her he had been in love with someone right before they met, but he hadn’t told her who it was, so now he would have to, or she would hear from someone else.

"I'm sorry", I said. "But I'm happy to know you're happy"

“How did Harry take it?”, he asked.

“You know… Well, I guess. He knew, so it wasn’t that much of a surprise”

“You told him?”, he asked, surprised, after a while. “Wow. You guys must be serious”

After that he agreed on releasing whatever explanation I wanted to, even going as far as to propose taking the blame. I told him I was gonna think about it and we said goodbye. Sadly, that was the warmest conversation we had had since we slept together. As I sat there, all I kept thinking was there was no way my career was going to survive this. Not if Justin’s beliebers decided to come at me. Not if Taylor and Selena couldn’t forgive me for spilling such secrets. Not if the Mediator’s fandom couldn’t forgive me for ruining it for everyone.

I looked around, the sky slowly falling from sunset orange to light blue night. I hadn’t noticed, but I had been circulating my indicator inside the bracelet Harry had given me. I took one long look at the H for Hermès, and decided to at least go down having the last word. So I took a deep breath and got up, and finally, got into game mode.

“Release a statement”, I told Janine, going back into the apartment. “I am disgusted at the invasion of privacy I suffered today by whoever it was that stole my phone and at the media that decided to profit from it. I refuse to apologize to anyone but the friends that had their personal lives directly
invaded by this, and especially not about the first picture release, the "nude", use quotation marks, considering I have shared more of my body on red carpets before and I refuse to be shamed for something as simply and banal as my skin. Make sure you put that line in", Janine didn’t answer, and I didn’t allow her time to, she was only typing what I said as fast as she could. “And say…” I took a deep breath, thinking. “Say Tyler Alvin is, always has been and always will be one of the best men and best friends I’ve ever met. We were briefly involved in the past, which has nothing to do with any decision we made later on in life. He and I share a deep love for the stories we got to tell together, both on television and on Broadway, and an ever deeper love for the fans that have supported us over the years. Every decision we’ve ever made had primarily our friendship’s and our fan base’s best interest at heart, in this order”, I sighed. “And then say whatever you can about the legal department and how we’re gonna sue whoever we can about this”.

Overcome with resolution over finally having something to say about things, I turned around, looking for LF, and headed to Harry’s room. He was there, and they were talking about something very enthusiastically when I opened the door without knocking.

“Jen”, Harry said, pausing the conversation for a second, and I heard the sadness and exhaustion in his voice almost as intense as I could hear it in my own. And as I stood there for a few seconds thinking, what I was thinking was so very clear in my mind:

Maybe he’s mad at me, and maybe much like it happened with Tyler, today was the last stroke for our friendship like it was before, and maybe he won’t be able to see past this, and maybe he’ll never like me the way I like him, probably because the exposure is something he was born to, but detested, and it was something I choose as a job, and maybe that’s something he can never understand. And maybe Edward was right, and it was better that he didn’t, because our life styles would never really… match. But as I stood there, not saying a word, looking more inside than anywhere else really, and Edward just decided I was probably not going to say anything and returned to his conversation with Harry, who kept looking at me nonetheless, I remembered our 4th of July.

And the way the fireworks reflected in his blue eyes as we cuddled on the grass; and how he remembered twelve out of sixteen of my favorite songs; and how he remembered the dance I taught him in Brazil; and how he looked at me right before he tried to kiss me at the end of our dance to Gone, Gone, Gone; and how he wanted to know if I’d give everything up for love if it came to it; and how sad he looked when I said no; and how sad I felt when I said no; and it was clear to me he could never like me, and we could never be together, but Edward Lame-Fucks was right. We had started this aiming the media exposure so we could get over the things that were weighing too much at the time, but Harry deserved to be shielded from the wreckage that came with dating me for too long. I couldn’t have his image affected this much, not when it was so clear that at some point he would have to go back to his life without me.

“All I’m saying is”, Edward was telling him after I didn’t say anything. “You moved here saying it would only be for one season or two, so Davy would have a chance at getting her life back. And that was very noble. But that time has gone and she moved now, she officially moved to Johannesburg last month and it doesn’t seem like she’s planning to come back”, Harry finally took his eyes from, and looked at him, “So. Are you ready to come back now?” Harry looked at me quickly, he put one hand in his pocket and scratched his cheek with the other.

Say no, my heart begged. Please say no. It’s too soon. Please don’t leave me yet. Please, please don’t. I’m not ready.

“No”, he said. “I’m planning a benefit concert for Halo, I can’t leave without doing something big enough so I can be able to say I actually made a difference here”
“Okay. But the Duchess of Cambridge is due on the 20th and we will need you there when your nephew or niece is born to highlight the importance of family and country to you, so people know you’re not planning on staying here forever”

“And I told you, I’ll be there. I already informed Halo I’m gonna need to use a couple of weeks or three”

“Good, because, Harry, this is serious. We have republican leaders saying the Queen’s grandson is a supporter of the American political system, and the consequences can be catastrophic. We need to rebuild your image and do some damage control over all of this”, he pointed at me, blatantly.

“How can I help?”, I asked. Edward looked at me as if only now remembering I was there. “You said something earlier, about how you’re always left having to clean up one bigger mess than the last one, well, I want to help”, his eyes narrowed as he looked at me. Harry seemed confused.

“What did you tell her?”

“You read my file”, I went on, systematically ignoring Harry, and focusing on his private secretary. “You know I’ve done charity work since I was sixteen. And created my own philanthropic organization in Brazil, so let me help you. I can be useful. What can I do to make sure the mess you’ll eventually have to clean up is as little as possible? What can I do so that when that closet opens up I’m the only one going down?”. Edward took a long deep breath.

“I’m assuming your crisis over there is anything but done”, he said. “If you know the mess is inevitable and all I said was true, why would waste your time doing this?”, I took a deep breath, and looked at Harry, still confused in the back, and prayed he would see this as me being fateful to my role as his fake-girlfriend. I looked back at Edward, and refused to take my eyes from him after my next line.

“Because I’m in love with him”, I said, feeling in my soul that there was nothing fake about those words. Edward then did something more terrifying than all the sarcastic, passive aggressive rudeness he had been directing at me since he arrived.

He smiled.

“Will anyone tell me what all of this is about?”, Harry asked.

“It's pretty simple, really”, Edward said, still looking at me. “Your girlfriend is coming to England"
That Time Harry Almost Said He Loved Me* But We Decided To Break Up Instead

*which I didn't find out until at least two weeks after that, but first things first:

My first time at Comic Con had been when I was fresh into High School, as a fan, dressed up as Wonder Woman with Alessa – tradition we repeated every year up until our final edition before we left the West Coast for college. After that, of course, I was on The Mediator so the Comic Con experience took a new turn. I started attending every year to be on our panel, I gave about ten interviews per day, did signings and attended parties and basically sleep walked my way back to the hotel every year and every year it was just as magical as that first one.

Comic Con was home to me, from the early hotel breakfast to running into other actors you don’t usually get to see, up until taking in forty minutes of enthusiastic questions and love declarations from the people that had been waiting in line the entire previous night to see us – people, kids whose lives we had touched without even realizing it. Teenagers in black skirts and flats, outfit my character Suze wore to school, or black leggings and boots with a tool belt, outfit she wore to break into houses to save the day from the new psychopathic ghost in town. And that was just my character’s cosplays. Add to that all the white outfits and black eyeliner that Tyler’s character, Jesse, wore, or the ultra-blonde wigs representing Suze’s bestfriend who was albino, or all the priest costumes (they went to a catholic school and the dean who was a priest was also a Mediator, very close friends with Suze). It was my own version of a crazy adorable family and each edition was sweeter than the last one.

This year it was both different and nerve-wracking. The show had already ended, our series finale had aired the previous month, so this was our last panel as The Mediator cast and I was scared out of my mind the fandom would be mad and demanding answers about the whole Jenler (Jen+Tyler) affair. Truth is Tyler was the one who should be worried since it appeared they were blaming him for the end of the show (which was indeed a fair assumption if we’re being honest). There was a number of people who thought, of course, I was the slut who ruined the show after sleeping with her love interest, just like I did in Broadway with David, but at least from my point of view it seemed they weren’t the majority.

I knew this, of course, because with my secret tumblr account I could both keep an eye on the royal world I was undeniably a part of, and in my own fandom (insert here the fear I felt when my phone was stolen that people would find out about my tumblr and think I was some sort of royal stalker).

And talking about the royal world, that was another side of the coin that made me even more afraid of Comic Con this year: Harry. I was afraid someone would talk about him or ask about him and in every single panel I attended (three for Comic Con, plus one more for Nerd HQ for charity) every time they opened for questions I held my breath expecting them to bring up Harry until someone ended up asked something nice like ‘how do you feel about portraying one of the most real and strong female leads on television right now?’ Turns out I had no reason to fear because, apparently, my fans are awesome.

On the first panel (for Game of Thrones, the first and last panel I would do with them since my character only lasted one season), I got a couple of questions about the British accent and my favorite part of shooting in Britain (‘the place is just really beautiful, it didn’t even felt like working, you know?’), and on the Marvel panel I just got to talk a little bit about how my character had grown to be more than she had been imagined for (and also got teased when someone in the audience brought up the picture of me as a 14 year-old dressed as Wonder Woman, character from
the DC Comics, not Marvel. ‘Traitor!’, branded jokingly Robert Downey Jr).

On the Mediator panel, it was emotions, emotions, emotions from the very first second. We got there early, we did one last photoshoot as a cast, I found out Claire and Jacob, two of our castmates, were dating, walked on stage to the incessant screaming of our fandom and finally, as usual, sat beside Tyler on the panel table to answer some fan questions and talk about our series finale. This one girl who was dressed as my character waited in line just to tell us she hoped we were feeling okay and that she was sorry in the name of the fandom for how terrible the previous week had been for us – me and Tyler – and that she hoped we knew we were loved and supported whatever we decided to do next in our careers. As if my emotions at this point weren’t bad enough. Obviously, I cried. We talked about the finale, answered questions, joked around, and, at the end, screened two videos. An up-beat one to Pink’s Good Old Days, of our funniest behind-the-scenes moments since season one and one about our last day of shooting. Shortly after wrapping up our very last scene, it had taken me about ten minutes to get up from lying on the floor where I had been shooting the scene – it was my death scene - because I was crying so much I couldn’t move.

I cried again watching it, remembering the day and the scene that took so long to shoot because I just wasn’t ready to say goodbye to Susannah Simon, because I wasn’t ready to say goodbye to whom I had been for the past seven years. I remembered the terrifying feeling that someone I loved very deeply was dying in my arms when I heard the director say ‘cut, that’s a wrap on The Mediator, give Jenifer a round of applause’. Then, the sound of our crew clapping, and I couldn’t make the tears stop rolling. And I couldn’t take my hands from my eyes because I didn’t want anyone to see it. When I didn’t sat back up to get back on my feet, when I didn’t look around to see our production assistants bringing in a cake, Monica went to check if I was okay. I nodded yes but didn’t get up. ‘I just need a minute’, I said.

The applause died. In the video, a sad melodic acoustic version of our theme song started playing as everyone on set on the day realized I wasn’t okay (the same song they played when my character had died in our series finale). Tyler, still on his mark from shooting the same scene with me came to where I was and held my arms, bringing me up and making me sit. He had tears on his face, although he wasn’t crying as much as I was, and he sat down in front of me and hugged me and we just stood there for almost ten minutes, everyone else silent, just the sad song and my crying noises being hearable.

‘I just don’t know what I’m gonna be without her’, I told Tyler in the video, hiding my face in his neck although I still had a mike on me, so everyone watching could hear it. I didn’t have to watch the video to remember his answer.

‘You’re gonna be fine’, he had said, ‘Jen, you’re gonna be amazing’

Sitting beside me at Comic Con, as the video came to its near end with clips from our audition tapes back before season one, Tyler heard my crying and wrapped his arm around my shoulders, bringing me closer in a hug. When the video ended and the lights went back on, letting us see almost the entire Hall H crying, the fans saw us and cheered. Sitting by his other side, Claire hugged Tyler.

“Well, that’s a group hug if I’ve ever seen one”, Matt said, from beside her, and got up to his feet to come and join in. Soon enough, Tyler, Claire and I were the only ones actually sitting and Hall H was both in tears and screaming their little hearts out as the whole cast got up and came to join us in a group hug.

The whole thing made me laugh and feel loved, which was good, because on that note, it was time to leave and I had to say goodbye to my good friend Susannah and to everything that I was and that
I had been up until that point that I was still holding on to.

Holding my Comic Con name tag (I had a collection of all the ones from previous panels we did since season one) and my – new - cellphone, filming the last cheers of Hall H, I bowed down with the rest of my friends, thanking our fans, and said goodbye to Susannah Simon remembering Edward’s words from 5th of July:

‘This isn’t your typical tabloid research, this is a monarchy you’re dealing with. We have contacts. We managed to gather a lot of information from when you were… young… You know what I’m talking about, I’m sure. All the information those people have spent a whole lot of money and time trying to keep locked into your closet along with all of your other skeletons so you could still pose as the one child star that didn’t go the same way as the others… Hm… I guess that’s not working out very well’

Having a pretty good idea what could be on the file Harry’s private secretary had on me, I walked out of Hall H that day, knowing I had to leave Susannah behind. But I knew it was more than that, I knew I had to leave a lot of me behind too. I had to leave who I was before Susannah saved me, and I had to leave behind who I had been as I was Susannah and I was trying to escape things. As I walked away from Suze, I decided to walk away from Suze-booze as well, and from all the mistakes I had made.

‘I need to be better’, I thought, immediately knowing also why I felt like I had something to prove, and it was not only because I was dating royalty… but because I was in love with royalty. And every time I remembered why I had something to prove, I remembered why it could never work. But as I closed another chapter in my life, knowing the chapter about Harry was itself closer and closer to being closed, I knew I had to do it not only for him, but for me.

Another thing happened in July that made me happy enough to forget the biggest crisis in my career: I was going to be an aunt! Livia was almost two months pregnant when she and my brother Lucas told me over Skype they had made a honey moon baby! I was still on Skype with them when I started shopping online for baby stuff. If I had any say on the matter, I knew this kid was going to be spoiled. The fact I was gonna be an aunt alone made everything else almost easy to deal with.

Then, of course, that was before I got into the plane to London.

I hadn’t expected things to be so crazy. Not just in my life, and they were pretty crazy in my life, but things were especially crazy in the entire country there with the birth of baby-prince George and his adorableness, and when I showed up, the big question seemed to be if I’d come to see him or go to the Christening.

In my life, by then things were still crazy with the belieber hate and the royal hate and just all the other plain hate that had made all the death threats on twitter seem alarmingly worrying. They were the kind of crazy that made Richard and Janine start to annoy me to get a bodyguard for ‘crowd control’. I hated the idea for a couple of reason, mainly because I didn’t see myself as the kind of public person that needed a body guard.

“You’re growing as a celebrity”, Janine told me. “This is good news!”

“You’re telling me I need some guy to walk up and down the street with me because of twitter death threats, paparazzi and general public harassment. How is that good news?”

“It means you’re more famous now”, Richard intervened. “Getting recognized more often. People who don’t even watch the show may wanna come and ask for a self. Paparazzi will do anything for a picture because you’re worth a lot”
“Beyoncé needs a body guard”, I told them. “Taylor has a body guard. Are you trying to tell me I’m as famous as Beyoncé and Taylor Swift right now?”

“Harry has body guards”, Monica reminded me.

“If four people died Harry would be the head of state of sixteen countries, of course he has body guards! Doesn’t mean I should get one!”

As it turns out, that was a battle I lost. Comic Con was particularly crazy and even just driving around LA for auditions proved harder than usual, so upon planning the trip to England, I said yes to hiring a body guard for a trial period.

The good news was that since Harry’s family had their own security detail on Britain, he didn’t need to take Eddy with him from Manhattan, which meant Eddy was available to work for me. I liked that arrangement because I already knew and liked him and turns out it was fun having someone around to talk to all the time and not having to worry if this will be the day the paparazzi blind me so much I’ll trip in my heels.

So although the original thought on my trip to London – that, need I say it? Harry was very unpleased about – was for me to keep a low profile or be seen in charity to work to improve Harry’s image, Janine had decided that it’d be a good idea to take a ride on the publicity boost that I was having, so she scheduled a bunch of things for me to do there. Giving priority to Edward’s plan so he’d be less of a jerk, the first thing I did was an event with The Mia Foundation, the organization I was representing when Harry and I met the previous year.

I visited the MF’s offices on my second day in town, attended an adoption fair they promoted in Hyde Park and did some press about them in the day (I even took Vodka with me to play with the fresh rehabilitated puppies up for adoption, and one of the directors let it slip for the press she had been rescued by them and had been a present from my, ahem, boyfriend, which made news pretty fast).

The fair was a hit, the organization got a lot of press, a bunch of fans came to see me, and at the end of the day some Scotland Yard officers had to come and help Eddy shield me from the turmoil, but the important thing was that I was in a bunch of pictures with kids and puppies saved from death by an organization I had history with, which is what Edward LF wanted.

On the next day, one of my careers biggest achievements came to life: my first cover for Vogue! Granted, it was Vogue UK and it was only for October, since the September issue was a whole big deal and it was gonna have Jennifer Lawrence in the cover. But it was still a huge deal for me, which didn’t save me from Edward, who came to bitch about it the very next day.

“What do you think you’re doing?!”, I heard his heavily accented voice come into the room, he had smoke practically coming out of his ears, as he barged into Richard’s apartment in Knightsbridge, where I was staying. “Do you have any idea how difficult it is to make you look good right now?! Or did you forget the nude photograph?! And the sleeping with your co-star scandal?! And telling the world Justin Bieber is on cocaine?! And as if the announcement you’ll be walking down a catwalk half-naked come November hadn’t been bad enough, now you put a neon sign over your head to make sure all of Britain knows you’re here?!”

“Oh, calm down. It was just a photo-shoot, Edward, it’s my job”, I told him. “And wasn’t the whole point of me coming to England having people see me?”

“Good you! Proving Harry is not all about New York now. That he understands England is his real job. Not this”, he threw me a newspaper. On the cover there was a picture of me in a big haute-
couture dress in the middle of a bridge with the Thames and the Parliament on the back and the caption: ‘Jen Silva closes Westminster Bridge’. “You know what you’ve done with that? You’ve told them ‘you know what is also all about me? Your country!’”

“Okay, first of all, Edward, take a chill pill”, I could see it in his face how much he wanted to yell at me to call him sir. “Second of all, it was Vogue UK, my first cover of Vogue, thank you very much. Not that you’d know what a big deal that is, but they had all the right permits to close the bridge… partially! They partially closed the bridge. Third, how can haute couture possibly be bad press? I did the puppy adoption fair with The Mia Foundation, with the amount of commotion it generated I thought that went well…”

“The fair was great”, he said, unfolding another newspaper. “Great press. Of course we could have done without people finding out your dog was a present from Harry who got her from The Mia Foundation”

“I had already talked about getting Vodka from TMF, so I thought it was okay if their rep talked about it to boost the case. I just forgot to tell them to not mention Harry. That one’s on me-“

“Wanna know what’s also on you?”, I didn’t. But, of course, he told me. “The fact that now that you closed half an important bridge for a fashion photo-shoot, all of the press for TMF will be buried under all of the new press that’ll come up about Prince Harry’s girlfriend taking London by storm and being the center of attention all the time!”

“My whole job is being the center of attention”

“Trust me, I know!”, he shouted, “Have you even seen Harry since you got here?”

“Of course I did”, I said, defensive. Oh yes, we had a fake-date-night on my first night in the city, a very awkward night watching a musical in the West End, and talking about the concert he was planning and how I was taking it, the show being over. Always making sure I sat in a different couch or very consciously trying not to touch him. “On the first day. We had dinner… But, you know, he’s busy. He’s on conference calls every day about the benefit concert for Halo. Also, you know, catching up with his friends and his brother and getting to know his nephew. I wouldn’t wanna intrude”

“Right. Of course you wouldn’t…”, he sighed. “Even though The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge have gone to Bucklebury with the baby and, maybe, you haven’t seen him as much because you and I both know you wouldn’t exactly fit in with his friends, now, would you? Did he even invite you to go meet his friends?”

“Oh, go f-“, I took a deep breath, “fly a kite, Edward. Honestly, I know you think I don’t get any of this royal thing, but in that case, you don’t get my job either. It’s not just a nine-to-five job for me, I can’t just turn things down while I’m sitting here waiting for you to tell me what to do to make Harry look better!”

“…Excuse me”, Monica said, walking in, awkwardly. “Jen, the hair and make-up crew are on the phone, they want to know what time we need them tonight”. Edward looked at me, putting his hands on his hips.

“Why do you need hair and makeup?”

“… I have a taping of TV interview”

“No”, I said, rolling my eyes, “…The Graham Norton Show”, he buffed.

“Not as bad, then”

“…Chatty Man was last night”

“Good Lord, Silva!”

“It’s about the show ending! And what I’m up to next… You know, Wild & Free, and the Victoria’s Secret Fashion Show! Did you know we were nominated for an Emmy? And that by us I mean me? First time ever, thank you very much. And I’m not gonna talk about Harry in the interviews!”

“You better not!”

“Plus Graham Norton is just a taping. It’s gonna air in two months or something…”

“Could you at least try and talk about how much you love England or something? And the Mia foundation?”

“Of course!”, I said, “I was intending to, anyways. I did it last night at Alan Carr”

“Good. So go ahead and do it. Finish your work today because tomorrow you and Harry are getting on a G6 to Scotland”

“Whaa-Why would we-?”

“Because it’s summer and that’s where Her Majesty, The Queen spends her summers… Her Majesty has invited you two for a weekend there, since she misses her grandson and fears she might not be able to see him before he leaves the country”

“Oh”, I said. I processed what he told me. “I’m gonna meet the Queen”

“Of course, the Prince of Wales will be joining you, with the duchess of Cornwall and the Philips”

“Cool”, I said. “Who are they?”

“That’d be Harry’s father, step mother and cousins”, Monica whispered by my side.

“Great. That’s just… great”

“Bye now”, Edward said, abruptly, turning around to leave.

“…Edward, wait”. He stopped midway and turned back, looking annoyed to have to spend any extra second with me. “Do they know?”, I asked him. He looked confused. “I’m assuming it’s important for you, for Harry’s image, I make a good impression? I need to know what I’m in for”

“What are you asking?”

“What do they know about me? What was on the file?”. He gave Monica a weird look.

“It’s fine. She knows all there is to know about me”. Edward thought about it for a while, before walking back into the room and sitting down on the couch to a long sigh.

“We have all the boring stuff, you know… School reports, grades, creepy art projects… And then we have the registration form from the, uh, spa”, he made quotation marks with his fingers over the
word spa. “…You and your mother went to when you were fourteen. And the Social Services report from Michigan from when you were fifteen, along with all of the doctor diagnoses and exams-“

“That is confidential information!”, Monica interrupted, as my eyes were closed and I felt my heart heavy. “Doctor-patient, and she was a minor!”

“We have contacts”, he said, simply. “And money”

“Go on”, I asked.

“We have your college application essay, I personally found it very touching… a piece on body image, sense of identity and the high expectations the industry bestowed on you since so early on-“

“Dear God, Edward, just go to the important parts”, I said. He sighed, looking me in the eyes.

“We have surveillance footage from 77th street on Queens”. Oh God, I thought. Why? Why this? Buy my side, I saw Monica’s jaw drop as she started to pace around the room. “Records show you around an increasingly amount of times between New Year’s 2008 until April, before disappearing completely. Disturbance reports from the neighbors. We have the pictures the nurses took in the hospital in case, you know… They do it in case victims decide to come back to press charges, I guess.”

“That is absurd, we could sue people over this-“, Monica said. I gave her one look and she stopped talking.

“We have the LAPD police reports from the next couple of years, registrations of donations made… Your mug shot.”

I sat down, resting my head on my hands. “And they know all of this?”, I asked.

“They’ve been shown the most important parts. Debriefed on the overall look of things. It’s already more than what Harry knows, I presume”, I sighed, not saying anything. I could still feel his eyes on me a couple of minutes later when he finally stood up to leave. “You should tell him”, I laughed, humorless, getting my head up.

“Yeah, I should. Definitely. I should tell my boyfriend, whose whole life spins around keeping a good image so he doesn’t embarrass his family, who happens to rule sixteen freaking countries, about my time in jail and the real reason I left college and how much of a Hollywood cliché I really am. Great idea, Edward. You know what? I have an idea!”, I started shouting, “Why don’t we tell him together?! This way you can be there to tell him how wrong he was and how right you were right after he breaks up with me!”. I stood up, breathing heavily.

“He’s gonna hear about it, Ms. Silva”, he said. “It’s just a matter of who tells him first”

“Then why haven’t you?”, I asked. “God knows it’d have spared you a lot of work”

“Unlike what you seem to think I have no interest in ruining his happiness”, he told me, buttoning his blazer and turning to the door. “Besides, he has said he doesn’t want to know what anything you haven’t told him yourself… And you should tell him. He’s more understanding than you give him credit for… Especially because he’s been in his fair share of problems himself.”

Edward left, but his words remained with me throughout that day and even during my interview with Graham Norton, where when Graham turned around to get something he ‘wanted me to explain’, my heart almost stopped and I could swear it was going to be my mug shot before he
turned back and showed me the action figures they had made of Susannah for The Mediator, making me laugh.

But the words that stayed the longest in my mind weren’t just the ones about my file, but the ones about Harry.

…Maybe, you haven’t seen him as much because you and I both know you wouldn’t exactly fit in with his friends, now, would you? Did he even invite you to go see his friends?

…he hadn’t. So I don’t know what came onto me when got out of the studio where they taped Graham Norton, pretending I was paying attention to whatever it was Eddy was talking about, and get into the cab telling the driver that, instead of heading back to Knightsbridge, we were going someplace else. Where?, he asked. Eddy looked at me. I didn’t know. I had no idea.

I knew Harry and I had to become just friends. I knew there was no other possible outcome. And I knew now how Tyler felt when he had to quit to get over me, because, if after all the time I spent in Arkansas far away from Harry I still hadn’t been able to let him go, I knew we had to break up. I knew we had to break up so I could move on from him and from what I felt and I knew I had to let him know. Because as long as kept thinking about it, I’d find a million reasons why I shouldn’t tell him. But the moment I did, it’d become a plan. I don’t mess with plans. Harry and I had to break up.

When I was thinking of telling the cab driver to take us to Kensington Palace, or to call Harry and ask him to come and see me, as if it was a sign from God, he texted me.


Maybe I should just tell him how I feel. Maybe I should just ask him out. Maybe I should just take him somewhere where nobody could see us and kiss him and let him know I did it because I wanted to.

Maybe I could just answer the text.

‘Where are you?’, I asked.

‘7-12 Sloane Square’, he replied. ‘Why?’

I gave the driver the address, Eddy said I should call Monica to let her know we’d be late. Monica, who was on a date with Thomas that night, probably didn’t even remember my name at that point, which is what I told Eddy.

We drove around London’s narrow streets and low buildings and soon enough the driver pulled up in front of some pretty simple street. I had no idea where we were, but judging by the paparazzi outside, I could tell that’s where Harry was.

Eddy walked out first as I paid the driver to talk to the person at the door, probably saying ‘I have Jenifer Silva here, Prince Harry’s girlfriend. Can she come in?’. Soon enough he came back and opened the door for me, the paparazzi finally realizing I was there. I was so glad to have him guide me through the flashes to the door, especially because I was wearing particularly high needle heels.

Inside, the hostess pointed me to the stairs that led to an underground low roofed dark bar/restaurant/club with a big white ceramic statue of Mary in one of the walls and some colorful hammocks around. I had just enough time to try and shut out the voices of people recognizing me before realizing Harry was in the bar… with her.
I don’t know what my plan was when I started walking in their direction. Maybe I just couldn’t stand in front of the stairs trying to pretend people weren’t looking at me any longer. Maybe I was just wondering why he had texted me if he was with his ex and needed to know the answer to that question right away. Perhaps I just really needed to talk to him about breaking up, to make sense of it out loud to someone else so it could make sense in my heart as well. Whatever it was, I just did it. As soon as my eyes found them I put one foot in front of the other and made my way to them as if nothing else existed.

I couldn’t really hear the music, I couldn’t really hear what they were saying before they noticed me, but when they did I barely left them any time to react.

“Jen”, Harry said, when he looked up just as I came close. Although he looked surprised to see me (let’s face it, how surprised could he actually be considering he gave me the address?) he also had a very light smile at the very corner of his lips that didn’t go unnoticed.

‘Break up’, I thought. ‘We need to break up, it’s the right thing to do’. Maybe I could pretend I was outraged he came to see her. Maybe I could make up a whole scene in the bar. I could slap him and leave and let the paparazzi speculate about what happened. I could get on the first flight back to Manhattan, skip the trip to meet the Queen, and never see him again. ‘It’s the best for the plan, Harry!’, I would tell him afterwards. ‘It’s time we broke up!’. I could stay as far from him as possible. I could retreat to Los Angeles until he came back to London for good. People would assume we broke up. People would talk and talk about it. We’d get even more press. I could do it. I should do it.

Instead, when I reached them and saw his slightly awkward yet undeniably relieved smile, I sat down on his lap, wrapped my arms around his neck and kissed him. There was a couple of seconds in which he seemed surprised and confused, and then his hands found their way around me: one in my back, the other in the back of my thigh, pulling me closer and gripping me strongly, our tongues intertwined as if we were alone which, as I realized later, completely defied the whole purpose of our fake relationship. Trying to look like I didn’t know the last time we had kissed like that had been on my birthday in April, and like I hadn’t been waiting to do that again ever since, I put my acting mask on and shielded the shyness, breaking the kiss in a confident smile. My eyes, hands and heart never left him.

“Hi”, I said. He smiled, his eyes never leaving me. His hands neither. Unsure about the heart.

“Hi”, he answered. My mind started working on a plan.

“I’m sorry I’m late”, I said, perfectly aware his ex was still across the table, probably looking away awkwardly trying to look like she wasn’t eavesdropping. “The interview took longer than I thought”. He smiled larger.

“It happens”

“I met Paul McCartney today”, I told him, wide eyed.

“You didn’t”

“I did!”

“I don’t even know him”

“Well, I do now. I guess I’m just more famous than you”, I joked.

“I wouldn’t doubt it”, we laughed.
“So that’s my excuse. I was talking to him after the taping of the show, and then Katy Perry came to talk to us and I kind of lost track of time”

“Well, as far as excuses go, I guess I can forgive you. Considering it was Paul McCartney and Katy Perry”

“Good”, I smiled, stroking his hair behind his ear. Then, pretending I had just now noticed the blond across the table, I faked surprise. “Oh, my God, you have company. I’m so sorry!” She flicked her hair looking back at me. A second later, a smile.

“Jen, this is Chelsy”, Harry said, and I held out my hand. “This is Jen Silva, my girlfriend”

“Hi!”

“Hello”, she said.

“It’s nice to meet you, Chelsly”

“Chelsy”

“I’m sorry, Chelseen?”

“Chelsy”

“Oh, with an ie at the end?”

“A y”

“Oh. Tricky. But nice nickname. What does it stand for?”. Her smile was gone now.

“Chelsy”

“Oh”, I said. Harry coughed, hiding his face behind us so she wouldn’t see the smirk on his face.

“Jen’s an actress”, he said.

“So I gather”, she said, smiling again. “You have a TV show for kids, right? In America”. For kids?

“It’s a young adult book series adaptation, yes. We’ve won quite a few awards for it. Our last season just aired, actually, but we’re still nominated for a few Teen Choice Awards later this month and we also got an Emmy nomination for the first time. It’s kind of a big deal, they don’t usually nominate ‘kids’ shows”.

“So, you’re in London”, she said, changing the subject.

“Obviously”, I said, smiling. “And so are you. Don’t you live in Africa now?”

“Johannesburg”

“Right. So… what are you doing here?”

“I’ve lived here my whole life. I came to see some friends. Catch up. Much like Harry. What are you doing here?”

“I’m on business. A charity I represent needed help on something. I had some talk show taping
interviews… A Vogue cover to shoot. I’m shooting another one too actually, for Glamour Uk.”

“You are?”, Harry asked. “I didn’t know about that one”

“I am! Just heard we closed the deal a couple of hours ago we’ll shoot once we get back from Scotland”. I turned back to Chelsy. “Harry’s family invited me, we’re meeting them tomorrow for the weekend”

“Oh”, she said. “That’s… Early”

“Well,”, Harry interrupted, “we should get going… we have that… thing”, he looked at me.

“Yes, it’s our six months anniversary!”, I improvised. “And we have plans that do not include a night with Harry’s old friends.”

“If only I could get a waiter to get my check”

“Go to the counter and pay up, I’ll finish you’re drink for you. Is this vodka? You’ve been hanging out with me too much”, I stood up so he could go get the check. He did, looking at both of us. I sat back.

“Don’t worry, Chelsy will keep me company.”

“…Okay”, he said, and left as if he wasn’t sure it was a good decision to leave his current girlfriend alone with his old one.

“I know how you feel”, she said, after watching me for a while as I drank. “What you see in him. The partying and the jokes. He can be pretty fun and wild”, I lowered my glass. “It’s all a fun adventure until you have to start giving something up for him. It’s never fun to lose yourself”. I was confused.

“If all that you are is your career than I can see why the relationship didn’t last”, I said. “And there’s little to do with who he is”. She smiled.

“So you do know who I am. For a moment I thought you didn’t”

“Oh, I know who you are”, I told her, downing the last of Harry’s drink. “I just don’t care”. She laughed, seeming genuine.

“You know I was wondering what is it that he saw on you. I talked to some of our friends since I got here and they told me that when he called them he’d tell them about you, and he’d say you were this kind of force of nature, this… hurricane or something. I was sitting here trying to see that, but I don’t”, she must have seen some outrage on my face, because she hurried to explain what she meant. “I mean, it’s not that you’re some kind of superhuman. That’s just the way he sees you”. I looked from her to the bar counter, where Harry was. “I get it now… he loves you”, the words came out of her mouth without any bitterness or scheming. I could tell she meant it. And it hurt me so much more to know even his ex-fiancé genuinely thought he loved me. “Good luck with that”, she said, as Harry made his way back to us.

“Should we go?”, he asked.

“Yes”, I smiled, standing up. “It was nice meeting you”

“It was nice seeing you, Chels”, he said, extremely casually, looking at her for just about a second before holding me by my waist and guiding me to the doors, where we found Eddy with Nathan,
Clark and another protection officer I didn’t know. They called a cab, and we drove home.

We didn’t talk much on the way, considering Eddy was in the car with us (the others following in a car in the back), so my nerves were quite weird at that point. I kept thinking how awkwardly I had to keep myself away when we had had dinner two nights before, and how he was with his ex in a bar and hadn’t said anything about it before hand. Did he run into her? Did they plan on meeting? Was he gonna tell me? Why am I feeling like a jealous girlfriend when we’re supposed to be just friends?

I had to tell myself I shouldn’t feel weird, that there was nothing weird happening, at least not really. The only weird things were inside my head. But still, when I saw London Eye across the river by the car’s window, I had to go see it.

“Stop the car!” I said, as we were beside the Thames river, almost at the Big Ben. “Oh, I’ve always wanted to say that”, I added, leaving the car making Eddy hurry to follow me. Confused, Harry did the same and crossed the street in a hurry. On the car behind us, his POs jumped out and followed.

“Where are we going?”, Harry asked.

“Don’t you see this?”, I said, pointing at the lights across River Thames, illuminated not just by the ones in the iconic Ferris wheel, but by all the lights in the buildings behind it as well.

“London Eye?”, he asked. “Or the Aquarium?”

“The Ferris wheel”, I said.

“London Eye”, he corrected.

“Whatever”, I said, making him chuckle. “This is from Doctor Who”, he looked confused. “In the first episode of the new series, Rose, the Doctor and Rose stop right here thinking where the signal that was controlling the monster could be coming from. The Doctor says it had to be-“

“Big, metallic and round”, he remembered.

“Yes!”, I said. “And then he stood right here”, I walked to the wall separating the sidewalk from the river and turned to him, “and Rose had to make him see that the thing he was describing was right across the river”. He smiled at me.

“And they ran all the way across the bridge to the… lair of the evil monster thing. I remember”, he said. I turned to look at London Eye.

“And they smiled too”, I said. “How weird is it that this man, fresh out of a war that killed his entire species, and this girl, who just found out aliens exist and the world is about to be destroyed, as they run against time to try and save it, still have smiles on their faces just because, despite everything going wrong in their lives, all of a sudden, they’re not alone anymore”.

Harry came to stand by my side. “You get really deep about Doctor Who”, he joked, making me laugh. I turned around, jumping up and sitting in the wall.

“I remember because as he described it there was a really obvious shot from down here, you know, so his face stood right in the middle of the London Eye, and it looked like he had a halo”, I turned my legs around, so I was facing the river. Harry didn’t seem happy. “I remember thinking not everyone looks good on a down shot. It’s just the kind of thing you notice if you work in the business-“
“Seriously?!”, he asked. “What is it with you and walls that can kill you?”

“Relax”, I told him. “Come on, sit with me”. He sighed, looking down, and then threw one leg over the wall.

“Harry, come on”, Nathan called, from a feet away, sitting in a bench with the other PO.

“It’s fine, I’ll be careful”, Harry said. He sat with one feet to each side of the wall, facing me. “This way I can catch you if you fall”, he said. I looked around; Eddy was with Clark on our other side, keeping an eye on the road and who came through the sidewalk, but there was no one else, just the cars passing by.

“Do you think they’d jump in the water after us if we fell?”, I asked.

“That’s a good question”

“And if I fall here… Will I end up in France?”. He laughed.

“Your body might”, he joked.

We stayed silent for a while, watching the water run below, and the way the lights shone on it. “So, that was… fun. Back in the bar”, he looked at me.

“Yeah”, I laughed. “I’m sorry, if I shouldn’t have done… all of that, I just-”

“No”, he nodded, smiling. “Thank you for coming… It was weird, talking to her again”

“What did she want?”

“She said…”, he stared ahead, thinking. “She said a lot of things. All I remember is she wanted to get back together”. I felt a punch in my stomach.

“She did?!”, I asked. “What did you say?”

“I said I have a girlfriend”, he looked at me. We smiled. He looked back at the London Aquarium across the river, beside London Eye. “Jen-“

“Are you in love with her?”, I interrupted, after a while, staring at the water, feeling my heart ache. He was sitting facing me, so it was easy for him to just stare. I felt his eyes, but didn’t look back. “And I know you’re gonna say she broke up with you so close before your wedding, and it’s been a long time, but that’s not the question. And you know one thing unfortunately doesn’t necessarily have anything to do with the other. So…”, I coughed. “Do you still love her?”

‘Just friends’, I thought. ‘We can only be friends, there’s no need to put so much anticipation on this question’. He took a long time to answer, and when he did, it was like the world was a little lighter.

“No”, he said. I finally looked at him. He shrugged, looking ahead. “I just don’t. I don’t know how to explain it… I didn’t know she’d be there tonight, my friend owns the club. I went out with him and some other guys the first week I was here and then I had to work on the concert, and then you came, so I told them I was spending some time with you, since you’re my girlfriend and it made sense that I did… so he made me go out tonight, and there was some other friends there, but I didn’t know she was coming too. When I saw her, the first thing I thought was, I have to get out of here. But then… She asked to talk to me in private and we sat in that table where you found us. And, I don’t know. I felt a lot of things while we talked, but none of it was love”, he looked at me.
“Then I texted you”. I nodded.

“Well, than I don’t feel so guilty about playing the trophy girlfriend back there”, I teased, making him laugh.

“Trophy girlfriend?”

“Yes, you know”, I said. “Like in the Met Ball how you helped make me look like I was winning the break up. I did the same with the”, I made an affected voice tone, “Oh look how famous I am, just came from an interview, met Paul McCartney and Katy Perry and I’m sorry, I didn’t see you there! What’s your name? Chelsty? Chelsteen?”, he laughed, and I joined.

“That was a nice touch, actually”

“I know, I’m brilliant”, we chuckled.

“…I missed this”, he said. “Hanging out”

“We had dinner just the other night”, I said.

“Yes, but before that last time I saw you was a month ago”, he said. “And then two months before”

“Yeah”, I said. “I miss you too”. I immediately knew I shouldn’t have said it.

He looked at me, with a smirk on his lips.

“You do?”, I looked at him. He was sitting really close, the eventual lights from the cars passing by shining in his eyes. His smirk turned into a smile as he waited for my answer. “Perhaps I am also the most interesting person you know?”, he asked, holding my hand. I laughed.

“Don’t flatter yourself”, I said. He smiled, staring at our hands together, his fingers making patterns in my palms at an excruciatingly slow pace. “But yeah, I missed you”. He looked at me. I felt the world turning in my stomach and a weird warmth all over my skin despite the chilly breeze. I forced myself to make the next words come out. “We need to break up”. The smile left his face.

“Wha-why?”

“Well”, I sighed, taking my hand from his with the excuse of fixing my hair. “Uhm… mainly because we both already got what we wanted out of this”, I looked at him. “It was a plan, remember? Just a scheme. I wanted work opportunities, you wanted to leave Chelsy behind. If the little time I’ve had lately is any indication I think I already got the career boost I needed. And you just found out you can finally let Chelsy go, so… That’s it. We did it. We got what we wanted”. He pulled his leg back from the riverside to the sidewalk, sitting to the opposite direction of me.

“Now, I feel like this is just kind of messing up your life, so we should stop while we can”

“Messing up my life?”, he asked, looking at me.

“You know what I mean, your image”, I said. “Think of what Edward said, these people here, they’re your people. They’re your job. And the fact they don’t like me is damaging your image”

“They’re stupid”, I laughed.

“Don’t worry about me, Mr. Prince”, I told him. “My schedule is filling up pretty quickly, I’m not coming out of this empty-handed. But now that you’ve let your ghost of girlfriends past behind you, you can get a real girlfriend”
“I like the one I have now”. I smiled.

“Well, good luck replacing her”, I said.

“Well, if that’s what you want…”

“It’s what we need to do”, I said, fighting the gut wrenching feeling that everything was wrong and that was absolutely not what I wanted, telling myself it was necessary and that it was the only way. That we had no choice.

“What do we do now?”

“Well, we can’t break up now because the paparazzi tonight saw us and your ex in the same bar, so if we do, they’ll just assume there’s something to do with her and go back to harassing her, so we’ll have to wait until we’re back in New York and the we’ll think about it”. He nodded.

“What about Scotland?”, he asked.

“We still have to go, so no one suspects anything is wrong”, I said. “I can’t believe I’m this calm about meeting the Queen of Britain”. He smiled.

“We should go, then”, he said. “I still haven’t packed”, he held out his hand and helped me down the wall, and I took one last look at the view, still thinking about the Doctor and Rose and their smiles on that one night that changed their fictional lives. “Let me guess”, Harry said, still holding my hand, “You want to run across the bridge all the way ‘til London Eye like the Doctor and Rose?”, I smiled, thinking about it.

“It’s a long run”, I said. “If anyone saw us it would be an embarrassing story on the news”

“So?”, he said. “We don’t have much time left, let’s enjoy confusing the shit out of them”. I laughed, and looked around to the POs.

“Should we tell them?”, I asked.

“Or we could just start running and see if they can catch us”, we chuckled.

“Okay”, I said. “Wait!”, I unbuttoned my heels and held them in one hand with my clutch, still holding on to him with the other. “Let’s do it”

“One”, he said, smiling, “Two”, we turned to the street very slightly, preparing to run in the direction of the Big Ben, and across Westminster bridge all the way to the Aquarium and London Eye. “Go!”, he said and we started running with all we had, hands together.

It was hard not laughing when the guys realized what we were doing and had to hurry to follow us, but we kept the smiles on our faces the whole way, much like the Doctor and Rose. And much like them, despite all of our mess of fake-relationships and bad ideas and unspoken feelings, we kept smiling knowing that, at least, we were not alone.
Jen goes to Scotland to meet the Royal Family who have all kinds of doubts about her, luckily Harry comes in to save the day, which only makes Jen more confused. After almost six months of fake dating, fifteen seconds will change everything.

When Monica walked into the guest bedroom I was staying in at Richard’s apartment in London, I was already in front of the bathroom mirror curling my hair, putting half of it up and sorting through my makeup. I had prepared a special outfit for that day and I was so proud of it I even named it. It was composed of an Alexander McQueen three-quarter sleeved oversized white blouse with a necktie, tucked into a Mary Katrantzou blue pleated skirt with a colorful print in the center, TOD’s classic black flats, Sophie Hulme black envelope clutch, Phillip Lim Cat Eye Sunglasses and, the final touch, Jade Jagger diamond, ruby and yellow-gold earrings. The whole look was worth more than fifteen thousand dollars, which was definitely not the kind of thing I took lightly. I called it The Blair Waldorf. I knew Harry’s world was one big British Gossip Girl episode - Royal edition – and I knew in that scenario I was a mixture of Serena Van Der Woodsen (with the terrible past and party-girl fame) and Jenny Humphrey (coming from a low income past, trying to buy my way into something that was supposed to be a birthright). And so I knew that to get Harry’s family – the royal family – to overlook my file, with all my dirty secrets even Harry didn’t know about, to give me a fair chance (or to at least not kick me out screaming) I had to prove I could be Blair Waldorf, so I made my outfit like something she’d wear. Yes, I knew Blair also had the bad past and rumors in the show, but then again, she did marry a prince.

Not that I wanted that, because we all know that could never happen. Yet, that’s what I was wearing when I arrived at Balmoral Castle in Scotland: something that would make Blair Waldorf shed tears of joy. Something a princess would wear, because despite my never dying efforts of making myself accept the fact Harry and I had to break up, my subconscious kept telling me to enjoy it while it lasted, after all, that’s as close I would ever get to the fairytale.

‘So it’s not real, but so what?’, i thought. I still remembered the kiss in the Met Ball, when I felt so happy to kiss someone again – to kiss him again, as I knew it now – that I pretended it was real. That I didn’t have the past I had, that my ex didn’t exist, and that we were kissing because I had caught a prince’s eye. Because I was worth a fairytale. So as we flew over to Scotland, my second time in the country, I endured Edward Lane-Fox’s bitchiness and constant disapproval as he tried to give me ‘princess lessons’.

He spent the entire flight reminding me of all the rules one must follow when meeting the royal family. From the very start: you call the Queen Your Majesty the first time, and then ma-am after that. He repeated the right pronounce of the word ma-am a billion times and I repeated after him a billion times. I could hear no difference between what I was saying and what he was saying, but still he kept making me try again and again until the word was just annoying to my ears.

“You know, we’re about to break up”, I told Harry when Edward LF finally said the lessons were over and we were close to landing. He sighed.

“I know”
“So it’s a bit pointless trying so hard to have your family approve of me”

“I’m aware”, he said, bitterly.

“So do you want me to make sure they don’t?” He looked at me, puzzled.

“What?”

“You know… To pave the way for future girlfriends of yours. I can be the worst girlfriend you’ve ever had. I can make your family hate me so they’ll be more accepting when you bring a real girlfriend home”. He shook his head in disbelief.

“This is the craziest idea you’ve ever had”

“Come on”

“No, I’m serious. It might even top the last one, let’s pretend to date for the publicity”

“I’m just trying to help”, I shrugged. He looked at me for a few seconds.

“You think you could make them hate you?”

“Harry”, I started. “I’m an actress. All I have to do is forget everything Edward taught me, wear a really slutty dress for dinner and be super loud and obnoxious”. He laughed.

“Sure”, he shrugged. “I guess you don’t need them to like you… Just don’t let Edward know”

Truth is I didn’t need the royal family to like me. What would actually improve Harry’s image was for word to go around that I was there. For people to believe that the royal family had invited Prince Harry’s celebrity girlfriend for Balmoral Castle, because despite everyone’s opinion that that relationship was a bad idea, they seemed to like her, so how bad could it actually be? That was Edward LF’s plan. But still, I couldn’t help but feel like a complete outsider being thrown into a new world having to prove herself more than she ever had.

“Welcome to Balmoral Castle, Miss Silva”, an older, white haired man greeted me when I hopped off the car at Balmoral Castle. He was wearing a suit, tie, vest and white gloves.

“Thank you”, I smiled, looking around to the huge property with trees all around and the well-maintained garden and, finally, the rock castle with pointy roofs and huge hard wooden doors.

“Jenifer, this is Magnus King. He is Balmoral’s butler”, Harry said. I suppressed a sigh, because of course they had a butler!

“Will you be making use of a maid, Miss?”, Mr. King, the butler, asked, with his adorable British accent, that I noticed was a little different than Harry’s and the guys’, so probably scottish.

“A- I’m sorry, a what?”. I saw Edward LF hurry to translate whatever it was the butler meant, only to have Harry stop him.

“That’s a yes”, he interfered, sharing a look with LF. “For both of us, thank you, Magnus”. Magnus King smiled.

“This is Samuel Walsh and Imogen Brookes, they’ll be assisting you”, he said, pointing at the man behind him, also in a suit and vest – no gloves, though, and a woman, looking like she was in her early 40s, in a black-and-white traditional housekeeping uniform with her hair all up on a low bun. They smiled at us and went to the car to start to unload our luggage.
This was so surreal it was actually easier to pretend I was really in a fairytale.

“Shall we go inside?”, Harry asked, and Mr. King lead the way.

“Her Majesty awaits to greet you in her sitting room, the other guests are almost all here except for The Princess Royal, who should be joining us soon for lunch. Is this your first time in Scotland, Miss? If I may ask, of course”, the butler smiled, looking back at me as we made our way through the foyer with red walls and golden (was it actually made of gold?) furniture.

“I was actually here almost a year ago at work. Mostly in the coast”, I said. “But it’s definitely my first time in a Castle”

“Oh, you will love it, Miss”, he said. “The Estate was purchased by Prince Albert, the consort of Queen Victoria, in 1852”, in my head, I saw the Queen Victoria from season two of Doctor Who, and her deep love for her late husband, who created the Torchwood institute after a werewolf incident with the Doctor and Rose and was bit by it, making the whole royal family – to this day – werewolves. In the story, of course, not in reality, since Doctor Who is fictional. I mean, I didn’t remember ever seeing Harry out on a full moon night, but I wasn’t about to bring that up. “The existing house being too small, Prince Albert commissioned the Castle to architect William Smith, of Aberdeen, and amended every design himself. The construction was completed in 1856, and the royal family has been adding to it since then. Now it covers an area of about fifty thousand acres and it is a working estate, including forestry, grouse moors and farmland”, he finished the story, turning from the foyer to another corridor and knocking on a double door. Harry held my arm when Mr. King walked in.

“Don’t do it”, he pleaded.

“What?”

“The thing we talked about on the plane, just don’t”

“Excuse me, ma’am, His Royal Highness,”, we heard Mr. King say. “Prince Henry of Wales and Miss Jenifer Silva”. Harry gave me one last look before letting go of my arm.

“Okay”, I said, and he took a deep breath before bringing me into the room to greet his grandmother. As I wondered why had he changed his mind and prepared to try and be actually nice, I looked around.

The room, as the other parts of the Castle I had seen so far, had a high ceiling. About four long windows to our left, covered with green long curtains. But not normal curtains. They had cornice on its top and passementeries holding them open. The fabric looked old and shiny, with pleats and ruffles. Something in my mind went ‘you’re in a castle, an actual real-life castle’. So I decided to try and remember the details so I could tell people afterwards. But, overall, the room just looked very old. Not monarchy old, grand-parents old. The type of old that makes you want to call an interior designer. The vomit-green wall paper was too simplistic. The carpet was plaid, also in tons of green. The white marble fireplace was small with one big square mirror on top. There was no chandelier. There were sets of couches at each end of the room and one round table in the center, with four chairs around it. I could also see a desk, and some pictures on the wall that were very disproportional in size, mostly black and white, with simplistic frames. It left a lot to be desired for a place that had held monarchs and history-making people for so long.

Then, there was her.

As we walked into the room, I saw Harry bend his head lightly before smiling and walking to his
grandmother, so I curtsied. I think she was too busy making sure her grandson was still whole to judge me, so I waited.

“Gran, this is-“, Harry started, looking back at me, a bit marveled that I hadn’t followed him and was still waiting by the door. But I knew better, because Edward LF had told me I had to wait for the Queen to allow to approach, so I did.

“Miss Silva”, his grandmother, the Queen, looked at me.

The first thought on my mind when I met the Queen of Britain was of my mug shot. I looked at that normal-looking old grandma with a tea length plaid skirt in shades of red and a white blouse with moccasins and big pearl-white reading glasses on that matched her white hair and the one thing I saw was my mug shot. She wasn’t wearing a big shiny tiara or a fancy looking hat and still what I couldn’t shake was the fact that this woman, this head of state, this iconic piece of history, had seen my mug shot.

I remembered my mug shot. My hair was messy, my eyes were swollen, makeup all over the place, my mouth half-opened. This woman, this old woman in front of me was, more than a Queen, a grandmother. And I still felt absolutely overwhelmed at the fact she had seen my mug shot. That it didn’t matter how good I looked at that very moment, how Blair Waldorf I looked at that moment, how composed and chic and polite I acted, I knew that she still had it in her head the image of the girl whose mug shot had been shown to her.

I reminded myself she was still the Queen, the face in the money, the old grumpy lady from the last Olympics, so I curtseyed again, one leg behind the other, now that she was looking. ‘Knees together, keep eye contact’, I remembered. She watched me – my legs – as I did it, and offered her hand at a distance.

“Welcome to Balmoral”, she said, and I approached, knowing all too well this was the scene in the movie of my life all the audience held their breaths in suspense over my possible success or failure.

“Thank you, mam. Ma-am!”, I corrected the pronounce. In my head, I heard Edward: ‘use your indoor voice, don’t be too loud, remember to smile’. And then I realized my mistake. “I mean, Your Majesty!”, I corrected myself.

“Please, do sit”, was all she said, barely shaken up by what I felt could be a crime. Was it too rude to not call the Queen Your Majesty the first time? It was easy to forget the manners I had learnt when up until five seconds ago I was planning on not following any of it. I looked at Harry for answers, but he just gave me a little smile before we sat around the table. Her Majesty ringed a bell (like, a legit little golden bell) to ask for some tea.

“Do you drink tea, Miss Silva?”, she asked. Suddenly, I was out of words. I hated tea, but I couldn’t say that to the Queen. I mean, she’s British!

“Jen is more of a cappuccino person”, Harry intervened before I could say anything. The Queen didn’t order my beheading like I expected, instead she just smiled a small, weird, grandma smile and had someone bring tea and a cappuccino, before asking how our flight was, and how Harry was doing in New York and if he liked his job, things like that. She asked if he was giving me too much trouble, which was pretty easy to answer (‘Ma-am, you have no idea’, which made her laugh and Harry grin). And just like that, I had met the Queen. In general, hers is the look I’d classify as bored, which terrified me even more than any other. She probably just met a ton of people all the time, and so wasn’t all that impressed by me, but I also knew it could mean she just didn’t want me around.
It was too fast to remember details, yet the whole conversation still burned in my mind when we were being led upstairs to our rooms to change for lunch with the rest of the family.

“Rooms?”, I asked Harry, in a tone which I was hoping the butler couldn’t hear. “Are we not in the same one?”

“You thought your family was the only conservative one?”, he asked back, with a smirk, and my heart broke a little bit. “Even when Wills and Kate were living together they still had to sleep in separate rooms here. It’s just tradition”.

So were maids, apparently, as I realized as soon as I walked into my room, a fairly large room with a double canopy bed, couch, table, chair, more pictures on the wall and weird-looking curtains. There, Imogen Brookes, the woman Mr. King had gotten to unload our luggage hadn’t done just that, she was also unpacking the whole thing when I got there after our brief introductory tea with the Queen. Apparently that’s what Mr. King had meant when he said she’d be assisting me.

“It’s fine, it’s my job, Miss”, she said, the picture of politeness as she placed my make-up bag in the dressing table.

“Oh, I just… don’t wanna trouble you”

“You told Mr. King you’d be requiring a maid, correct? That’s me, Miss”

“I did?”

“Well, His Royal Highness did it for you”. I was silent for a while, as she went on to awkwardly fold my underwear and place it in one of the drawers, before realizing what Harry’s look to LF meant.

“Yes”, I sighed. “I guess he did”

As it turns out, I couldn’t be any gladder to have Imogen, because as I was getting ready to excuse myself and go yell at Harry for making the weekend even more uncomfortable for me, she asked if I needed to iron my lunch clothes.

"Uh… ", I looked down at what I was wearing, "is this not good for lunch?". Imogen seemed to consider very carefully what to say next.

"It’s not that, Miss. It is just customary of the Royal family and guests to change before meals".

I signed. “I put so much effort into this look to make a good first impression and now I already have to change?!”. I heard a small giggle out of her, which made me smile.

“I’m kind of in over my head, aren’t I?”, I asked, laying in the bed with an impact.

“You’re doing great, Miss”, Imogen said, looking around suspiciously seeming preoccupied before speaking again. “Miss Chelsy wore jeans and boots her first time here”. I laughed, then fished among my clothes, already all neatly folded into the drawers, for another look that would be appropriate.

"You think it needs to be ironed?", the look in her face told me all I needed to know.

"I can do it in no time, Miss"

"I can do it, you know. If you just get me an iron… There’s no need for you to… "
"I’d be happy to, Miss”, she said, already half-way through the doors.

"One more thing", she stopped, looking back at me, "If you call me Miss one more time I’ll start to feel like I’m in a Downtown Abbey episode, which, don’t get me wrong. I’d love to… But since it’s not the early nineteenth century, perhaps we could stick to Jen, yes?”, she smiled.

"Of course, Miss-“, she stopped herself, laughing.

“Just Jen”, I reminded her.

“Just Jen”, she repeated, leaving.

I went down the stairs after changing into my ‘lunch clothes’ and the only reason I wasn’t annoyed that I had spent so much effort preparing my outfit just to have to change into something else so quickly was because my lunch look was also pretty Blair Waldorf-y.

“Jen!”, Harry called, from one of the dozens of living rooms, leaving a couple of people to come greet me at the entrance. He was wearing jeans and a black blazer over a dark blue shirt that contrasted to the orange of his hair, taking my breath away. “Are you ready for this?”, he whispered putting his hand on my lower back leading me inside. Something in my mind reminded me of when we were setting the ground rules for our fake-relationship and how ‘meeting the parents’ were one of the do-not’s so we could keep it uncomplicated. I almost laughed at my naivety. Of course I fell in love with him and now was meeting his family.

“Jen, these are my father, Charles, and his wife, Camila”, he said, and the all-too-known couple gave me polite smiles.

“Please, there’s no need for that”, the Prince of Wales told me when I started to bend my knees one behind the other in a curtsey saying ‘your royal highnesses’. “Just call me Charles”. Sure, I thought. Lemme just call the future king of the freaking UK by his first name!

Camila – the woman I had grown up hearing my mother say ‘stole Diana’s happy ending’ – stared at the very top of my head all the way down to the tip of my Calvin Klein white flats al with that typical British little polite smile. She didn’t exactly say anything directly at me other than ‘it’s nice to meet you, Ms. Silva. We do hope you have a good time here’. She just looked back at Harry after that and asked of his ‘plans for the move back home’, which in my mind pretty much says it all. I tried not to focus too much on her question, or on how Harry breathed in too fast in surprise of it, seeming unsure of what to tell her. I tried hard not to hear whatever his answer was going to be, trying to look around to the room and distract myself from the sharp little twinge in my heart at the words ‘back home’. I felt foolish thinking of Manhattan as both of ours home.

“Como on, love”, I heard from someone across the room, coming our way. “Come and ask her yourself”.

I knew his name before he approached, since Lame-Fucks had me learn everyone’s names and titles on the plane over so I knew who I had to curtsey to. So I knew Peter Phillips was one of Harry’s favorite cousins, from his father’s sister Anne, the Princess Royal, but I wasn’t expecting him to be so… laid back. And I definitely wasn’t expecting the heated hello they exchanged when he came over, a bit too loud for the usual British ‘inside voice’.

“Hello”, he turned to me. “So you’re the superstar that shits puppies and farts hope”.

That’s definitely the one greeting line I wasn’t about to forget that soon. I was caught off guard by his choice of words, but Charles and Camila merely laughed.
“Peter, dear”, Camila said. “Table manners, we’re about to have lunch”, and then walked away with her husband to go talk to someone else.

“Harry seems to think you can bring mankind world peace or something”, Peter went on. “He talks about you all-the-damn-tim-”

“Okay!”, Harry interrupted. “I think it’s time for lunch now”

“Right”, Peter laughed. I blushed, smiling, unsure what to say to that, and looked to the ground hoping to avoid eye-contact with my boyfriend. There, I noticed the little blonde girl attached to Peter’s legs.

“Hi”, I said. Her reaction reminded me of most little girls I had encountered when meeting fans of our show – or Luiza, Thai’s daughter. Her cheeks got red and she left out a little giggle, showing the little teeth with a gap in between them, hiding behind Peter’s legs some more.

“This one’s been dying to meet you”, he said. “Hey, this is Jenifer. Say hello”, he told her. Blondie looked at me for two seconds, still smiling, then looked at Harry and her father, and giggled some more, hiding again, making us laugh. “Or not, I guess. This is Savannah”, he told me, “All she watches are the reruns of your show on Disney Channel with her sister, could give Haz a run for his money on the title of your biggest fan ever!”, he smiled at his cousin again.

“Oh, well, thank you, Savannah. I’m glad you like it”, I told her, avoiding Harry’s look again. She suddenly ran all the way across the room to a blonde woman in a lovely lavender dress and a baby on her lap that I assumed was her mother.

“Oh, look, the man of the hour is here! And I don’t mean your brother”, he winked at Harry, and went on to his wife who was greeting the couple that had just arrived along with Charles and Camila. One extra look and I knew it.

The tall woman with light hazelnut hair and big dimples gracing her picture-perfect smile was most definitely Kate Middleton, the world’s most famous bride. Of course I had watched her wedding. I remembered waking up extra early and having Ally sleep over the night before so we could make a viewing party out of it, with chocolate bars and delusional dreams about our future in the love department. Looking back at it not, two things strike me: 1 - that was probably when Ally became so interested on the royal world; and 2- I remember feeling extremely annoyed at what a big deal people would make out of Harry when all I thought was I could definitely not see the hype about him. Oh, the irony. I wished I could go back in time and give 2011 me a punch in the face and a couple of warning on what’s to come.

I soon knew what Peter meant by the man of the hour and how it wasn’t Harry’s thin-blond-haired brother, who was by Kate Middleton’s side – sorry, I had been informed the correct term was Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge. Instead, the actual man of the hour was the little baby boy on his arms swaddled in a light blue blanket screaming his little lungs out.

“Come on”, Harry said, holding my hand and rushing to meet them. He patted his brother’s shoulder and leaned in to kiss his sister in law on the cheek, engaging in some conversation as I stood there, staring at little baby Prince George trying to grasp the concept of this screaming bundle of cuteness being king one day.

Prince George was barely three weeks old at that point and the last time the world had seen his pale, flaccid face was when his parents left the hospital with him, images that had spread across the world. Now, everyone was waiting on the first official photographs and the date announcement of the Christening – the next two times he’d be seen. I knew about the general anxiousness of this, of
course, because of Alessa, who had gone on and on about it on the phone a couple of days before, talking about how cute ‘Georgie’ was and how he had already made a ‘royal wave’ at one day old and how she would positively die if they didn’t release the pictures soon. Of course that conversation had happened before I knew I was coming to Scotland to meet the Royal Family, but even if I had known then it would have probably been safer to not tell her right away. I wondered if I could snap some shots of George and text her, but with my history of leaked phone pictures, I thought it’d be better not to. But I knew Alli would know about this at some point, and I knew she was gonna hate me for not risking it.

“That is one cute baby”, I told Prince William.

“Aw, thank y-“, he took his eyes from his son to look up at me. “Have we met?”

“Right!” I bent my knees together in a curtsey. “Your Royal Highness, I’m-“

“My brother’s girlfriend!”, he smiled. I could feel the word girlfriend weighing on my stomach. “Of course. And please don’t do that. Call me William. So, first time in Scotland… how do you like it?

“Oh, I’ve been here at work before. Last year, actually. Shooting Game of Thrones”

“Oh, of course! We love that show!”, he gasped. “Kate cried when you died”, I laughed. “I almost did too… Don’t tell Harry I said that”

“Hey, you guys’ met?”, Harry turned back to us, holding his brother’s shoulders and looking back at his nephew.

“Well, we had to, since you’re too impolite to do it. Honey, come meet Harry’s girlfriend”, he told his wife, talking to Camila three steps away. She excused herself from the conversation coming to stand by William. “My wife, Catherine”, he said, looking from me to her.

“Hello”, she said, her voice sounding like joyful velvet. “Pleasure to meet you”

“You too!”, I said. I wondered in a millisecond if when William said I didn’t have to curtsey to him it was extensive to his wife as well or if I should do it again. Deciding not to risk it, I did it. “Your royal highness”, I emended.

“Please, call me Kate. It’s Jenifer, right?”

“Just Jen it’s fine, actually”, I said.

“And have you met little Georgie?”, she asked, raising her hand to strike her baby’s head trying to calm him from his little cries.

“Yes, he’s the cutest little thing”, I said, and we all kind of just gazed at the screaming mess that was the future king of the United Kingdom in all his baby cuteness.

“Would you like to hold him?”, William asked.

“Oh! Sure”, I said, and he handed me the baby that I carefully cuddled in my arms, just knowing Alessa would positively die when she heard about this, starting to wiggle myself gently so he would maybe calm down a little bit. “I should start to practice… My brother and sister in law are expecting a baby due in February”

“How wonderful”, Kate said. “Are you excited?”
“So much!”, I smiled. “But they have decided not to know the gender, which is already driving me crazy”. They laughed.

“We did the same”, William said. “Patience exercise, really”

“Oh, Jen is terrible with patience”, Harry said. “It’s why she can’t cook”

“Excuse me?”, I asked, fighting a smile. “I don’t cook. By choice. Doesn’t mean I can’t”

“Oh, really?”

“Really.” By the corner of my eyes, I saw Will and Kate exchange a grin.

“I could bet money you can’t cook for your life”, he turned to me, with a smirk on his face.

“Fine. Let’s do it”, I said, trying to look threatening despite the baby in my arms.

“Ooh”, went William, making Kate laugh, both looking from one of us to the other as if they were watching a tennis match. Even George’s crying seemed to have dimmed down a bit.

“How much?”, Harry asked.

“Fifty bucks”

“Done”, he said.

“Wait, go higher”, Kate said. “He can afford it! Dream big”

“Oi, who’s side are you on?”, Harry asked her.

“How about this?”, William asked, “Whoever wins makes a valuable donation to the other person’s charity. Harry has Sentabale, and you have one in Brazil, right?”

“How’d you know that?”, it seemed weird for me that he had heard of my small educational organization back home.

“I must have…”, he looked at Kare, “…read it somewhere.” I wondered if that somewhere could have been my file.

“…Right”, I said.

“Okay, I’m down”, Harry said. “You?”

“Hey, I’m game if you are. You know, for charity”, I said and we smiled at each other.

“How about tonight?”, he asked.

“Tonig- what?”

“Yes! You could cook dinner tonight!”, William agreed, enthusiastically.

“I wouldn’t mind some typical Brazilian food”, Kate agreed.

“…I’m sure your grandm-The Queen would be very annoyed for being deprived of her chef”

“Oh, I’ll talk to her”, Harry said, and just on cue, the Queen showed up greeting her family and making her way to the dining room – where by etiquette we weren’t allowed to go until she
arrived. “Unless you don’t think you’re up for the challenge…”

“Go ask her, then”, I said. “I just don’t think she’ll say yes”

Turns out, she did. Not straight away, of course. She had some reservations on how impolite it would be to let one of her guests cook for everyone on such short notice.

“Oh, but I’d be honored, Your Majesty”, I told her, just so Harry would stop looking at me like he had already won our stupid bet.

Then, she agreed. We talked ground rules over lunch, like I was allowed to have the chef’s and other cook’s help on what came to quantity, but the recipe itself and all the steps had to be up to me. After this the talk over lunch revolved primarily around baby George and Kate and William’s biggest surprises so far, with the parents sort of going around giving them wise advice on the subject.

As they were all distracted, I discreetly pulled my cellphone out of my Elie Saab blazer and typed an urgent text to my mother.

‘Need a full course dinner recipe idea to cook for the British royal family tonight. ASAP. Make it Brazilian. Please explain in details and with pictures. Long story, explain later’

The most recent guests to have arrived just before lunch were the Prime Minister of New Zealand and his wife (as if the list of people I’d have to cook for wasn’t overwhelming enough!) and Harry’s aunt, Anne, The Princess Royal - according to one of the main conversations I had had with Alessa prior to my trip, she was one of the harshest members of the Royal Family. Ally said she refused to go with a kidnapper once. Has got to be the kind of woman to admire… and then, came lunch.

I don’t remember which turn of the multiple conversations lead up to it, but at some point William and Kate were talking to me about Game of Thrones

“So Jenifer, any chance you’ll return to it anytime soon?”, Kate asked.

“Unlikely”, I said. “Since she, you know, died.”

“She had a very graphic death, love”, William reminded her.

“Who did?”, the Queen asked them, seeming concerned. She was sitting at the head of the table, across from the traditionally empty chair on the other end usually left untouched in honor of late Queen Victoria. The Queen’s husband, Prince Phillip, who usually say by her side, was still on Buckingham Palace and had passed on the traditional holyday deciding to rest back home after a stay in the hospital. In his seat, was Harry’s father Charles, followed by Camila, then Harry himself and me. On the Queen’s other side, in front of Charles and Camila, sat William and Kate, followed by The Princess Royal, her husband Timothy Laurence and the Prime Minister of New Zealand with his wife. By my side, Peter and his wife Autumn. Their daughters along with George were being given lunch in another room by the nannies.

In my head, the nannies looked like Mary Poppins and Sister Maria.

“Jenifer’s character”, Kate told the Queen. “In a television show she did”

“Oh”, she seemed relieved. “How… nice”, she smiled at me, awkwardly, and I had to try and ignore Harry’s difficulty at hiding his laugh so I could do the same myself.
“Oh, goodness!”, Autumn gasped. “That’s right, you’re in Game of Thrones! I barely recognized you without all the makeup and… normal clothes!”

“Calm down, honey”, Peter told her. “She’s a big fan”

“Very popular in New Zealand!”, the Prime Minister told me.

“Is that the one about zombies?”, asked Timothy.

“No, that’s The Walking Dead”, I said. “Also really good”

“Game of Thrones is the medieval times one with dragons”, Harry said. “Jen’s been on it. She won an award for it”. I tried to suppress the smile on my face over the pride in his voice, staring down at my food in bliss. Then came Princess Anne.

“Is that the porno one?”, she asked, as casually as if asking for the salt. I looked back up in surprise, unsure if I had heard right. Everyone else seemed to be pretty sure what they had heard: no one seemed overly surprised, although they all looked uncomfortable. That told me this could be considered normal for the Princess Royal. I looked around the table more carefully: Peter let out a sigh. Autumn, Kate and William looked at their plates with weird expressions on their faces. Harry was staring at his aunt. Camila had let out a little nasalized laugh as if the question could be considered a joke. Charles didn’t seem to know what to make of it.

“The what one?”, the Queen asked.

“Porno”, Anne repeated, louder, for her mother to hear. “A lot of nude woman and explicit sexual scenes”

“Oh”, the Queen said. “How… modern”

“So”, Anne went on, “I assume that’s the one you were awarded for?”. I knew what her sentence meant, of course. It was meant to make it sound like I had been one of the nude women with an ‘explicit sexual scene’.

“It is”, I said. “In fact I won my award for a scene where my character tries to stall the enemy army when they come for her queen and she does it by faking what turns out to be a very real breakdown after such a long time of war. She strips in front of them, staying in her underwear, pleading for the last part of her to be taken since there is absolutely nothing bad in the world she still hadn’t seen. They take her hostage to prison where she eventually dies after being tortured for information”.

“Having a breakdown and going to prison… Is that what you usually do?”, she said, her eyes piercing at me. From an outsider perspective, it could seem like a genuine question about my work, which is probably why the Prime Minister and his wife seemed to be letting go of the topic and engaging in another discussion with Peter and Autumn. The others also seemed to not be paying attention anymore, although Harry dropped the arm holding his fork loudly in his plate looking puzzled at his aunt.

“No, it’s not”, I told her, serious. “But at least I didn’t have to be nude, I guess”, I smiled, taking another bite of my food as casually as possible. I still could feel Harry’s eyes on me, and the silence was still just enough so I could hear the next thing Princess Anne whispered to her husband.

“Not that time…”, she said, obviously referencing to my leaked pictures although they were far from having any part of my breasts in them. The food went down in painful lump. I could see Harry reclining in his chair ready to say something to her, so I tried to change the subject.
“So, is there any particular dietary restrictions I must follow for dinner?”

Our little group was around the shed just outside the kitchen exit on the northwestern garden a couple of hours later getting ready to go on yet another part of the weekend that despite having been warned about, I still wasn’t quite comfortable with: a pheasant hunt. Like, an actual hunting hike. They had a shed with all of these rifles and ammunition and pheasants around the property that we would go out shooting at. I was definitely not cool with it, but since after lunch I had gone to search Brazilian recipes and talk to the chef so he could go shopping for the ingredients they didn’t have in time for dinner, when I came to my room to change for it, I barely had time to actually worry. Then Imogen had to help me find appropriate hunting clothes, which turns out I’m terrible at. So she found me a pair of boots somewhere in the house - that was at least one size bigger than what I normally wore - and a parka that I could wear and told me that at least I had a good excuse to leave the hunting party early.

“I’ll just tell them I have to come back to start the dinner preparations early”, I whispered to Harry when we joined the group about to leave near the guns.

“Nice”, he said. “Nice to see you and your maid are getting along well…”, he teased.

“Yeah, thanks for that by the way”, I told him. “She not only unpacked all of my stuff, but organized it in color order in the drawers”

“You’re welcome”, he said, laughing, as I approached the table with the rifles and ammunition.

“You’ sure you know what you’re doing with that?”, Harry asked, when I reached for one of the rifles.

“Oh, this? I don’t know”, I told him, grabbing the rifle by the wood stock and forestock to make sure everything was in place. I opened the bolt handle to see the empty barrel, reached for the ammo boxes on the table, grabbed two number 6 shots and loaded it, closing afterwards and turning to the practice disks standing across the yard outside Balmoral Castle. Making sure I had a clean shot, I fired twice, one in the center, the other close enough. I felt many eyes on me, and looked back at harry with a smile. “You tell me”

He looked puzzled. “How- What was that?”

“That’s me handling the Beretta 687 Ultralight Deluxe to perfection. Of course, I’d prefer a handgun, but I do what I can”, I said. “I had to do gun training for Marvel”

“You had to-“, he looked puzzled for another moment, before laughing. “Well, there’s something I did not see coming…”

“Hollywood, Mr. Prince. Nothing’s what it looks like”

“Nice shot…”, Camila said, approaching us. “And are you what you look like, Ms. Silva?”, I noticed she wasn’t wearing boots or bearing a gun like her husband, the prime minister, Timothy, William and Peter were. I wondered if I was the only girl tagging along.

Harry got rigid by my side, noticing yet another demonstration of passive-aggressive hostility, so I laughed to try and make it seem what she said could be a joke.

“I guess it depends on what I look like, ma’am”. She smiled.

“Oh, you look like a nice girl”, she said, smiling. “The kind of girl who value the right things in life, which usually says so much about a person”
“What are the right things in life?”, Harry asked.

“Oh, you know. The relations we maintain with others and ourselves… How to make the healthiest decisions for ourselves and our loved ones…”, she numbered these things looking around, very casually, then she looked at me. “Respecting the sanctity of family… Of matrimony”, I felt a punch in my stomach, the same one I felt over lunch as Anne had made her comment about prison. “…Putting it before all else-“, then, Harry stopped her.

“And what would you know about that?!”, he asked, rudely, and I closed my eyes wishing he hadn’t.

“Harry, what did you just say?”, his father asked, coming to stand by his wife, whose eyes I tried to avoid. Harry gulped looking between them, seeming to regret his words but not the reasons behind it. I tried to look at him in a way he could know that I was fine, but I didn’t dare speaking and making the whole situation worst.

My life was suddenly a Gossip Girl episode and I hated it. I was Serena Van Der Woodsen having her dirty secrets exposed in a takedown by the born and bred Blair Waldorfs. But the worst part was that my own personification of Dan Humphrey – which is ironic since I had always seen Harry as the man Chuck Bass becomes after love changes him – was willing to sacrifice his own personal relations to defend my honor without knowing it was a lost battle.

“It was nothing”, Camila told her husband, sounding almost convincing. I knew there was a lot at stake in there, with the tenuous history surrounding Charles and Camila’s relationship in what involved Harry’s mother, but I also knew both he and William had a more than great relationship with their stepmother, something I didn’t wanna see chattered because of me.

“Harry?”, his father asked again, demanding.

“Ask your wife”, he said, picking a leather bag - for the hunt -, his ammo and gun and holding my hand, pulling me down to one of the two cars we were supposed to take to the woods behind the castle. “Jen and I will take the north route, we’ll meet you by the river creek”

“Harry”, his brother called, following us down to the tree line where the car was parked. “Harry!”, he didn’t stop. Harry was holding my hand firmly, staring ahead, and I just wondered how he knew, how had he known what she said was meant to hurt me.

His brother reached us, as Harry was putting the bag, guns and ammunitions in the backseat. He told me to get in, which I did, and William reached for his arm before he could get into the driver’s side. “Come on”, William said, “don’t walk away, we haven’t divided the groups yet…”

“Then I just did it for you”

“Harry, come on. She didn’t mean it like that…”, Harry didn’t say anything. “She –“

“She what?”, he asked. “She meant well?”

“Well…”, William shrugged, sighing. Harry looked back at me, just for one second.

He took a deep breath. “Wills, you dealt with this the way you thought was best when it was Kate and God knows how the fuck you two made it. You know damn well you almost didn’t. But this is how I’m gonna deal with it, and if you excuse me, I did not fly my girlfriend ten hours across an ocean for this”

“Harry”, William pleaded again, getting closer to his brother and lowering his voice tone. “Look
around. We’re your family. We never had this kind of problem with Chelsy”. Harry took a step back and I suddenly just wished really bad I could go back home.

“That’s the bloody point”, Harry said, and he got in and turned on the car and we drove to the woods.

After we arrived, we walked up and down the hiking trail in the woods for a solid five, maybe even ten minutes before I had to stop to catch my breath. I hadn’t even realized I wasn’t breathing normally after the whole showdown, which didn’t make for the perfect hiking pace.

“Are you okay?”, he asked. I nodded, looking at the ground as I leaned in to a tree.

“You shouldn’t have done that”

“Maybe… But I’m glad I did”

“Harry…”, I sighed. “Why would make such a fuss over something that’s about to end anyway?”

“Because, that was…”, he sighed. “Fucking—… Ridiculous. My aunt at lunch about your job and that just then. What the hell was that about? David getting back to his wife or something? It’s like he didn’t even cheat on you”. So that’s what he thought it was all about. That hurt me even more.

“Harry, it doesn’t matter!”, I said. “I told you, I don’t mind! The problem starts when you make a big deal out of it!”

“Well, it was a big deal. And why do you sound mad at me?”

“I’m not mad!”

“Well, you sound mad! Why?! How am I the one in the wrong when all I did was to defend you!”

“Yes, but you defend me by enlarging the already gigantic precipice caved between our worlds!”

“Our worlds?! Goodness’ sake, Jenifer! Enough with that! There’s no such thing as our worlds. There’s only one world, where we both live! The differences you see are the ones we put there!”

“Maybe, but they’re still there, aren’t they?”, I asked. “They don’t go away just because we want them to! At the end of the day your family simply doesn’t like me or what I do any more than mine does, and that’s fine”

“No, it’s not fine. And you know it, because you stood up for yourself back in Brazil. You told your family they didn’t have to understand or like your choices, but they had to accept them. I was doing just that, I was defending your life choices!”

“And that’s wonderful, but now all they’ll think is that I’m throwing you against them!”

“I’m just…”, he sighed. “Standing up for you”

“Back in Brazil, it was you”, I said, going back to walk the trail, “In Brazil I was defending you. I could have gone for years just internalizing my cringes and eye rolls, but they started to voice their opinions about you, that made me stand up on that rehearsal dinner. And although my family wasn’t fond of the idea of us being together, they still loved you. You’re a prince, Harry, and it has nothing to do with your tittle, ironically. It’s about you and how charming you were. They loved you, so when I stood up for myself, and for you, they felt ashamed of themselves because they saw how wonderful you were…”, I turned to him, who looked up from the ground to meet my
eyes. “There, I’m their family. They’re supposed to accept me! Here, you’re the family! I’m the intruder, the outsider. And the stakes are so much higher because they’re… You know, the monarchy. I’m just the social-climbing, celebrity train-wreck who doesn’t belong and who could ruin your image and theirs!”

“You’re not that”, he said, walking to catch up to me.

“But that’s what they think. That’s what everyone thinks”, I said as he got closer, in front of me.

“They’re wrong. Jen, they’re… They’re different. You can’t read too much into it, they’re… I don’t want to justify them, but-the way we’re raised here it’s just different, I guess. They’re-“

“They’re right”, I stopped him, who looked up to me like I had just broke something. In a way, perhaps I had. “That’s what you said to me, remember? In Brazil, at my brother’s wedding. When I told you what my family had said. You told me they were right”

“I was wrong”, he said.

“No, Harry, I don’t think you were. And I don’t think your family is now”

“They are- They are wrong. They have to be!”

“Why?!“

“Because what if it was real?!”, he shouted, looking distraught. “What if I fell in love with you? I don’t want to believe that if this was real, if we were real, that we wouldn’t even have a chance! Not even a chance? I can’t believe that. I refuse to believe that if I wasn’t engaged a year ago when we met at that ball and I had nothing stopping me from fl-…”, he took a step closer, breathing heavily now, as I would be if I was breathing at all, “from flirting with you…”, and then, there it was, out in the open. The possibility. The big what if I had been trying to ignore. “I don’t want to believe that if I was single and I had flirted with you and for some miracle you had decided to give me a chance… and we ended up, say… Falling in love”, I could almost feel my eyes tearing up at the intensity I could feel in my bones. I could feel myself shaking now, so I closed my hands in a fist trying to not let it show. I couldn’t take my eyes from him, “that we wouldn’t even have a fighting chance.”

He looked sad now, but he never took his eyes from mine. He was less than a step from me and wasn’t moving. I was breathing heavily for I’m not sure how long, just staring into his eyes thinking of what to say next, because it felt like it was my turn to speak. What he had just said, the possibility he voiced held such a weight to it that it felt like it was my turn now even though I had no idea what I was supposed to say. I barely remembered how the conversation took that turn in the first place. All I could think now was the possibility of it. The possibility of us. I considered what he was saying, the thought of last year, heart-broken-me being hit on by the world’s most eligible bachelor, Prince Harry, at a Ball after the year I had had… and right after he tried to steal my poker chips; it made my heart warm.

“That didn’t happen”, I said, hanging on to our reality. “So you don’t have to worry. It’s not like you’d ever fall for someone like me anyway”

“Why not?”, he didn’t seem to be trying to be funny, just genuinely intrigued.

“Because…”, which made it so much more difficult to reason with him. It seemed so weird that after a year of knowing each other and six months of being really close – fake-dating close – he wouldn’t know why not. “Because I’m…“, a celebrity, famous, a brand… “me”
“When we met”, I said, smiling ironically, “at the ball. You tried to rob me. You said it yourself you broke almost every rule of how to talk to woman. And you wonder why does it sound so ridiculous the thought of you hitting on me?”, he laughed. I was glad the mood of the moment had stopped being so intense although I still felt like we were stepping on forbidden territory, since we were still openly, blatantly talking about the possibility; crossing every line we had put there to protect ourselves.

“I’d try”, he said, with a smirk. “I probably would be terrible at it and I’d ruin the whole thing because I’d be… overwhelmed by you, but I’d try.”

“Overwhelmed?”

“You know... beautiful actress, used to big shot guys hitting on her all the time, I usually didn’t have to do much for girls to want to be with me. With you I wouldn’t know where to start. Still, I wouldn’t have a choice... One look at you, in your purple dress, coming at me with all you had... that’d be it”, he was making my legs feel weak, and I felt the intensity come back twice as strong now. “I’d be hooked”. I smiled again, turning away this time and going back to walking the trail, away from him, at least a little bit. “Even though you’d probably just tell me to bugger off after I had embarrassed myself enough”

“Oh, please”, I mocked. “You look cute nervous. I’d give you a shot”, when he didn’t say anything for the longest time, I turned back. He was still standing on the same place, with a weird look on his eyes and a smirk changing quickly into a smile.

“You’d give me a shot?”, he asked, sounding in disbelief. He started walking to catch up with me. “What happened to I’m not your type?”

“I never said that”

“Yes, you kind of did. You said you couldn’t see the hype about me. On the day we decided to do this, at my room. Trust me, I’d remember”

“Yeah, well...”, I could feel myself blushing. “Whatever. The point is, then what? Someone, probably Thomas or Edward, would have come to us and whispered who I was in your ear and you’d have known it couldn’t work”, I turned back again, going back to pacing forward slowly.

“Tell me who you were?”, he asked, and although I was walking forward again and not looking at him, I could hear the smile in his voice. “I’d know who you were... I had watched some of your movies before we met”

“You know what I mean. They’d tell you about David, or, maybe some time after that if we had gone on a... date or something... as soon as they thought it was getting serious, they’d still make that file about me, you know, the one Thomas did... and you’d have known that you had to run the other way”, I laughed modestly, trying to look like I was okay with that. Trying to be okay with what I was saying although nothing about it felt okay.

I felt his hand hold onto mine, stopping me from walking, but I refused to turn to him. But he got close. He stood right behind me holding my hand, his thumb striking my skin in circles for a while before he finally said something. I wondered if it had taken him time to talk because he didn’t know what to say or because he didn’t have the courage to. Maybe both?
“Nothing could make me run the other way”, he said, softly. I closed my eyes in frustration, before turning to face him trying to look skeptical, but failing at the sight of his eyes. “Not if you keep looking at me like that. Trust me, I’ve tried.”

I could feel every inch of my skin burn since his hand had touched mine. In my fairytale, I wasn’t wearing a gown, my prince wasn’t in a tux, and there was no party with a midnight deadline. I wasn’t in heels, but in hunting boots that were too big for me. My hair was undone, messy and frizzy, and we were in the woods in Scotland with absolutely no one watching us. We were carrying guns, ammo in our pockets and a bag on his back that had been used to carry around dead birds for years. There was no Ed Sheeran to be heard, instead, there was the absolute silence we could barely hear over the sound of our hearts beating so fast it felt like they had wings and we could fly, because he was holding my hand without an excuse. And looking resolute as he didn’t let it go. Because he said nothing could make him run away and I so desperately wanted to believe him, but how did we even get there?

“You don’t know me all that much, Harry”, I warned him.

“I know enough”

“You really didn’t read the file, did you?”. The fact he barely seemed surprised with the mention of it told me more than I wanted to know. It told me he could tell something was up.

“Only the first few pages”

“And no one told you?”

“They tried”, he admitted. “I didn’t want to hear it”

“That’s…”, I laughed, humorless, “…stupid”, I said.

He smiled. I had no idea what was even happening anymore. “I know”, he said, still holding onto my hand.

“Why? Why not let them tell you? Show you?”

“I just thought… Whatever you wanted me to know, you’d tell me yourself, when you felt ready to”. I could feel tears again and I felt stupid. So stupid and for so many reasons, but mostly because I held onto his hand now, because I could feel myself giving in and not wanting to let go.

“Nothing in Hollywood is what it looks like, Harry”, he didn’t even blink. “I’m not either”

“I know who you are”

“You know me now, you know what I’ve made myself into, but I… I’ve done so much that I regret. I’m a textbook Hollywood screw up, Harry”

“I don’t care”, he said.

“How can you not care?!”, my voice broke. He took a step closer. Was that even possible?

“I told you, I know who you are”

“I told you, you don’t know everythi-“

“I know enough, Jenifer! I know you’ve been hurt and manipulated and I know because I’ve been there too but that is not what I think about when I’m with you because I know better. I know you
talk in your sleep. The most random sentences I have ever heard and I know you hate tea, and prefer cappuccinos, and I know you hate beer. I know you cringe internally when you watch the Disney show you were in, and I know you hate reading in bed because it makes you sleepy. I know you hate olives and the color green for some reason, and I know you love old musicals and 80s movies. I know you hate the little part of your hair above your ear that never gets straightened as you like, despite it looking so freaking cute. I know videos of babies or puppies and random acts of kindness make you cry and I know you’d live in a cloud if you could because you love heights so much. I know you love Skylines, and views and the Manhattan fire escapes. I know you love modern art, although you prefer the history behind any classical. I know you’re open-minded and liberal. I know you blame yourself way too much for things that are not in your control. I know you hate the word museum because you never learnt how to pronounce it right. I know you love post-it notes and unlined journals and gel pens and sometimes I find myself terrified of how much I know about you until I remember I know all of this because you told me in some way or another because you talk so. Damn. Much”, he closed his eyes quickly, laughing, “And then I stop being mad because I realize I love it when you talk”

In my fairytale, it wasn’t lame that I felt a tear rolling down my cheek because I couldn’t remember the last time I loved a guy who said all the right things. In my fairytale, it was possible I was the kind of girl who caught a prince’s eye, because I started to suspect that might have actually happened.

“I don’t really know how to respond to that”, I admitted, after a while, my voice small and shaky. “But I feel the need to say that I’m a mess right now. Frankly, for as long as I can remember I’ve only ever always been a mess”.

He smiled again, for reasons that were far beyond my reach, putting his rifle and mine down so he had his other hand free to dry the single tear in my cheek. My skin burned in bliss under his touch, like the rest of me.

“You’re the single prettiest mess I’ve ever seen”, he said. I smiled, looking away for a second trying to gather my senses, my reason. When I looked back to his small blue eyes staring right into me and the mischievous smirk on his lips, the hand that refused to let go of mine, and the other now fixing my hair behind my ear, I knew there was no point. My reason had gone out the window a long time ago.

I tried to snap out of my trance by shaking my head and getting my hand off of his, decided to walk it off and maybe shoot some birds, but he only held onto it tighter.

“What are we doing?”, I asked in a whisper. Felt like he was just closer now which made no sense.

“Jen?”, he asked. I felt his breath on my nose.

“What?”

“I know you’re an over-thinker and a control-freak, and I don’t want to overwhelm you, so I’m going to do this slowly and give you time to process it and maybe run away if you want to, ok?”

“What are you-?”

“I’m gonna give you time to freak out, and over-think, and over-analyze this however you need to. And you can make a list in your head of all the reason this is a bad idea, but after fifteen seconds, that’s how long I’ll give you, fifteen seconds… After fifteen seconds it’s time we both stop dancing around”, I didn’t understand what he was talking about, but the way he looked at me from so close and pressed my hand so gently told me something big was happening. “In about fifteen
seconds”, he paused, “…I am going to kiss you”.

The first two seconds were spent with my surprise. In the next two, we had a silent stare down, time in which I expected him to explain himself, which he never did.

“What? Why?”, I asked in a whisper, in second five. He wasted seconds six and seven to smile differently than I had ever seen him smile before. A smile that was serene and simple, like all of his cards were on the table and you could see the happiness in the way his cheeks bended to make room for the joy on his lips. Like the only thing that mattered in the word was standing right in front of him – but the only thing in front of him was me.

“Because we both know I should have done it a long time ago”, he said, making it nine. And making me shine.

In second ten, I realized what he meant. In second eleven, I considered my options. Could I still turn around and walk away like nothing happened? Could we just go on with our day ignoring this moment right there? In second twelve, I realized even if we could, I didn’t want to.

“There’s no one watching us, we don’t have to”, I said, in a whisper, one last attempt of keeping it inside our unspoken fake-dating agreement as Harry closed the final little distance between us, letting go of my hand and holding onto my waist in second thirteen.

“That’s the point”, he whispered back. That was fourteen. I couldn’t feel the floor beneath my feet or smell the trees, and I wasn’t sure how I was still standing when I felt so trembling and dizzy. But I could see the freckles beneath his eyes and the way you could see the smile on his nose that was an inch from touching mine.

“Ask me to stop”, he said. “And I will”. I believed him.

“That’s the thing, Mr. Prince...” There was only one problem, “I don’t want you to”.

Fifteen. He kissed me.
The Ones Before The One

Chapter Summary

Jen runs away. Harry loses a bet. A secret from her past comes out. Harry makes a promise.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It is important to me that you understand what I’m about to tell you, mostly because I need you to know that no matter how messy you’ll think I dealt with the whole Harry-situation, you should know that inside, I was messier. So here it goes:

When I was thirteen-years-old I was shooting the second season of the first television show on my acting career, on Disney Channel. I played a Hispanic girl who terrorized the main character and in that particular season my character started an arc that involved her feeling sad and angry over her realization that, because she always came on too strong and was kind of mean to people, no one would ever love her and, unlike the other girls in the show, she would never have a boyfriend. Until, of course, they introduce a character played by Jimmy Kempner.

Jimmy Kempner was my age, adorably blonde with dark brown eyes and overly excited about getting his first big role in Hollywood. At the time, it was all he wanted. Jimmy stayed on the show for about six episodes, which means about six weeks, time in which our characters became each other’s first love and kissed, having a ‘very serious relationship’ (or, you know, as serious as it gets on Disney Channel) and then they ended his arc and participation on the show using the excuse of his character’s parents having to move to Hawaii.

In real life, the first time our characters had to kiss was also the first time I ever kissed anyone ever. And no, there’s no need to point out the irony in the fact my first kiss ever was a fake kiss, thank you very much. Wanna know what else is ironic about it? After we shot the first kiss scene, both Jimmy and I decided we liked each other, so we kept on kissing, even when we weren’t shooting, and we started dating seriously (you know, as serious as it gets when you’re thirteen). So there you go, turns out Harry is not my first fake-relationship turned real. As I said, Jimmy only stayed in the show for six weeks, and after that, our love didn’t survive the distance and we broke up (see the irony here too? Good). I heard from old friends from the cast he now lives in Boston and, after graduating from Boston College, has been managing a hotel in the area – he gave up acting by the time he got to high school. Maybe he was up to something…

Since I was homeschooled, I didn’t really know a lot of boys beside the ones I met in Disney, and after Jimmy the next time a boy kissed me was after I had left the show for High School. At first everyone thought I was lame for being an immigrant and from Disney, it was tough getting a cute boy to like me, so this next kiss happened in social circles outside of school, when Ally and I went to Comic Con, where we met a lot of people and I ended having a two-days ‘relationship’ with an Anakin Skywalker cosplayer. I remember his name was Ted, but I still like to refer to him as Anakin.

After that, the movie came out and people seemed to think I was a bit cooler than they had previously asserted, phenomenon I was able to blatantly avoid until the senior prom bug came to
bite me in the ass. Ally kept talking about how all of it was stupid and dumb and how she was
happy to stay home and binge watch Gilmore Girls, but I was excited. And when Aiden Jackson –
the linebacker for the football team - asked me to be his date not only did I proudly accepted, but I
started to wear his varsity jacket around every day until the prom. Ally was kind enough not to
judge me and to help me pick a dress, but when the day came and he drove us to the beach after the
party was over to try and have sex with me, the whole thing kind of lost its magic and I saw what
Ally did: a dumb tradition and a childish jerk. I gave him his jacket back, took his hand out of my
tight and walked down the street as I called Ally to come and pick me up, which she did and, as the
good friend she is, she heard me roast Aiden Harper for about an hours before making me shut up
so we could watch Gilmore Girls for the rest of the night.

The next boy who kissed me was different. Both because he was kind and caring, and because he
wasn’t just a kid or a jerk, he was my good cousin Leo. Leonardo was two years older than me
when I went to Brazil to help my parents get settled back home. At the time, when I was 17, fresh
out of high school, I had just finished my first Broadway run and was longing to move to New
York definitely with Ally, having started to realize the tool on me over an industry that got to me
way earlier than it probably should have. So I decided to step away. Go to college. Be normal. So
before classes started in September, as my parents made the definitive move back, I ended up
seeing Leo a lot more than usual. He was the coolest, most intelligent guy I knew back then and
pretty much one of the only five, maybe six friends I had in Brazil and that’s including Thai. Every
time we saw each other due to family gatherings we spent all the time playing video games or
swimming or laughing or basically just eyeing each other very intensely, and so when we ran into
each other in the mall one day while we were both leaving, he offered me a ride home. He parked
near the beach near my house so we could talk, we walked in the sand at night without anyone
around and he listened to me rant about why I felt so betrayed by my own decisions and how I just
wanted to leave things behind. I remember telling him about my few weeks on Broadway just days
before flying there, days after school was over, reason why I skipped graduation, and how it was
such a dream come true, and if only I could just to musicals I maybe wouldn’t feel so betrayed.
‘Musicals are the good part about the business!’, I told him, who laughed like he understood what I
was saying and offered his own feeling about high school and life. I remember clinging to the
Portuguese coming out of his full, perky lips like it was a life-saver, feeling its familiarity like the
best part about being home. When I kissed his cheek before finally realizing it was time to go
home, we stayed closed a bit too long, and he kissed me. He pulled away a second later, eyes shut
close, regret all over his face. He waited for my reaction, and so I just kissed him back. We got
back into the car and the rest is history.

‘No one can know’, we whispered to each other, feeling like he was the twenty-first century
version of Romeo to my Juliet and until it was time for me to leave for college, we kept sneaking
out to see each other. We finally broke up when summer was over with dramatic ‘I’ll miss you’s,
and I went to College ready to start again, now as a new and matured woman (ha-ha!).

As I arrived in college-life, I had a big task ahead: leaving Leo behind. He was, after all, the first
full-on romance of my life, and at that age, I did imagine he could be the love of my life. I
remember listening to Tim McGraw, by Taylor Swift – whom I didn’t know at the time – and think
we would be dancing to that song at our wedding one day. Finally, Ally managed to drag me out of
my heartbreak-spiral and take me around the city to enjoy Manhattan and for party after party and
for bars and hipster music street-festivals.

Quickly I started to unleash my pain through slam-poetry and poem after poem, party after party,
song after song, hook up after hook up, Leo started to stay behind, until I only really remembered
he existed because I saw him at Christmas. In all fairness, we did sneak out of the Christmas dinner
to hook up, but I was trying to forget someone else at that point.
I had three serious hook ups in NY before the one that taught me what true heartbreak felt like. The one man who seemed so keen on making me hate him was also the one who showed me for the first time I could be sexy and extravagant and confident in myself. He taught me I could have control over my body, and my life and my career and he was also the one who broke me to pieces gaining a VIP ticket straight to my confidential file, leaving metaphorical and very literal scars on me.

Moving to Los Angeles, so fueled by pain and drama, had me embracing Susannah and all that came with her: an excuse to be someone else again, also known as acting; my Suze-booze alter-ego and party-girl fame; living in one house with most of my cast for the first several months and finding in them a family who didn’t know about the pain, and who didn’t care or judged, who wanted to dance it off as much as I needed to. Every other weekend, even after we each moved out, we’d hop on a car or two and drove down to LA to find some club or Hollywood party that would let us in simply for being those actors from that teen show that everyone was talking about.

Around that time my love life consisted of party hook-ups and one-night-stands that I tried to forget the morning I did the “drive-of-shame” back to Carmel. With the parties came the drinking, the pills “just to keep awake” and the tattoos and fight-picking and realizing my career and body were the reasons men never seemed to take me seriously, issues I kept postponing to think about and deciding to just drink more instead.

Around season two was when I hired Richard – and, later on, Janine. Richard was just starting his own managing agency, and I was one of his first clients. He worried about the nineteen year old kid living alone and away from her family, probably seeing a lot of his daughter Payton on me, partying way too much, and finally, he started taking me under his wing, taking me to his house every weekend, and to his parents’ house in Idaho every thanksgiving, having me rehearse my lines with his sons and help them with their homework, including me in his family activities like he hoped someone would include his kids if it ever came to it. Being near the Arctechs and being reminded of the plus side of trying to be good to myself and to others was when I started to try and get myself together, and to get my career where I wanted.

Then came Brody Jenner – the living reason I created my rule to never date reality TV stars. People think they should stay away from musicians because they have never been in a Kardashian brunch where there’s more alcohol than coffee. Brody, who is the son of the Kardashian’s stepfather Bruce Jenner, and is to this day famous for either that or for playing himself in The Hills, was mostly modeling when we met at the party scene in 2010, after his reality ended, and so did his fake relationship with Lauren Conrad – who ironically I became quite good friends with. One of his friends owned the club and he walked to me, looking like the statue of a Greek God, and simply introduced himself. Our very photographed romance made the news and the next month, I met his crazy family. On the other, he invited me to go away with him to a wedding in France. On the next, we broke up. It is sad that that was the healthiest, most appropriate relationship I’ve ever had, but it is also true. Nothing was very serious after him. Not until David.

David Cobb, or as I like to call him ‘Big Life Mistake Number 2’, was the antonym of everything that had been wrong before, he was the personification of what I ended up dreaming of after all of my failed attempts at love. When I proudly held his hand in public, against the age criticism, I felt like a hero, like the bigger person, like the mature woman with a healthy relationship and solid career I wanted to be. Everything felt right: he adored me, his daughter was welcoming, we made plans for the future and committed and then, before our last performance on Broadway, the tabloids were out. And everything went dark again. And the only thoughts on my mind were ‘not again’. All the thoughts on my mind were ‘why do I try? This is it, this is all I have to show for a career and for a life’.
I barely remember what was on my mind when I slept with Tyler. All I remember was thinking I could do this, I could just sleep with someone, feel someone’s touch, doesn’t have to mean anything. I remember clinging to the idea that I didn’t need a serious relationship to feel wanted. All I seem to have forgotten was that he was one of my best friends in the world. The one about whom I once had proudly said never tried to hit on me. The one I thought I knew like the back of my hand, but whose biggest secret escaped me: his love.

I don’t think there will come a day I don’t feel guilty about Tyler, and how everything went down with us, which is what fueled me to realize that was enough. I did not want another relationship, not until I felt it could be the real thing. It had been too much already, too much self-destructive patterns, too much heartbreak.

This was the pain I was working through as I chopped some onions and sporadically instructed the Queen’s kitchen staff on how much water to use on the rice or the right amount of cassava flour to fry. The Queen’s kitchen staff contained seventeen people, including her personal chef (who was present, and told me to order him around and teach as much as I could, since he’d love to get a glimpse at traditional Brazilian cooking). When I had gotten there, they all stood from their stools and turned to me with smiles on their faces very quietly waiting for orders. I put my acting face on, trying to play the part of the really confident girl who knew exactly what she was doing, grabbed my phone, reading the recipes my mother had sent me and started to ask about onions and garlic and meat and explaining to the chef about the right way cutting the beefs. ‘If it all goes to shit’, I thought, ‘at least in the future I’ll have a story about cooking for the royal family that I can tell in talk show interviews’.

After the main orders had been given and I could sit with a knife to chop the vegetables I dove into my own overthinking mind and, not only did all of those past attempts at love came back to haunt me, but they were all mixed with Harry, with questions and, mostly, with what his stepmother had told me just a couple of minutes before I had gotten to the kitchen.

“Ms. Silva”, Camila called me as I hurried through hallway after hallway trying to find my way to the kitchen and out of the memory of the kiss that had just happened in the woods a few minutes before. “I’d like to apologize”, was her opening line. She said it soft, but firm, hands together as she looked at me.

I sighed, not having any space in my mind for her, “Oh, ma’am, there’s absolutely no need to-“

“No, I believe there is”

“Honestly, you didn’t really…”, I thought of how to continue the sentence. Do anything? Offend me? “…lied”

“Oh, I know”, ouch. “But I’m afraid it was not only impolite but uncalled for. Terribly rude, really” I sighed again, wanting to be done with her apology and how much more tired it was making me. “It’s fine, ma’am”

“I hope you know that I have no reason really not to believe you’re a wonderful girl”

“Really? ‘Cause you seemed to have one earlier”, I said, then, remembering this was just gonna make things worse, I tried to mend it, “It’s fine, ma’am, I get it. I don’t fit”, I said, smiling so she’d know it was an innocent statement instead of a hatred one.

 “…I just worry”, she looked worried.
“About Harry, I know”, I said. “Honestly, so do I”

She smiled, “He does seem to have an unusual resolution for longing what he can’t have, doesn’t he? Unfortunately that is extensive to his taste in women. Or girls, in your case”. I ignored the small hint at our age gap, trying to keep the peace afloat.

“Longing the impossible doesn’t always have to be a bad thing… is a trait most heroes have”, I told her.

“Yes. But we don’t live in a world of heroes, do we?”, she sighed, paused for a few seconds and then took a deep breath before speaking again. “If you can look in my eyes, Ms. Silva, and tell me that this time is different than the others in your long list of bad choices… than I’m sure there’s a chance we could all find a way to make this work for everybody’s happiness”

I remembered the kiss less than twenty minutes before, and how it made me feel like magic, like flying, like being hopeful in the future – before the past came back to haunt me.

“I can assure you, ma’am”, I said, thinking of the kiss barely twenty minutes before, and how it had felt like magic, “Harry’s not like anything that’s ever happened to me”

“So you do understand there’s so much more at stake here?”, she asked. “Because, darling, if you can understand the dangers of making him another name on your long list of past lovers, than perhaps you could consider taking things slow, you know… making things right. Making sure you won’t change your mind after he moves back home”

“I just can’t help but think that the first step to take things slow should be to stop worrying about a future that’s still so long away-“

“Long?”, she asked. “I know a lot can happen in a month, dear, but-”

“I’m sorry?”, I interrupted – another big no-no on Edward LF’s list.

“Harry’s moving back home in less than a month”, she said. “I thought you knew, it’s been decided about a week ago”

I don’t know how to fully explain the way my heart appeared to have sunk down to the ground. Technically speaking, I was aware that wasn’t biologically possible, but still, that’s how it felt. Like it wasn’t there anymore, where it was supposed to be. Like my chest was heavy with its absence. I gulped, breathing heavy.

“I’m sorry, I have to go make dinner now”, I said. “Let me assure you, ma’am, whatever is supposed to happen between Harry and I, we’ll deal with it as maturely as we can so no one is left… damaged”, ‘not more than we already are’, I thought. I gave her a small curtsey and took three blind steps back, as protocol dictated, before turning my back and walking a corridor, thankfully ending up in the kitchen.

I put the knife down, pausing the carrot chopping for a minute so I could breathe, knowing having an anxiety attack on that day would be the final drop. I took deep breaths thinking back at her words. ‘It’s been decided for a month now’. I thought back to Harry’s hand splattered in my waist, pulling me closer than it seemed possible, his soft lips on mine, the questions echoing in my mind so much louder now.

A couple of hours later they all stood from their stools around the kitchen isle or took the pans out of the fire and turned to the doors, bowing or curtsying. Automatically, I stood up, thinking it might have been the Queen. It wasn’t. When all their heads went down in synch, I saw him,
looking straight at me, seeming to have ran all the way there from the woods as soon as someone called the hunting over.

“Oh, hello, everyone, sorry to bother”, said Harry, walking in, appearing to have forgotten that was the effect his coming into the kitchen had. “Please go about your work normally, we don’t want Ms. Silva to accuse me of trying to sabotage our bet”, he smiled at me, just for a second, and I heard the general laughter from the staff. Harry looked awkwardly to the ground walking slowly to where I was.

He sat on the stool beside me at the big wooden kitchen isle. “…Hi”, he said, finally. I felt the air escape me. I stopped the knife mid-air and looked at him, trying to contain a smile.

“…Hi”, I whispered back, before turning my attention back at the onions, resuming my work, trying to look normal, feeling like if I stared at him for as long as I wanted people would somehow know. How much could you fit into a simple ‘hi’? I felt like mine carried the world.

“You know…”, he started, on a low tune so only I could hear him, “when I said nothing could make me run away from you… I didn’t realize I couldn’t stop you from running away from me”

“I didn’t run away-“, I said, looking up fast, not realizing he had brought his face really close in order for me to hear him speak. His eyes almost blinded me. “…from you”

“…You kind of did”, he whispered.

“No, I didn’t”, I insisted, in a sigh, putting the knife down now. Harry smiled.

“You didn’t?”, he asked, not teasingly, but rather genuinely. I sighed, without taking my eyes from him. I knew what he was asking: ‘so you’re not regretting it? So you liked it?’., because if I didn’t run, it might have meant that I wanted to stay. And that on itself might have meant I wanted to kiss him more and, truth is, I might have. I might have kissed him again before he had even let me go. I could have kissed him more. I could have caved in and told a lot more than I should. I could have grabbed his hand and brought him back to my room. We could be there right now if it hadn’t been for the little interruption. We could have kissed again and erased a lot of questions and raised many more if it hadn’t been for his brother and cousin finding us before we ourselves remembered where we were.

I knew I would have kissed him again because I remembered how that kiss had made me feel, the kiss before the cooking, before Camila’s words, before I ran back to the castle. The kiss after the fifteen seconds he gave me to prepare myself. The kiss without witnesses, without excuses, without a fake-dating agreement, without reason.

I remembered how I could feel my whole body light up when he tightened his grip around my waist. How I tried to memorize the way his hair felt in between my fingers, or the way his nose brushed on mine every time our heads shifted from one side to the other. I tried to remember how there was no space between our bodies and yet we seemed to keep on getting closer and the way he gently bit my lower lip a few times. The parka I was wearing started to feel too hot but all I could bring myself to do was grip his hair tighter; kiss him harder; I kept feeling my skin get hotter making my body number but I couldn’t bring myself to care.

By the time our lips parted from one another with an intense sigh from both of us – much longer afterwards-, his hand was on my cheek; the tips of his fingers gently tracing my ear, my jaw, my neck. It felt impossible that I could feel his skin on mine, but there it was. We were touching. Our foreheads, our noses, his hand on my cheek, my hand on his neck; I could feel his skin. And it only reminded me how much I’d longed for this.
I never knew it was possible that something that makes you so happy could also make you so sad, but there we were. I felt sad because I knew it was a bad idea and because I knew it couldn’t last and I should say we should pretend this never happened, but I couldn’t bring myself to. Because kissed me. Harry kissed me and I felt happy. And not just the kind of happy you feel when you’re thirteen and your crush calls you cute, no. I felt a different happy, a deeper happy. The kind of happy like when you’re seven and your mother tells you if the weather changes, she can take you to the zoo or the park, and you run to the window and, sure enough, the skies are gray and it’s pouring rain and you can see the trees dancing to the wind, but suddenly the idea of a boring Saturday vanished because if the weather changes, you’ll go the zoo! And you don’t care that the sky is gray and you can hear the thunders and the lights are flickering a little bit, because if – just two little letters magically put together – if in a few hours the rain stops, you’ll get to go. And sure, it’s a big if. And all the signs point out for you just staying home all day, but you’re still happy because you have hope. That was my kind of happy when he kissed me: I felt hopeful.

Then, like in a poorly written soap-opera, we heard a cough. Harry’s arms and mine dropped from each other and we stepped away like two kids being caught in mischief.

“Well, that is one way of going pheasant hunting”. William stood a few feet away with Peter by his side, both with smirks on his face. “No need to look so guilty, you two. It’s not like we caught you shagging”, he and Peter laughed.

“Jenifer,”, their cousin started. “You asked to call you when the cook arrived from the grocery store with your requests? The maid asked to fetch you”

I inhaled, trying to process everything at once. The embarrassment of being caught along with the information he was giving me. Yes, the cook. With the food I asked. So I could cook the dinner Harry had bet I couldn’t. Before he kissed me changing absolutely everything.

“Right. I should go… Deal with… that”. Harry looked at me, opening his mouth like he wanted to say something. I waited a while, changing between looking at him expectantly and looking around or at the ground awkwardly. Maybe he also didn’t want to break the moment – but it was too late now, the moment was gone, Imogen was there, and I had to go. Maybe he didn’t know what to say. Maybe he felt like he had said enough already and it was my turn – it felt like my turn – or maybe he had said everything with the kiss. Whatever it was, I finally took a deep breath, and started walking towards Imogen. “Right. So I’m gonna… go now”, I said, looking back at him shortly. Then I saluted and turned.

Let me pause here, because I feel like this needs a bit more freaking out: I saluted. And left.

Closing my eyes so thigh in disbelief at myself it hurt, I walked fast up the trail back to the Castle and the only words in my mind now were I saluted?! Like the actual gesture of bringing your hand to your forehead and then forward in a fast motion. Feeling mortified at myself, I drove back to the Castle and changed out of my hunting clothes to go make dinner, not before, as I’ve mentioned, Camila found me.

Back at the kitchen, Harry waited for an answer.

“No”, I granted. “I didn’t run, I just had… things”, I gestured to the food with my hands, “to do”

“Right”, he said. “The bet. I just thought… maybe what we were doing before was more appealing to you”

I couldn’t help but smile now. I tried to make it ironic, though. “Are you trying to purposely distract me so I’ll lose the bet?”, I joked.
“So I’m… distracting to you?”, he asked with a pretentious smirk on his lips.

And I found it, right there in the deep of my gut: a resolute want to kiss him again. To let go.

“Harry…”, I said, slightly smiling as I picked the knife back up, trying to get back at work to distract myself.

“I just want to understand”

“Understand what?”

“You”, he said. “How-what you’re thinking right now. Where do you stand”

“What does that mean?”

“Jen, I told you I have feelings for you”, I lost my breath again. He did? “And then I gave you time to call me crazy and run or ask me to stop, and you didn’t. So I kissed you. And you kissed me back… which was amazing… until you did run away… So now I’m confused. I kind of want to know what you are thinking right now… Where you… stand”

“You didn’t say you-You just… sorta… you didn’t say anything. You just… kissed me”

“I-I thought… you knew that’s what I meant”, he held my hand. I pulled it away.

“Harry…”, I started, not being able to forget what his stepmother said. Trying to focus in one problem at a time. “You think maybe you… Think you like me… because I’m impossible?”

“What?”

“You do seem to have a thing for things you can’t have… so I was wondering, first Chelsy, now me… Do you think you kind of subconsciously just think you like me because you know you can’t have me?”, he looked at me puzzled for a few seconds.

“…So, I can’t have you?”

“That’s not… what I said. You know what I’m talking about-”

“Okay, so you think I chose to fall in love with Chelsy”, he was starting to sound loud now, and a bit mad, “knowing she would never love me more than her career? You think I just decided to make myself a laughingstock for the entire world-?”

“That is not what I meant-“

“You think I choose to love her knowing she’d leave me?”

“It’s not what I’m saying”

“Than what are you saying?! Because it doesn’t make sense to me. And the answer is no, by the way. I’m not doing it on purpose! Why would you even think that?”

“Because for what other reason would you decide to kiss me after all this time right after you set a date to move back here?!”

He leaned back, closing his eyes on a sigh. “Who told you?”, he asked, lowly.

“So it’s true? You set a date to move back?”
“I-“, he sighed. “I know it wasn’t my father or Will, ‘cause they were out hunting with me. And I know it wasn’t granny, because she wouldn’t go talking about something that is not directly related to her. So, either Kate or Camila. Wait, was it Edward?”

“Harry.”, I stopped him, angry, “stop making it about them. It’s about you. Why didn’t you tell me you were moving back to London⁉️”

“Because I’m fucking in love with you!”, he shouted, suddenly. The kitchen staff went silent and looked at him in a scare. Harry looked down awkwardly.

I put the knife down and took off my apron. He followed me out the kitchen’s back door into the big stone deck, walking till the stone steps leading down to the back garden.

“Okay, let me try this again”, he started.

“It’s a bad idea”, I interrupted.

He looked up. “I know”

“It could never work”

“Jen, I know”, he said. “But that’s not what I’m asking here”

“…what are you asking⁉️”

He took a moment to think. “Sorry about what I said inside, let’s… Pretend I didn’t”, I sighed in relief. ‘Yes’, I thought. ‘That’s good’. “Not that it isn’t true”, I closed my eyes in a frustrated sigh. ‘Aaand there we go’. “But you’re afraid of commitment and there’s a lot at stake so I’m sorry I… said that. That being said, let me make this clear”

He spoke calmly, slowly. Firm, but taking his time, getting the message through.

“I have feelings for you”, I felt my heart pounding faster in my chest. “But, if you don’t feel about me the same way I feel about you…”, I looked down, afraid he’d see the truth in my eyes, the complicated, messy, troublesome truth that I did felt the same. “Than is fine. Really, it’s perfectly okay. Just tell me. Let me know. Tell me you’re not interested. I get it. You kissed me back because… I don’t know, it happens, I guess. We’ve been alone too long. We’ve been pretending for too long. Maybe you’re attracted to me, which doesn’t have to mean anything other than that”, I so wished I was simply attracted to him. “But if you- I-“, he sighed. “When you don’t say anything all I have to go on is what you do. And I told you that I would stop if you asked and you said you didn’t want me to. And you kissed me back”, he stepped closed, staring at me intensely. “You hands held me tight… You held on to my hair… And when we sleep together, in the same bed no matter how far we go to sleep, we always wake up close. In the middle of the night when I wake up with you saying something really weird in your sleep you always put your arm around my waist and press your nose against my beck”. Breathing got difficult as he kept bringing the little things up, the little things I had fought to ignore. “And sometimes we kiss when there’s no need to, and you look at me for longer than you have to-“

“Are you saying I look at you? And so I must like you?”, I asked, getting angry maybe at the wrong person.

“No”, he sighed. “I don’t know! What I’m saying is I don’t know! What I’m saying is… what I’m saying is I like you. And I wanna know if you like me. And it’s okay if you don’t. But if you do, if there’s a chance you like me but you’re just scared… if you’re afraid because I have to move back here… And you’ve been hurt before. And you don’t believe in long distance. And we don’t have a
future together unless you give up on everything you love… Or if you’re scared because talking about the future is inevitable with me and you’re too young to think about this just yet… If you like me, but you’re just scared of all of this or of saying it…”

“I’m not scared”, I lied.

Of course I was scared. All of my sessions with Dr. Arrow usually came back to the same point: my fear of commitment or intimacy over my family history and previous experiences. Another point of discussion was also my stubbornness to admit said fears.

“You’re not?”, he asked.

“I’m not”

“Than…?”, he opened his arms, asking ‘than what?’ Do I feel the same way? Do I not? He wanted an answer, a definition. “Just say it, it’s fine. You don’t feel the same way”

“I didn’t say that!”, I said, a bit too eager, maybe.

“Then you-you… do?”, understandably, he seemed confused. And eager for an answer, which he deserved.

I tried to give him one. “I-“, I felt the knot on my throat and my lips trembling. I wanted a world where I could just tell him how I felt and we could turn this fake relationship into a real one and just… be happy. Why did there have to be so many issues involved? “It’s just not that simple!”

“Right!”, he said. “Because no answer is ever simple for you, right? Nothing is ever definitive. I’m not asking you to spend the rest of your life with me, Jenifer, I just want to know if you have feelings for me. It’s a yes or no question. If you don’t, that’s fine, we’ll try and pretend it never happened. I’ll do my best. But if you do-Jen, if you do…”, he took a couple of steps closer, “Tell me so I can convince you that we can do this”

“We can’t!”, I shouted. “Oh, my God, Harry, that’s the point! I’m your girlfriend, but I’m not. And now this”, I gestured to the two of us, “Is happening. And there’s so much involved that goes so beyond the two of us. And you’re moving back here-you like me but you still decided to move back to London-“

“I didn’t decide this”, he said. “They gave me an ultimatum; I had to! I have to be back after the concert”

“A week ago. They gave you an ultimatum a week ago. Why didn’t you tell me? Why didn’t you tell me when it was decided?”

“Because I was trying not to have feelings for you”, he took another step closer. “I’ve been trying for a long time, Jenifer, and it… sucks. Because I suck at it. But I tried. So we could stay friends. So I could move back and- with time, maybe, I could let you go. So I didn’t have to ruin your life by bringing myself into it. But earlier today in the woods the only thing I could think of was how much I fucking lo-“, he sighed, stopping himself. “How much I wanna be with you… How tires I am of pretending I’m only holding your hand because someone’s watching us when the truth is I feel like there’s a part of me that’s missing if I’m not holding your hand. And how we’re running out of time. And how I needed you to know that since I’ve met you it’s like my whole life to this point has been a black and white movie and all of a sudden when you look at me I feel like the world is colorful again”, I breathed heavily trying to keep myself from crying. I looked at him. “And, you know what? Yes, I love you. I’m in love with you. Jen, I love you”
As he waited for me to tell him if I felt the same or not, I thought of the last time someone told me they loved me.

Tyler’s whisper in bed that I chose to ignore. His distressed face in his trailer asking, begging for me to let him quit so he could try and get over me.

David, in his dressing room in our penultimate night on Broadway the year before, right after the round of meet-ups and press after-shows. I had walked into his dressing room as I had done every night before and sat on his lap, kissing the cheek I had recently fake-slapped. ‘Sorry about the slap, Professor Calahan’, I told him, as I had done so many times before. ‘I’ll survive, Miss Woods’, he told me, wrapping one arm around my back, resting the other hand in my thigh. On the months of pain that came afterwards, I had relived that moment many times, and every single time the one thing that infuriated me was the hand in my thigh. I told him the cast was going out for drinks and he said he was gonna go home, he kissed me. He was leaving me to get back with his wife, and he still kissed and touched the thirty-five years younger girlfriend he was planning to break up with. I remembered how I made a joke about him not going because he was old, and he laughed like he always did, and I kissed him like I always did after joking about his age. And then I did what I always did after that: I told him I loved him, to which he answered ‘I love you too’.

Brody had told me he loved me on our second month together. We were fighting, I don’t even remember about what, and he raised his hands, trying to make me stop talking, and said ‘I love you, babe’. In the most… natural tone. As if it was no big deal. As if it was what he was supposed to be feeling.

I remembered Adam, before the scars, of course. Our last night in his apartment, our hiding place in Queens, after we had another session of passionate angry sex after a discussion about a subject from one of the classes. I had wondered in my half-sleepiness if we could be together forever, because I wanted it. He made me feel alive. I told him that I loved him. And he looked at me, blowing out the smoke of a cigarette, looking like bad news in blissful haze and said: ‘don’t’.

I remembered his smile. I remember laughing as if he was joking, because how could he not be? How could he mean it after all we had been through, I knew sure enough it was complicated and messy, but all good things were, right? I had tried to convince myself of that for the previous three months we had been involved and so it was pretty easy to ignore his ‘don’t’. I told myself he wasn’t ready, I told myself his life was complicated and he would come around and I have hated myself for it ever since. If I concentrated hard enough I could still hear his voice and the way it sounded when he said it: don’t. The last thing he ever said directly to me. Just like the crying from the next morning was also still loud and clear in the way it haunted my worst nightmares.

Looking back, the only real I love you I ever heard that was probably genuine was Tyler’s, and that was the worst one of all, the one I hadn’t been able to reciprocate, the one that had ruined so much.

These men flashed in my mind as I stepped away from Harry, and all the pain they caused me and I had caused in them was suddenly very vivid in my heart as I heard him sigh. I looked back and saw the way Harry’s hands almost rose again before he closed it in a fist. I wondered if it was so he would stop himself from speaking any longer, or from kissing me again. I hated myself for wishing he would.

He was still waiting for an answer, which he deserved. The tall, kind, polite, guy with the annoying confidence that had decided to live his life for his country and for people in need. The orange hair and blue eyes framing the big smile on his face, the family-oriented man who had suffered a lot and still just wanted a family of his own. The guy that made me wish love was easy had just said he loved me.
“Don’t”, I told him, trying to sound resolute, like Adam had. Trying to speak really softly to cover the way my voice almost broke.

Harry smiled, sad. He looked at the ground and nodded. I waited for him to say something.

“…ok”, he said, finally. “I won’t bring it up again”

Then I said I had to get back to dinner and, feeling like I was dead inside, I turned around and went back into the kitchen.

At around the time dinner was pretty much done, the cooks said they could finish without me, and so I went up to take a shower before the traditional drinks before dinner. I had missed afternoon tea – on purpose – under the excuse of cooking, so I knew it’d just be rude to try and miss drinks too.

I went to my room and, with the assistance of ever-so-helpful Imogen, got ready for dinner. Of course, in the monarchy, getting ready for dinner meant pretty much the same routine I had to undergo before red carpets in Hollywood considering the dress code was black tie (so, pretty Downton Abbey). Luckily, that was one of the few parts of Harry’s world I was comfortable with: dressing up.

Imogen ironed my peach Elie Saab dress while I showered and after that, all there was left to do was braid my hair and put make-up on – I wondered if red lipstick would be considered tacky until finally realizing there’s only so much I could bring myself to care. Next thing I know, I’m hanging out in yet another fancy living room holding a glass of gin and tonic and making small talk with historical people.

That was the start of the most awkward, nerve-racking dinners of my life. Throughout the entire evening I was singing show choir soothing ballads in my mind in order to keep the little itchiness I started to feel in the skin of my stomach – signal my anxiety and stress were raising a lot higher than I cared to admit.

I will, however, admit I was nervous about the food, so after making another quick stop at the kitchen to make sure the instructions on how to prepare the plates had been followed rightly, I waited until the Queen said it was time for dinner and walked into the room with the others. I stood up on her invitation and explained the meal we were about to eat with all of the confidence I could gather, after all, if there was one thing I knew I was sure of was that Brazilian food was appreciated everywhere.

“Your Majesty, Your Royal Highnesses, ladies and gentleman”, I started, “Thank you for the honor of cooking for you tonight. I could not have done it without the assistance of your much talented kitchen staff, ma’am, it was an amazing learning experience since, unlike what some people may think”, I looked at Harry for half a second, making them smile, “I am able to cook. Hopefully, you’ll enjoy it as much as we enjoyed making it. Tonight I bring you a little taste of Brazilian cooking, so to start our dinner, we have Feijão Amigo, a soup made primarily out of black beans that roughly translates as Buddy Bean. It has torresmo on the side, which is basically pork cracklings and according to my father the best thing about our country beating even our football skills”, they laughed. “For the salad, I bring you Salpicão, a salad made of chicken, ham, raisins, carrots, apples, olives, and mayonnaise, and topped with shoestring potatoes”, I heard pleased noises of agreement from the table. “Our main course is traditional southern barbecue with roasted potatoes and farofa, which is fried cassava flour with bananas, egg and bacon and I promise you tastes better than it sounds!”, they laughed again. I felt my nerves calming down, as I knew I had this. Nothing beats Brazilian food, not even juicy secrets from the outsider celebrity guest.

“Finally, for desert, we have chocolate pavê with brigadeiro. Pavê is a kind of pie in layers of biscuits and filling and brigadeiro… Well, one can’t really explain it, you must try it and find out,
I’ll just say I’ve never met a Brazilian person who doesn’t like it. And I’ve heard you have a special place in your heart for chocolate, ma’am”, I looked at the Queen, “so I guarantee after you’ve tried it it will be your new favorite desert”

“Dangerous promise, Miss Silva”, she joked.

“I stand by it”, I smiled, and she nodded.

“Well, then by all mean, let’s eat”

“As we say in Portuguese, bom apetite!”, I sat down, happy to see their smiling faces, and smiled at my napkin that I quickly placed on my lap.

“How do you say it?”, the New Zealand Prime Minister asked.

“Bom apetite”, I repeated, and around the table they all repeated to each other as well as they could and I did my best not to laugh.

I tried my best to ignore Harry’s look from my left, but, finally, I had to look at him. He was smiling at me.

“What?”, I asked. He shook his head, smiling a little bigger before looking back at his plate.

“Nothing, I just… sometime I get the feeling you could fit in anywhere”. I forced a smile at the table towel.

“I’m an actress”, I sighed. “I’m good at making people believe in things that aren’t necessarily truth.” He looked at me, then gave me a sad smile before fixing his own napkin in his lap.

“What?”

“Nothing, just-“, he sighed. “That’d explain why I seemed to think that you might have felt the same way as I did”. As I felt as if I had just been punched in the stomach, the footman showed up with the entry, which was the Buddy Bean soup, and I settled in my seat, staring straight ahead as they served us.

“Thank you, Mark”, I said to the nice guy from York I had gotten to know earlier that day as we cooked after he placed the torresmos in my plate. I noticed Camila raised her eyes in my direction – not that it had been loud, especially as everyone had started conversations with whomever was sitting by their side, but seeing as she was sitting directly in front of me, she could still hear me. I wondered if it was against protocol to thank the staff for serving. ‘Great!’, I thought. ‘Another thing I’m probably doing wrong on top of everything else!’. Not that I could care that much about Camila’s opinion right then, I was too busy caring too much about Harry, who seemed to think I much definitely didn’t have feelings for him.

“I’m sorry”, he whispered, leaning closer to me. I looked at him. “I’m trying not to make it awkward. I know I’m failing, but I can do it. I promise. I’ll let it go”, I nodded, not strong enough to formulate an answer, and we went back to out food.

I realized, much too late maybe, life isn’t a movie. You can’t just edit out the awkward silences and jump to the next important scene. Life is full of awkwardness and boringness and having to sit through dinner with your fake boyfriend’s family pretending nothing’s different when inside you feel like everything has changed.

The rest of the meal went simply and calmly, and next thing you know the Queen is done with
desert (“I must say you were right, Miss Silva, this is quite extraordinary!”) and due to protocol, if the Queen is done, everyone else is done too.

We made our way back into the living room after dinner where I finished my drink and a conversation about fashion with Autumn and Kate before realizing Harry had left the room with his father and hadn’t returned yet. I waited for him to come back, realizing how dependent I was on his presence, his smile, being in the same room, even if we weren’t talking straight. Even if he was just there, where I could see him. ‘Is this what it will feel like after he’s gone?’, I thought.

The Queen said goodnight, and the others started going up to their rooms as well. William and Kate went to enjoy the fact George was already down to play a round of poker. The Prime Minister and Timothy were having cigars somewhere. So I bid them goodbye as well and made my way up the stairs back to the room, thinking it was a good thing Harry wasn’t there so I didn’t have to do the awkward goodnight kiss everyone would expect considering I was his girlfriend. If I’m being honest, I was a little upset about it.

I got to my room and Imogen had ironed my pajamas. I took my earrings out, and unmade my braid, putting my hair up in a bun and taking my heels off. As I sat in the stool before the dresser, staring at the corner of one of the drawers, Imogen asked if I wanted help to change into my sleeping clothes. I didn’t move, or spoke, so she asked again. I looked at her, realizing I didn’t want to change. And I didn’t want to go to sleep without letting Harry know what was on my mind and why it could never work. So I told I’d be fine and, after she left, I walked out of my room and across the hall to Harry’s room.

I felt the rug on my feet as stood before his door wondering if I should knock, or if he was even in already. He was probably still downstairs. I decided to walk in and wait, or that’s what I told myself when I opened the door without really knowing why. After I closed it behind me and turned to the bed to look around, Harry was there.

I gasped. “Oh, I’m-I didn’t think you’d- Sorry to-“, I coughed. “Sorry I didn’t knock, I was just gonna come and wait for you… I didn’t think you had come up already”. He smiled, sad.

“I just got here”, he said.

I waited for him to ask what I was doing there or to say he loved me again or to ask for an answer again or to do the one thing that would have hurt the most: to say I should go, because he just couldn’t be just my friend right now. Like Tyler did.

“So should I send you the check or just make the donation straight to the foundation?”, he asked, making me laugh.

“Whatever works better for you”, I told him, smiling at the rare sight of him admitting defeat. I walked towards the bed, sitting in the small two-seat couch at the end of the canopy bed.

I had missed this, us laughing like good friends before the awkwardness took over. Before he fell for me; before I fell for him.

“So there’s the service tomorrow”, he started, unbuttoning his cufflinks. “Am I gonna be graced by the sight of you in a fancy big hat?”

I smiled. “A small, gentle, fascinator, I’m afraid”

“Damn”, he lamented jokingly. “One day, Silva. One day”, we laughed. Then there was silence again. I watched as he took his vest off and the tie then, finally, the shirt, staying in the white under
They’re nice”, I said. “You’re family… I’m having fun”. He looked at me in a way that said ‘please’. “I am, really. They’re kind and nice and fun”

“They were rude to you the whole day”

“Not all of them”, I said. “And I can handle it, I’m a big girl”, he nodded. “Did you, uhm… Talk to your father about the whole… Camila-thing before the hunting?”. He sighed

“Yes, I uh- I just did, actually. I apologized for being rude, for being rude in front of our guests, that’s not how I was raised, bla-bla-bla. I told him I already apologized to Camila, but there I refused to apologized for defending my girlfriend, considering Camila was also very rude”

“She did say she was sorry, you know”, I said, ignoring the way my heart skipped a beat when he said girlfriend. “She apologized to me”, sort of.

“Good…”

“What did your father say afterwards?”

Harry took his shirt and folded it carefully, taking his time before speaking. “He uhm… He said… He said Camila- He said…”, he sighed. “He said you had an affair with a married man”

I closed my eyes, feeling a punch in my stomach, keeping the tears. Harry went on.

“Then I told him I didn’t want to hear it, that I- I had already told him not to tell me, because I didn’t want to know unless it came from you. I said if he said one more thing about it I’d come up and pack and leave, so he didn’t say anything else”, I bit my lip now, finding it harder not to cry. I looked at the windows on the other side of the room so he didn’t see my distressed face. The fact he kept on trying to give me the right to my privacy even when it would be so much easier to just hear what he was in for, especially as he knew what kind of thing he was in for… it made my heart ache. “So I- I told him- I said goodnight”, as I wiped my cheeks and breathed heavy still avoiding his eyes, I couldn’t hear anything. I wasn’t sure if he was still folding his shirt or if he wanted to say anything else or if he wanted to ask about it. So I decided I should just tell him.

“I was in college”, I said, my voice smaller than I wished it would be.

“Jen…”

“Ally doesn’t know about it”, I went on, standing up and facing him, trying to make myself stronger. “It wasn’t supposed to have gone that far-“

“Jenny!”, he shouted, stepping closer to me and holding my arms. I realized how long it had been since he had called me Jenny – he usually only did to spite me, only when it was just the two of us, since he knew I hated the nickname. “You don’t have to tell me. This doesn’t change anything… I told you I don’t want to hear it unless you want to tell me and I meant it. I just told you this because I thought you should know I, kind of… accidently heard it. But you don’t have to say unless you’re ready to- If you’re ever! I don’t- I don’t need to know”

He let go of my arms and put his hands in his pocket. I noticed he did that a lot: putting his hands in his pockets. He also snapped his fingers when he was trying to leave any state of laziness or procrastination to go do something productive. And he used to put his hand on his chest when he felt uncomfortable, like walking into a crowded room of looking at him. I noticed how I loved every single one of those things.
“I’m sorry I ruined everything”, he said, after the longest time as I recomposed myself. He was still standing just in front of me and his eyes hovered the room as he tried to avoid mine. “I’m sorry I picked the worst time to let you know I felt. I’m sorry my family has been making you uncomfortable and I’m sorry I dragged you all the way here for this. And I’m sorry I’m sorry if you’ve felt cornered… I’m trying really hard not to be a jerk about this… I can’t be sorry for the kiss, though. I can’t. Honestly, I loved it. And I would do it again. And again. Probably in a different timing, but, yeah, I’d… I’d give anything to kiss you again”, he looked at me. “And if I’m being honest, if you’d let me I’d keep on kissing you for the rest of our lives”, he paused, letting me process it. “But mostly I’m sorry if I’m trying to be your boyfriend when all you need is a friend. I’m sorry for not knowing you don’t want this and I’m sorry for making this awkward. But please don’t push me away. If you want me just as a friend, tell me, so I can leave this in the past and I can try and keep you in my life in however way I can, even as a friend. Because I can’t lose you, Jen. So I need you to tell me if you just want me to be a friend, because I will be-“, I raised my arm and touched his cheek with my hand, bringing him down to me. Without a second thought, I leaned in, standing in my toes, and kissed him.

It took him a while in the shock, but eventually his arms embraced me, bringing me closer and making me feel even warmer, like being burned up from inside in the best of ways. We kissed for a while and, finally, I bit his lips gently, breaking us apart. We took a few seconds to get our breaths back before we actually got apart again. I pushed his chest away gently and he let go of his embrace.

We stared at each other silently for a while as I tried to figure out what the hell was I doing.

“Go out with me”, he said.

I looked up. “What?”

“I wanna go out with you”, he repeated, “on a date. Like, a romantic date. That people go to when they wanna get to know someone they’re interested in”

“Harry, I’m sorry I kissed you. I got really carried away-“

“So you don’t like me?” he asked. I stared down, biting my lip. “Let’s make it right. Let’s do things like they should be done, like we should have done… Go out with me”

I breathed heavily, before finally speaking again. “I’ll tell you what’s gonna happen. We’re gonna pull through the next month, I’ll have to spend the next week in LA, so it shouldn’t be too hard. Then you’re gonna move back here. And at first we’ll talk. We’ll Skype everyday for the first two weeks, and then I’ll have something for work and I’ll be tired, so I’ll skip a day. And then you’ll be sleeping when I can talk and we’ll just miss another day. And one day I’ll read something online about you going out with your friends, and I’ll spend an entire afternoon staring at the picture of some pretty blonde who’ll probably be with you and you’ll ask if I’m okay and I’ll say I’m fine before finally letting you know I’m jealous. And you won’t be able to make me believe I don’t have a reason to be, because you won’t be there. At some point in the future, if we make it, my friends will start to get married, to people from the business because that’s all they know, and they’ll give talk show interviews talking about how they met their spouses, and they’ll show pictures of their babies, talking about how fast they’re growing, and they’ll post videos on Instagram sharing the little joys of parenthood, like they see their old friends from school do on Facebook. They’ll do it to try and feel like they’re normal, because no matter how much we like what we do, we still just want to do what regular people do. And meantime, you and I will avoid ever talking about the future, because we know we don’t have one together. And if we make it,
years from now we’ll end up breaking up over the phone because you read somewhere that I’m
dating someone I’m in a movie with, even though it’ll probably not be true. Even though what
weighing on you will probably just be the fact you’re being pressured to find a wife and I’m not it.
So you’ll go on to find some prep school blonde with a job she feels good enough about leaving
behind, and I’ll find some actor, maybe a musician or an athlete that I’ll meet in a talk show studio,
or at work, and I’ll talk about him to people, and post pictures, and plan a future, because I’ll be
allowed to. And we’ll think back at each other, but with time, day after day, will slowly leave each
other behind until finally we’ll only remember each other sporadically as we read something
somewhere about something we’ve accomplished”, I had tears in my eyes, and I spoke slowly.
Harry allowed me to speak without interruption and I prayed he could admit to himself he knew
what I said was true. “Time heals everything, and it’ll heal us too. We just have to try. So why
don’t we just cut the time we’ll spend in pain and just try to stick to being friends, ok?”

He didn’t say anything, so I just turned to the door planning on saying good night, when he spoke
again.

“You said a lot of things but you didn’t say you didn’t like me”, he said. “You kissed me again,
and you spoke again about how hard this will probably be, but you didn’t say you don’t feel the
same way, can you say that? Say you want me to stop”

“I can’t!”, I said, turning back to him. “Guess what? I am scared, Harry. I’m terrified!”

“That shouldn’t make you run away…”, he said. I sighed. “It won’t make me! I said nothing would
make me run from you, Jen, you won’t either. Not unless you tell me you don’t want me… Stop
letting your scars make you run from me-“

“Of course I run away, it’s all I know! But don’t ask me to say I don’t feel anything for you”, we
stared at each other. Him, understanding maybe a little more of what was happening inside of me.
Me, wishing I could keep my mouth shut longer. I turned back to door, and made my way through
the room. “I should go to bed… And we”, I tried to sound resolute, as if I was sure of what I was
saying. “We’ll be fine, Harry. It’s just a month. Then you come back and, uh… And time will pass,
as I said, day after day, we’ll get busy and talk less and less and eventually… we’ll let it go”

“I’m not letting you go, I’ll remind you. I’ll remind you day after day that time is passing and I’m
not changing my mind”, he said. “Not unless you ask me to. Not unless you can look me in the
eyes and tell me you’re not interested. Tell me to stop”

“Stop what?”

“Reminding you”, he said, “I’ll keep reminding you everyday if I have to, so you know that this
isn’t the type of thing one simply let’s go off, that I’m not running away from you. That I’m not
gonna give up on you”

What I did then, since I didn’t trust myself to do the right thing and tell him what he was asking me
to – that I wasn’t interested-, was to just leave. I smiled, turned around, grabbed the doorknob and
left. I didn’t even dare say goodnight because I knew it might have come out as an ‘I love you’. I
took a shower after I got back to my room, I tried to remain strong on everything I had told him. I
got into my pajamas and took my make-up off. I brushed my hair and teeth and left in the open my
outfit and fascinator for the service on the next morning so Imogen could easily find it to be ironed
– all while wondering how could I still be strong for a whole month and not give into him; and
what exactly did he mean by ‘I’ll remind you’.

And after all of that, when I finally got under the blankets to go to sleep, I grabbed my phone to set
up an alarm, realizing it was past mid-night and realizing Harry had texted me since I had left his room. The seven words on it were engraved on my mind, making me smile through the confusion throughout the night:

‘Another day over. Go out with me.’

Chapter End Notes

Jen's outfit for the black tie dinner:
Go Out With Me

The messages changed every day.

It was almost lunch time on Monday in the studio in central London where I was shooting for my Glamour UK cover when I got message number 2:

‘Another day, nothing’s changed. I wanna go out with you’.

I sighed, partially happy at the reaffirmation of his feelings, and at the first sight of his resilience, and instantly remembered those weren’t supposed to be good things. I sighed again, turning the phone down, convincing myself I was right. ‘Just give it time’, I thought. ‘He’ll let it go soon enough’.

But he didn’t.

On Tuesday, I got a text saying ‘I was told I should put my job in front of you, but it won’t hold me like you do. Go out with me’. I remembered the song, Gold Rush, by Ed Sheeran, because it had been the line we used as caption on the picture for Instagram I posted on the day I accepted to do the publicity stunt with him. This time, I started to notice the pattern, and how that was the third text on a daily basis since we had kissed. So I decided to reply.

‘Are you trying to take credit for that line? ‘Cause I’m pretty aware that’s an Ed Sheeran song’, I said. Less than a minute, and I got his answer:

‘I know. We used that line the day we started “dating”. Just thought you should know how long it’s been and I haven’t forgotten that. Like I won’t just forget how I feel about you’. After that, I didn’t reply anymore.

On Wednesday I got on the plane to go back to the States. Harry was going to stay until the end of the week to attend an exhibit for charity. When I had settled on my seat on first class, right before turning down my phone, I got another text. This one read ‘Settle down with me, and I’ll be your safety. Kiss Me, Ed Sheeran. This one was playing in the Met Ball when we kissed. That was the day I realized I wished you were my real girlfriend. If you manage to let go of your fears and go out with me, I’ll be your safety. I promise. Have a good flight’.

I sighed, feeling sad, but unable to stop a smile for crippling into my face. I didn’t reply.

On Thursday, I was in Los Angeles going from meeting to meeting to audition to meeting. I signed a contract with Adidas for a one year sponsorship – they wanted to film me getting ready for Victoria’s Secret and to take me to watch the World Cup games next year in Brazil -, and I met with my accountant firm and decided it was time to hire a chairperson to properly manage my organization in Brazil if we wanted to really take things to the next level, and considering I was getting more and more unavailable I couldn’t do it alone anymore. I also finally made the final, official decision of turning the casual and informal way we had been managing my businesses in Brazil into a serious Company (Silva Co.), which was a huge deal so it was a good day, and a very serious day, which might make you understand just how big of a deal was it that with just one text Harry managed to make me forget all of it.

‘Turn the lights off, I’m falling in love with you. Wouldn’t you like to kiss her? Love at First Sight - The Brobecs. You played this one in the pier to calm yourself after your attack the day we got in Brazil. That was the first time I almost kissed you without anyone looking. I sort of wish I had. Go out with me’.
I was in the middle of a meeting and had reached for the phone thinking it was an email I was waiting from the Brazilian lawyer. This time I didn’t even try to contain the desperate smile on my face.

“Miss Silva?”, my accountant called out, “Do you agree with the terms for personnel?”

“I…”, I looked at him, trying to remember what he was talking about. I sighed. “Can we make a quick break?”

I went to the bathroom, knowing I needed to focus and knowing Harry wasn’t helping. I typed a reply.

‘I’m in a meeting, Harry. You’re not helping’

‘I send one text a day. It takes you two seconds to read. The rest of your twenty-four hours are me-free. If you still can’t stop thinking of me it’s just my point being proven’, he texted back.

‘What is your point exactly?’

‘You love me. You’re just too scared. It’s fine, I don’t mind reminding you you have nothing to be scared about’

‘What if I mind????’, I answered.

‘I meant what I said right before I kissed you, Jen. Tell me to stop and I will. Tell me I’m making you uncomfortable; tell me you’re not interested. Tell me to stop. But if you can, consider WHY you feel uncomfortable, and if you think I could make you happy, let me. Go out with me’.

I felt my heart racing in my chest and my palms sweat. I wiped them on my jeans and stared at the bracelet in my wrist, the shiny H – for Hermès, or, in that case, for Harry – weighing on my heart like his words. I started typing the word stop in reply and froze before pressing send. Instead, I wrote:

‘I’m blocking your number’, and sent. I pressed my eyes shut wondering, if I knew I was right, if I knew nothing could happen between us, then why couldn’t I just tell him to stop?

Harry sent another text before I left the bathroom to go back to my date with bureaucracy. It said: ‘Isn’t it easier to just tell me to stop?’

‘Isn’t it easier for you to just not harass me?’, I replied.

‘Let’s get this very clear’, he wrote back, ‘I’m not harassing you. I don’t think it qualifies as harassment when I made it very clear that if you just type four different letters on your phone I will leave you alone… you can’t, can you?’

‘This is insane, Harry’, I wrote, biting my lip, hating the smile I wore on it.

‘I’m willing to bet you can’t bring yourself to tell me to stop’. I laughed, hoping there was no one else in the other bathroom stalls.

‘How much money are we talking about?’, I joked. As I waited for his response, I tried to type the word stop again.

‘Money? I thought it was pretty clear we’re betting a date’. I sighed, deleting the four letters I had typed.
'Let me make you a counter-bet: I bet you’ll stop this eventually'

‘You already tried that’, he replied. ‘It’s what started this whole another-day-another-text thing’

‘That’s it, I’m blocking your number. I have things to do. Bye Harry’, after that, I turned my phone down and went back to my meeting, trying not to wonder if he had sent anything else.

On Friday, I had an audition, a lunch meeting, and an appointment with Rachel Zoe, my stylist, to pick my dress for the Teen Choice. When I met Monica at Rachel Zoe’s studio, we were waiting for Rachel to bring me her picks when she turned around to me.

“Before I forget, Harry called me just now”, she started, making my heart skip a beat and reaching for her purse. “He asked me to give you a message, he said he’d be in meetings all day so he couldn’t call”, or he just thought I blocked his number, “So he asked me to print an email he would send me, and asked if I would be so kind as to avoid looking at it, which I did… So I’m assuming it’s something kinky”, she handed me a sheet of paper with a grin on her face. There, in the center of what looked like a Gmail inbox, I read:

‘All at once, everything is different, now that I see you. Tangled. I remember watching you sing this, dancing in the wall around that church in Brazil, thinking it had to be the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. You made everything different when you walked into my life. You made everything better. Go out with me?’

“Ooh, what’s kinky?”, Rachel asked coming back into the room, having just heard the last thing Monica said, which was good because it helped to distract me from crying over the paper in my hand.

“Jen’s boyfriend”, Monica said, and I looked at her, vivid. Rachel smiled.

“It’s not- He didn’t-”, I stuttered, “It’s nothing kinky”

“But what happened?”, Rachel asked.

“Jen’s boyfriend wants to convince her not to break up with him after he moves back to London, so he’s sending her all these messages-”

“Monica-“, I shouted, “Wait, what? How did- Where did you get that from?”

She tried to look innocent. “Harry told Thom, who told me”. I sighed. Of course Harry had already come up with an excuse for this nonsense.

“Oh, honey, what’s there to think about?”, Rachel said. “If he’s going to these lengths clearly he’s invested”

“Can we focus on dresses… Please?”

So Rachel gave me some dresses to try out and, following Janine’s advice, I picked another dress by a British designer, a red and short and beautiful Alexander McQueen, that I matched with golden Steve Madden stiletto heels.

On Saturday, after I had a promo shoot with Adidas for the short videos we were gonna make of my preparation for Victoria’s Secret (to be aired on MTV), I got home ready to work on my dress sketches for a little bit. So after I ate and showered, I took a drink and my notebook to the pool table and was about to start doodling when my doorbell ringed.
“Morning, Miss”, the guy greeted me when I went to check it. “I have a delivery for Miss Rose?”

‘Rose?’, I thought. ‘Oh! Rose-angela!’

“That’s me!”, I said, sounding a little surprised, getting the huge vase of the biggest amount of light pink roses I had ever seen. “Thank you”, he left.

I knew this reminded me of something I just couldn’t get my head around what exactly was that. The card held these exact words:

‘You were in college working part time waiting tables, left a small town, never looked back… A flight risk with a fear of falling, wondering why we bother with love if it never lasts… We’re taking on the world together and there’s a drawer of my things at your place. I’ve learned your secrets and figured out why you’re guarded, we’ll never make my parents’ mistakes.

Mine, by Taylor S. But you know that. You sang this one for your sister to go down the aisle and no one could stop looking at her, but I couldn’t take my eyes from you. That was the exact moment I realized it. Thomas noticed it too. He asked, ‘is everything okay?’. Still with my eyes on you, I nodded, and told him: ‘I’m in love with her’.

Go out with me?’

And then I remembered that first time he sent me flowers, after we had made people find us out, because Thomas made him apologize for the paparazzi harassment. I still remembered the second card. ‘Dear Jen, fuck you. Love, H’.

I laughed alone in my living room remembering those times about six months before when everything seemed easier. I didn’t fail to notice the difference in the card. This one, without the pre-typed ‘Dear _____,’ and ‘Love, ______’. Just the message. Just the song. Just what he meant and nothing else. I dropped the card in the table and sat in front of the flowers, staring at them. I had never had a favorite flower, I just always thought different types went well with different occasions and now I wondered if roses were my favorite flower. I liked it. I liked the soft tone, and the layers of the petals and how cliché of a choice it was. For some reason, I liked it. Probably because Harry and I were cliché, the biggest one of all.

If I ever gathered the guts to tell people the truth about it, I knew that’s what they were gonna say, that it was such a cliché. There had to be at least three different movies about people fake-dating who ended up falling in love with each other.

I considered today’s message. Left a small town, never looked back. A flight risk with a fear of falling, wondering why we bother with love if it never lasts… that was me. I didn’t just knew that, I didn’t just get that. On that day, on that Saturday when my brother and Livia got married, as I was singing this as she went down the aisle I had already made the connection. A flight risk with a fear of falling, wondering why bother with love? That could be the title of my autobiography.

We’re taking on the world together and there’s a drawer of my things at your place. That pretty much sums up our fake-dating adventure. I’ve learned your secrets and figured out why you’re guarded, we’ll never make our parents’ mistakes. That part held such promise I couldn’t stop the tears from gathering in my eyes anymore.

When I had left my room the previous Sunday’s morning, right after the Saturday that changed everything, (after waking up to the terrible bagpipe “music” that trembled the entire castle – a tradition, apparently), I ran into him in the hall. Harry seemed surprised to see me, and then his eyes went down my legs and made their way back, from my Sophia Webster white pumps with
golden needle heels, through my Dolce & Gabbana light yellow lace dress (the Hermès bracelet he had given me in Rhode Island not escaping his eyes) all the way till my hair pushed back in a low ponytail and the weirdly shaped fascinator in my head. At that, he smiled.

“Look at you”, he said, the smile never leaving his lips. “All… regal”, I laughed, rolling my eyes.

“I believe the name of this is morning dress”

“Suits you”

And there it could see it, the difference in his eyes. Before, they were sad. They were unquiet, unrest, fleeing mine as soon as an adjective had left his mouth, or when my eyes refused to leave his. Now they were determined. Confident. Patient. All-knowing. And joyful. Hopeful, even. That’s how he looked at me now. Now he hadn’t even used an actual adjective, merely the words ‘suits you’. That had been enough with the powerful look in his eyes, his hands on his pockets and the confidence in the way he refused to break eyes contact, it was enough to take my breath away. It was enough of a reminder of everything that had changed.

Now that he was keeping his distance, trying not to suffocate or pressure me, I could tell just how dependent I had become on our fake-dating excuse for touching. Now he was avoiding any unnecessary physical contact, I was painfully aware of how reaching out for his hand as we walked had become my default – just like sitting unnecessarily close, or putting my arm around his back. Now he was avoiding doing these things and I was trying to do as well, it was obvious how much I missed it.

When Sunday came, so came Janine, Monica, Eddy, the limo service, Rachel Zoe’s assistant with my dress, shoes, clutch and jewelry, my hair dresser and makeup artist, and after lunch, I got ready as I talked to Livia on the phone and she shattered my dream of finding out if I was supposed to be having a nephew or niece.

“I understand is your decision and I have to respect it”, I joked. “But is the wrong decision and I hate you”

“Calm down”, Livia laughed. “Five more months and we’ll know!”

“Five months is too damn long, Livia”, I cried. “I’m sorry but I don’t think is too extravagant of a request to want to know if I’m getting a nephew or a niece”

“But you’ll have to wait, because we want to wait”, I hear my brother’s voice on the phone.

“Yes, for now just know the baby is perfectly healthy and growing normally. Also my nausea is finally stopping, which is good, although I am just happy is not twins or triplets, considering that’s a thing in your family…”

“I’m happy for you, Liv, but I still want to know the gender”

“So, how is Harry?”, she attempted a change of subject. I sighed, staring at my reflection in the mirror as my hairdresser pulled my hair up in preparation for the Teen Choice Awards I was supposed to be going to in about an hour.

“Harry is…”, I started, thinking back on the eventful, to say the least, weekend we had had at Scotland, and the very weird week so far, “…great”

“You sound funny… Did something happen in Europe?”
“Europe was fine”, I said, deciding it would be more efficient to just shift the focus to something else. “I’m just worried about seeing Selena tonight”

Fun fact: for once since this whole thing started, I wasn’t lying. You will remember that merely one and a half months prior I had lost my phone that somehow immediately appeared in the hands of someone who release all of the information they could get to, including some really personal photos of me with Harry and my family at my brothers’ wedding and text messages I exchanged with friends. The most concerning texts - the ones with Tyler, when the world found we had been involved before, something our fans had been wishful dreaming about for years – and with Selena – when the world found out not only that she was still in a relationship with Justin Bieber, but that Taylor and I hated it, and that he was on coke. Justin Bieber came attached to an army of thoughtless pre-pubescent, small minded girls, and the press always jumped in whatever wagon they could to make money, so, as you can guess, I was now much of a public enemy number one. On her side, Selena had been evasively okay with the whole situation so far and then just said she had to take care of something and said goodbye.

“I thought she understood it wasn’t your fault”, Livia said on the phone.

“She does… But still, she’s been really dismissive lately, like she’s avoiding me”

“Maybe she’s just avoiding being associated with you not to spur any more rumors”, my brother added. I wondered how that was supposed to make me feel better.

The Mediator was nominated in the 2013 edition of the Teen Choice Awards in ten categories: for Fantasy/Sci-Fi Series, me and Tyler for actor and actress Fantasy/Sci-Fi, for male and female personalities, and for the new category Choice TV: kiss. I, separately, for female hottie, choice smile and choice style icon (yay!). Our other cast mates were also nominated for breakout star, TV villain and male and female scene stealer, so although we had won most of those awards many times in the past seven-going-on-eight years now, it’d be nice to go out winning them one last time.

Now let me tell you something about the Teen Choice Awards: it’s terrible. Let’s be honest here, in the ranking of best award show ceremonies, the Teen Choice only lost for the Kids’ Choice, or maybe the Brazilian version of the VMAs, which both managed to be worst. Red carpet interviewers in general were bad, and the made up jokes of award show ceremonies often sucked, but somehow the Teen Choice took it to a whole new level every damn year. This time their thing was ‘setting a world record for twerking’. The only thing that did make it enjoyable were seeing friends I missed and seeing the fans (both literally, who came to see us in the red carpet, and figuratively, who made themselves present by voting so we could win).

I made my way through the red carpet, stopping for pictures and to talk to the fans, taking selfies, signing things and was filmed answering inopportune questions as ambiguously as possible. Luckily, when it came to the interviews, we managed to stay on good topics and the only problem was the annoying little airplane flying way too low and being way too noisy.

“So, This is your last Teen Choice nominated with The Mediator”, the interview started, as energetic as joyful as they always were, “And you have a movie coming out! How exciting is your life right now?!”

“I know!”, I smiled, “The movie actually comes out in a couple of months, around November, and we’re so proud of it”, I had to raise my voice, not sure the microphone was enough so that I could be heard over the airplane noise. “And, you know, just having the chance of seeing everyone from the Mediator again is always a blessing, we’ve been like a family for seven years, almost eight now, which is not gonna change just because the show is over, although it makes it harder that we don’t get to see each other every day, so days like today are good for that”
“Yes, and you guys are nominated again this year in fourteen categories…”, she started speaking louder too, “There is a plane flying really low around here for the longest time now, can you guys hear us ok? Hopefully you can… Anyway, you also have something really exciting coming… Tell me, I’ve heard you’ve done it before, is it true? Is it like one of those hidden secrets from your early career?”", I laughed.

“I did the catalogue when I was in college”, I told her. “I was seventeen, going on eighteen. But I didn’t do the catwalk, so I’m really excited. I love fashion, I love Victoria’s Secret, and they’ve redefined fashion shows over the years. Also my friend Taylor will be singing, so that’ll be a blast, to spend the day with her. Also, Adidas and MTV teamed up-“

“I’m sorry”, she interrupted, closing one ear and getting closer, “I can’t hear you, who did what?”

“Adidas!”, I said. “And MTV, have teamed up and we’ll be shooting a series of short docu-videos of my preparation for the show over the next couple of months, they’ll be up on youtube on Adidas’s channel, and will also air on MTV”

“That’s amazing! I’ve always wondered how do you prepare for something like that- I’m sorry, what is this plane?”, she looked up, using her hand to block the sun. “Is that a- Oh, is a message plane!”

I imitated her gesture, looking up, and, sure enough, there it was, a small yellow plane carrying those narrow banners with a message. In the red letters I recognized the words from Ed Sheeran’s Cold Coffee, and the very familiar request at the end:

‘You can stay with me forever or you could stay with me for now. Go out with me’

I could actually feel the blood rushing on my face as my cheeks got redder. I lost my breath as I let out a laugh.

“Oh, that’s so romantic”, she looked back at the camera, “It says go out with me! Someone’s going all out to ask someone out. Isn’t that sweet?”, she looked at me.

I tried to remain casual, and I tried to say that I didn’t think it was that big of a deal, because I knew that Harry was watching this from home, but I couldn’t stop the smirk on my face. “That’s… That’s something”, was all I could say.

It was time to go, and so I said goodbye and made my way through the red carpet, taking pictures with as many fans as I could, ignoring the amount of people who were photographing the plane circling the place, and running into some of my former cast mates along the way.

When I finally found myself inside the Gibson Amphitheatre and Monica lead me to my roll, I managed to find my seat before she did, because all I had to do was find Selena.

“Oh, thank God you’re here”, I said, when Monica ripped the sheet of paper with my face on it so I could sit and walked out to deal with some thing or another.

“What do you mean? You knew that I was coming”, she said. Sel was wearing a dark green dress and nude shoes and she had her hair straightened down.

“Yes, but I thought you were gonna ask to sit somewhere else”, I admitted, feeling too tired to try and dance around my concerns.

“Why would I do that?”, she asked, in a funny tone, avoiding my eyes.
“Because you’re mad at me”, I said, watching her roll her eyes. “Don’t deny it, Sel, I can see it. You’re mad at me. And you’ve been avoiding me. I know it’s because of the leaked texts”

“I’m not mad at you”, she said and I looked her straight in the eyes, “I know it wasn’t your fault, Jen. I get it. I’m serious”

There were a lot of people passing by, getting to their seats, and taking pictures of us at a distance, so I decided to let it go and talk to her later about it. I tried to act like there wasn’t anything bothering me, but I couldn’t stop thinking about my best friend so clearly mad at me, and about the stupid prince in New York who managed to send a plane with a message.

“Your outfit is pretty”, Sel said, attempting a change of subject.

“Thanks”, I said. “So is yours, I love your hair”

Selena noticed how unquiet I was, with my legs crossed, swinging my feet up down and biting my lips. “And how are you?”, she asked. “How was England?”

“England was fine”, I said, still staring at a crumple in the carpet, absentmindedly forgetting to filter my words, “Scotland was the problem”

“What happened?”, she asked, sounding concerned. ‘Everything’, I thought. I looked at her, remembering I couldn’t tell her. Or anyone. “Did the royal family not like you?”

I laughed, humorless. “You could say that… But it’s…”, I sighed, swinging my feet a bit too much now, and closing my hands in fists trying to keep myself together. Finally, deciding I really wanted to talk to somebody, I spoke up. “It’s Harry”. Sel turned a bit in her seat, getting closer to me, and, before I knew what I was doing, I took a deep breath and told her as much as I could without telling her everything. “Harry is in love with me and the truth is I’m in love with him but he’s moving back to London in, like, a month, and I know nothing can happen between us- I, uh- I mean, what I mean is… more than it already did, like, we- we can’t be anything serious because we both know we have no future together. And it shouldn’t have come to this, we knew when we started this that it was a bad idea and it couldn’t have come this far, but it did and now he’s asking me to give us a chance and I desperately want to but I also know it’s a bad idea and I’ve ignored feeling that something is a bad idea in the past and I can’t do it again, because I don’t think I could handle any more pain.”

I took a deep breath, realizing I didn’t really want to talk about it. Sel held my hand, which didn’t help. I held onto to it.

“Did you talk about it in therapy?”, she asked, her voice soft as velvet, probably afraid to cross any lines in what came to the T word. “What did your doctor say?”

“I couldn’t go to my session this week”, I said. She gave me a sarcastic look. “What? I had meetings. A lot going on-”

“Jen, come on”

“Fine! I…”, I sighed. “I didn’t want to go… I didn’t wanna talk to him”

“But why not?”

“Because I know what he’s going to say”, I told her, rolling my eyes. “Dr. Arrow. I know what he’s going to say… He’s gonna say that the fact that I’ve never had a good relationship in my life makes me self-sabotage all good things that I come across, including in my personal life, which is a result
of my crushing fear of commitment, which basically means I’m paranoid of loss and messing up, which has brought me to show early signs of obsessive compulsive disorder”, I said, mocking the way Dr. Arrow usually over-analyzed everything I said, “He’s gonna say that I stress-drink to avoid my problems and that I over-exercise because I’m scared of not looking good enough for the shallow industry I’m trying to make a living out of and that has made me a perfectionist, workaholic because at the end of the day my career is the only part of my life I haven’t screwed up yet”, my tone went down at the last of the sentence, as I tried to swallow the lump in my throat as I realized the harsh truth in my words.

Sel’s grip on my hand was stronger now. We stayed silent for about half a minute as I bit my lip, taking deep breaths, trying not to have a meltdown.

“Do we need to get out of here?”, she asked, in a whisper. I tried to say ‘yes, please’, but all I could do was nod emphatically, so she pulled me up by my hand and we rushed our way out of the row and up the back of the theater back into the halls.

We quickly found a bathroom and after Sel made sure all of the stalls were empty and we were alone, she locked the door.

I found a settee sofa beside the sinks and sat down, letting a few tears roll down my face trying to dry them out as quick as possible so I wouldn’t ruin my makeup.

‘Because at the end of the day’, I repeated in my mind the words that had just left my mouth, ‘my career is the only part of my life I haven’t screwed up yet.’

“You know what?”, she asked, pulling out her phone, “we need Tay”

We heard the Skype dialing tone and then Taylor’s big smile was on the screen.

“Hi, you guy-“, her over excited tone quickly changed as she saw my crying face, “Oh, God, what happened now?”

“Jen just realized her fear of commitment is keeping her from giving the relationship a chance”, Sel shot on, and proceeded to explain my meltdown moment from just a few minutes before, and I stood up and went for the paper towels to try and salvage my makeup. “I mean I get where you’re coming from, J, but if you love him, don’t you think you owe it to yourself to give it a chance?”

“Because I love him, I owe it to him to help him get the kind of relationship he deserves”, I said, “an uncomplicated one, that his family can’t say anything about, that won’t damage his image”

“Don’t you think that’s his choice?”, Taylor asked. “If he’s choosing you, and asking for a chance, that means he’s willing to fight for it”

“We shouldn’t have to fight for it”, I complained. “It isn’t fair”

“Well, yeah”, Sel said, “But that’s not how life works”

“Okay, you know what?”, Taylor said, putting her business woman’s voice up, “Help me understand this. Do you want to be with him?”

I took some time, cleaning my cheeks and fixing my eyeliner. I changed my weight from one foot to the other, and then, I told them. “…Yes”

“And does he want to be with you?”
“He’s been going through some pretty wild lengths to let me know that, yes, he does”

“Then there you go”, Taylor said, “What’s the problem?”

“And don’t say he’s a prince and I’m a commoner because this isn’t a lifetime movie”, Sel added.

“But that’s the thing”, I complained. “I mean, not the commoner part, although it’s true, but I’m an actress. You know the drill. I dress too slutty, I kiss guys in movies, or have to do sex scenes, I take political and social justice stands, I’m too young to get married and he was engaged just last year, and he lives in London-“

“Okay. You know what I’m hearing?”, Sel stopped me, “I’m hearing you making up a bunch of crappy excuses to, yet once again, run away from your happiness”

“Just because they’re unfair doesn’t make them crappy”, I told her. “These are very real issues-“

“Jenifer, for the love of-“, she stood up, “He’s a prince?! He lives in London?! He was engaged last year but isn’t anymore?! His family is too conservative?! Don’t you hear yourself? You’re talking about things that have nothing to do with him, but with his reality which is out of his control! He didn’t choose to be born a prince; he doesn’t have any power over his family’s opinions or over the fact he has to move back because of their image or whatever. He was thrown in this ridiculous public life and is doing the best he can and he still wants to be with you, who, may I add, chose this life out of your own free will”

“This has everything to go wrong!”, I protested.

“Maybe! Maybe not! And if it does, it’s not because you don’t love him, which you clearly do, or because he doesn’t love you! It’s not because he’s not good to you! Or that you’re not good to each other, it’s because the world sucks”, she said, “You’re treating this as if he is the problem, but he is not. All of the reasons you’ve been naming for months now are things that don’t have anything to do with him! At the end of the day you know this is you shielding yourself from pain and in return keeping your own happiness away”, she stood up and gave me the phone. I pointed the camera at the mirror so Taylor could see us both. Sel put her hands in the sink’s granite, looking at her reflection.

“Are you okay?”, I asked, finally, after I saw the single tear running down her cheek. “I know you said you were okay with it, but if I can just say it again… Sel, I’m really sorry about Justin and the texts”

“Justin and I are not together anymore”, she said, clearing the tear away with a hand and fixing her hair. I heard Taylor’s sigh over Skype.

“I’m sorry, babe”, she said, “But I hope you know, you are so much better off-“

“Oh, my God, seriously?!”, Selena said. “You’re doing this again?”, I looked at her, wide-eyed. “Yeah, you know what? I am kind of mad with you two. But it’s not because the stupid text leaked, I know that’s not your fault. I’m mad because the text existed in the first place!”, I turned the phone to me, just to check if Taylor was hearing this, and in her face I found as much perplexity and guilt as there was in mine. “Almost ever since I started going out with him you two have always hated it”

“For the record”, Tay said, “We don’t hate him. We do hate how troubled he made you”

“I know!”, she said, turning back to the mirror. “And I get that now… But, most times it would have been great to have more support instead of criticism”
“Criticism? And you’re telling me I should be with Harry?”, I asked.

“Jenifer, is not the same thing!”, she said.

“Yeah, because I can see Harry is a bad idea, but you couldn’t tell Justin was!”

“No!”, she said, “Jesus, I just said this. Because what you think is a bad idea is the situation Harry and you are put in by people who ultimately shouldn’t have a say in your relationship anyway. The signs I ignored were about him. Like how Reckless and immature he’d act when he was away, like how his eyes were always prying around, and I had to convince myself there was nothing wrong with it and I was just being paranoid, those are the signs you should keep your eyes opened for. Of a guy that makes you feel bad about yourself. Not his family, because he’s not his family. Him. Do you have that with Harry?!”, she was silent for a bit. “Didn’t think so… You doubt him when you don’t have any indication you should… Don’t be weary of someone until the give you a reason to, Jenny”

I thought about it. I knew what Selena was talking about, the prying eyes in guys, always with an arm around you, but looking for something better around, I had seen it before, I had lived it before. Harry had never been like that. He made me feel good. Like I was the only thing that mattered, the only light in the darkness, the priority, worthy of interest, the most interesting person he knew.

“That was the bad part…”, Sel said, and I brought my attention back to her. Her voice was cracking now. “Having to defend him to everybody because all they saw was what was on the news, but I knew who he was. And how could the same guy that made me feel so special in the beginning make me feel so crappy at the end?”, I walked up to where she was and hugged her. We cried in silence for a while.

“I can’t see right. Are you guys hugging?”, Taylor asked. We laughed between tears.

“Okay”, Selena said, after we finished fixing our makeup once again, “What are you going to do?”

“I don’t know… All this time my therapist has been trying to make me understand I deserve a real, normal, healthy relationship… “, I said, “To make me understand my decisions about my life shouldn’t dictate either I am worth of being loved or not and I want to believe him, but-“

“Let me stop you right there”, Taylor said, “Do not take your brokenness and call it progress, Jenifer. Don’t hide under your fear and call it choosing yourself”

“Yeah”, Sel said, “You say you can’t be with him because you want to be happy, but isn’t that just making you more miserable? Staying away from him?”

“Maybe some relationships aren’t meant to last forever but why should it mean they shouldn’t be lived at all?”, Tay asked.

“Because at least we get to avoid the pain”, I said, in a low voice, sad at myself that I actually believed that.

“If you go about life using the bad things as an excuse to avoid potentially good ones, what’s the point at all?”, Taylor added. “You’re just gonna end up not living because there’s always gonna be bad things. We don’t run from it, we face it. Together, with the people we love.”

We let a few seconds go by, while all you could hear was the sound of our noses sniffling.

“You know, one day”, Selena said, more energetic, knowing we had to go back for the ceremony, and we needed to let the subject go, “one day you’ll go to an award show without crying tears of
mascara in the bathroom”, we laughed.

“I wonder what I’ll be crying about at the Emmys”, I joked.

“Well, the two of you need to get your asses outside and go win some awards because I’m watching and they’re starting and you’re not gonna be there.”

Selena and I said goodbye to Taylor, and after making sure our makeup was in place, we ran back to the amphitheater, feeling better and ready to handle the awkwardness and lameness of another Teen Choice Awards.

In a rain of confetti and way too vivid colors in the screens, One Direction opened the night with Best Song Ever, and after the usual boring open monologue, they won like nine awards. After the break they made a joke about other people getting a chance at the TV awards now that The Mediator was over – just to have the other co-host go ‘oh, but they’re still nominated today’, cue done-with-your-shit face by the first one. We laugh, because at least is a compliment. First host goes ‘oh, well, there’s always next year’.

Selena won Choice break-up song, Lea Michele gave a heartfelt speech about Cory Monteith and before I could stop myself I was thinking ‘at least I can be with the person I love if I want to, when she can’t’.

They gave an award to Ashton Kutcher and his cap, Jim Parsons was adorable as ever and Hayley Williams and Paramore sang Still Into You, the words in Hayley’s voice echoing a bit too much in my mind:

‘You felt the weight of the world fall off your shoulders and to your favorite song we sang along to the start of forever, and after all this time I’m still into you. I should be over all the butterflies, but I’m into you, and baby even on our worst nights I’m into you. Let ‘em wonder how we got this far ‘cause I don’t really need to wonder at all… Yeah, after all this time I’m still into you’

Miley Cyrus beat me for the style icon award and I was still thinking of these words when they announced the Fantasy/Sci-Fi category, that we won, and to our opening theme, we all marched to the stage to get our last ever surfboard together. As we were walking, we overheard through the speakers:

“How from The Mediator, Nolan Peace is your Choice Breakout Star, Anna Bostic and Chris Braden are your Choice Female and Male Scene Stealers. Jenifer Silva is your Choice Fantasy/Sci-Fi actress, Choice Female Personality and Choice Smile and she wins the Choice TV: Liplock with Tyler Alvin, who’s also your Choice Fantasy/Sci-Fi actor!”

As our big group settled on the stage holding amongst us nine surfboards (one for the show, one for liplock, one for Chris, Nolan, Anna and Tyler and three for me) and I got in front of the microphone decided to make it quick so this torture of a show could be over soon, it dawned on me that they had given us all of the awards the Mediator has been nominated for, much like they had done for seven years. So I did lose female hottie and style icon, and my life was a mess and they had terrible jokes, but at that little moment, up on a stage with my best friends in front of a crowded theater with the whole country watching, I didn’t feel so bad about it. I actually kinda liked it.

“Hi”, I said at the microphone, not sure how to express our gratitude, “The show is been done for a few months now, and every time we keep thinking it might be the last time to let you guys know how grateful we are for your dedication and love, and time and time again, because of that dedication and love we end up being able to thank you again, so, once more, with just as much love in our hearts as the first time around seven years ago, thank you! Thank you so much for
being amazing! And thank you for letting us into your lives and for being a constant part of ours, never stop! Thank you! We love you!"

We left the stage to the sound of cheers, shed some tears in the way, and so it was finally over.

I can’t tell you when it happened, mainly because I’m not sure. If I tried to pinpoint the moment I let the stress of my love life out the window and decided to just embrace chaos I wouldn’t be able to. So maybe it was the advice from my friends, my exhaustion, Lea Michele’s tears or Paramore’s song, but when I woke up on Monday ready to get back to New York and to get ready for the Fashion Show, I wasn’t worried about getting a message or about not getting a message. I just felt... enough. Like I was enough. Like what I had was enough. I don’t know how to explain it, but at some point between the previous night with my friends and getting ready to leave for LAX to go back to Manhattan, I could breathe better. Not even the paparazzi bothered me that day, I even prepared to take them on, dressed in loose boyfriend jeans, Louboutin nude pumps and a black crop-top with a brown leather jacket. I even did my hair half up in loose braids.

I got out of the car at LAX with Vodka in my arms, Monica- who was just dropping us off and staying in LA - and Eddy carried my bags and I just worried about protecting Vodka and looking good for the pictures.

“Hey, Jenifer!”, I heard one voice louder in the middle of the shouts and flashes, “Cute dog, what’s his name?”

“It’s a she!”, I said.

“Jenifer, can you hold her up this way?”, I ignored him.

We waited for the cars to stop so we could cross the street and enter LAX. Eddy by one side, Monica by the other keeping the creeps away, the loud sound of flashes all around us. I tried to focus on good things, holding on to my good mood and not letting go, scared out of my mind the stress and panicking from the past week would come back. It was like the sun had come up and I had to make it stay like that. I looked at the sky, squinting my eyes from the shine trying to soak in the warmth.

Ed pinched the skin between my jeans and my crop-top, I looked at him. “Someone told me to make sure you looked that way”, he said closer to my ear so the paparazzi wouldn’t hear it, signaling the side behind us, in front of the entrance of the airport. I looked over, in big white writing in the sky, there it was:

‘EIGHT DAYS AND COUNTING
YOU’RE LOSING THE BET (TO BE CON-’

The airplane writing it was just finishing what I assumed would be a ‘continued’. This time it was harder to fight the smile on my face.

Monica pulled me by the hand as I had started to laugh and we crossed the street, I had to try and make the smile smaller, staring at the ground as to not look too happy in those paparazzi pictures, but it was hard when I imagined Harry googling sky-writing companies in LA and making a call to order that non-sense of a line and then calling Eddy so he would tell me to look the right way. Rachel Zoe’s words ringed in my head: ‘If he’s going to these lengths, he’s clearly invested’.

I spent the five+ hours of my flight changing between planning what I had to do for work and wondering about Harry. To be continued? What the hell was that supposed to mean? Did he mean...
today? Like, two messages in a day? Or like, the bet would be continued for another week? In another sky? I sighed, so aware of the annoying fact he was getting to me. He was getting under my skin.

We arrived at JFK, picked our bags and Vodka and finally got into a cab back home.

“Why are we turning here?”, I asked, a bit after we entered Manhattan, “Isn’t it faster through Second Ave?”

“It’s the way I was instructed”, the driver said. I looked at Eddy, who gave him the address.

“We’re going through Times Square”, he said, and I gave him my best wide-eyed desperate look.

“What? I heard it’s a good day to go through Times Square, it’ll be worth it”

“Nothing it’s worth driving through Times Square in rush hour”, I told him. “You grew up here, you know the-”, I stopped talking and took a deep breath, understanding it. “It’s Harry, isn’t it?”, by my side, Eddy was looking out the window, but I could see the outline of a smile on his face.

“Edgar Louis Harold, who do you work for?!?”

“Honestly, that’s a bit confusing right now”, he admitted, which was true. He had been excused from his contract with Harry for a few weeks to work for me, but technically he still worked for him, although we were already in the works of hiring him permanently. “Look, I don’t know which kind of bet you guys are in right now, but he’s your boyfriend and he’s clearly trying to do something good, so just let him do his thing, what’s the harm in just taking a detour? We’ll be home in no time”

‘He’s your boyfriend’, he said, the words echoed in my head throughout the entire extra time we had to be in the car because of the detour. I felt annoyed at being played, sure, but the butterflies in my stomach told a different story: I was nervous, excited? Maybe anxious was the right term. I wanted to know what was next, what was the next thing Harry had done.

As we crossed Times Square, I looked at Eddy, expecting he would give me some kind of signal or deliver a message or something. Is someone gonna stop the car and give me more flowers? Are we gonna get stuck in a flash mob? Will Ed Sheeran descend from the sky with a string guitar and serenade me to- ‘Oh’, I thought. ‘There it is’. My heart skipped a beat, the smiled carved itself into my lips and before I noticed it, I was laughing. It was okay, since it was just the clueless driver and Eddy in the car – plus Vodka, but she was still waking up from her pill-induced sleep from the flight. So I just let it out, enjoying the lightheartedness of the feeling. Eddy heard me and leaned into my side of the car, curious.

“What?”, he asked. “What is it?”, I rolled my eyes, and pointed at the screens, the huge and numerous before colorful and shiny screen that filled Times Square had all faded to black with white letters.

‘GO OUT WITH ME’, they said.

“Why is he asking you out?”, Eddy wondered.

“It’s a long story”

“Isn’t everything always with the two of you?”, he asked. My smile faded a bit. ‘It is, isn’t it?’, I thought. I imagined how the hell he had done that, and what kind of favors he had had to charge.

I looked at the time, I had about half an hour before Harry left the Halo’s office back home. I grabbed my phone and found what I was looking for. I heard the dialing tone as I watched the
screens past as we left Times Square.

“Hey, girl, it’s been so long!”, I said when the person I needed picked up, “Listen, we have to chat some time, but right now I’m kind of running against the clock… Is there any way I can ask for a huge favor? Do you still know that guy that does media for Times Square?”

It was about an hour later when I was sitting in the couch in my living room, shoes off, jacket off, tangling my toes in the furry rug as I talked to my mom on the phone when I heard someone opening the door.

I had given Eddy the night off and with Monica in LA and Alessa in France, there was really just one other person who had a key.

“Hey, mom? Can I call you back later? Harry is here…”, I heard him before he actually walked into the living room from the hallway.

“So get this”, he was saying, no hello, nothing, “I’m coming home from work just now…”

“Hi, Jen”, Clark said, coming behind him, circling the room before going to check the rest of the apartment for possible hiding kidnappers of murderers or whatever. I waved at him.

“Yeah, bye mom, I’ll talk to you later. Love you”

Harry ignored both my phone conversation and Clark and went on, “…and as usual we’re taking the Times Square route from hell, except today is a good day, because today I wanna make sure my message of the day is up there where it should be, because, you see, I’m in this bet with a girl…”, he had hands in pockets, walking slowly about the room with a silly smile on his pretty face that just… made me happy somehow.

“Let me guess”, I stopped him, with a smile, still sitting on the couch, “You’re betting a date”

“Yes!”, he raised his hand in my direction, sarcastic, as if surprised by the coincidence of my knowledge, “How did you know?!?”

“I’m in a very similar bet apparently, although sort of against my will”

“Well, then someone must like you a lot”, his look intensified, as the sarcastic smile became a playful smirk. “…I look up at the screens and where my message should be, all I read is”, he looked at a wall in the back, at something inside his mind, remembering, “Two can play this game, Mr. Pea”

I was trying to keep an ingenuous smirk on my face, but I found the situation so fun I was already wide-smiling.

“Aham…”, I said.

“Yeah”, he went on, “Intriguing message, and at first I thought, well, what a coincidence, someone else has a message for Times Square in the same day I do, and what the hell kind of last name is Pea, by the way? And that’s when I realized it, Pea sounds an awful lot like P, the letter, not the vegetable. In which case, I remembered where I had seen the name Mr. P before, and I finally realized it was on your”, he turned at me dramatically, “phone! Because that’s how you save my name so people don’t know if they hack it or you lose it again”, he smiled at me. “Now what do you have to say about it?”

“Well, it would seem that you’re not the only one with friends in high places”, I said, getting up
from the couch and going to the kitchen.

“Okay, but how did you get a message up there so fast?”, he asked, and I could hear the smile in his voice. “Seriously… Or, did Eddy tell you?!”

“He didn’t. I had the idea after I saw yours”

“Well, how? It took me days to get that done!”

“Really?”, I turned around to him, smiling, perfectly pleased with myself. “I got it in, like, twenty minutes”

“Yeah, which is really unfair, how did you do it?!”

“I have friends in high places, or, you know, I have friends who have friends in high places”

“Well, that’s…”, he put a hand on his hip as I sat on a stool in the kitchen, “Quite unsettling”, I laughed.

“Well, you should feel quite unsettled”, I imitated his accent, “because it would seem I’m not just playing your game, I’m actually winning considering you broke your own rules today and sent me two messages”

“Ahá, but I didn’t!”, he argued, “I wrote to be continued in the first so they’re technically one”, he picked up Vodka on his arms, a victorious grin in his face.

“Oh, yeah?”, I asked, leaving my seat and going to the fridge, “And what is this?”, from there, I took the big round cake that I had found when I got home. It had white frosting and decorated with pink sugar flowers and a message in the center that read ‘A CAKE FOR A DATE?’.

“Oh, shi- that…”, he sighed, seeming disappointed, “…was not supposed to be here until tomorrow, actually”. I laughed.

“Are you serious?”

“Yeah… Hey, Clark”, he stopped his Protection Officer, who was making his way through the door to leave back to the penthouse at that point, “Who got the cake here?”

“Uh, I just picked it from the bakery”, he answered. “Nate was in charge of bringing it down tomorrow…”, I laughed at their plan making skills.

“See?”, Harry asked, an apologetic smile on his lips, “you were only supposed to see it tomorrow”. I smiled.

“…Sorry”, Clark added.

“It’s cool, Clark, thank you”

“Bye Jen”, he said, leaving again.

“Bye, say hi to the guys for me”

“Will do”, we heard the door open and close.

“So…”, I started, “Since I already saw it… Can I eat it today?”
“Well, why not?”, he put Vodka down, “can I have some?”

“Well,”, I said, picking two forks and handling him one, “I suppose you’ve earned it considering you honored my love for passive-aggressive pastry”, he laughed.

“Plates?”, he asked, pointing at the cabinet.

“I mean, it’s cake, who has time for plates?”, I said, “We’ve shared saliva before, why draw the line at going straight at it?”

He smiled, “That’s one way of putting it”. I immediately regret my previous choice of words.

“You know what I mean…”

“Well,”, he said, as we took our bites of the cake, “Now I have to think of another message for tomorrow”

I stopped my fork midway through my mouth and looked at him, who looked very innocent as he chewed. I laughed. “You’re incorrigible”

“People keep saying that”, he joked and I smiled, “Makes you smile… It’s worth it”

I granted him a playful look. “I mean, sure, it’s funny…”, I admitted. “But, Harry, this is insane…”

“It’s like people say, Jenny, happiness lies in insanity”

“No one says that”, I said, laughing, “Literally no one”, he laughed.

“Well, now I did… Seriously, though, in a completely unrelated note, do you usually listen to the radio? And if so, at what time exactly?”, I threw my head back, laughing.

“You can’t be serious!”

“I’m just saying the morning Z100 program might have some interesting song dedications coming up…”

“You are unbelievable!”, I laughed, as he just grinned as he ate his cake. “Seriously, Harry”, I said, still laughing a bit. “This is insane… You have to stop this”

I nodded, still laughing a bit and got another bit of the cake, I waited for his sharp reply, but it never came. When I looked back at him, he was chewing slowly and staring at the fork depressingly.

He sighed and put the fork down. “Okay… I, uh. I guess that’s it”, he looked at me, just for a second and turned around in his stool. “I should go, uh…”, he pointed up and took the longest time to finish the sentence. “…Take a shower. Things to do.”

He stood up, scratched his head and walked out of the kitchen to the door with just a very cold ‘see ya’.

I was still sitting in the stool, hearing the sound of Vodka’s light little paws in the hardwood floors when I heard the door closing. My mouth opened, the fork in the cake, wondering what just happened. What did I say that changed the mood of everything in one second?

‘If you tell me to stop, I will’, I remembered. I closed my eyes at the realization. I told him to stop.
I hear the sound of metal hitting granite as I dropped my fork in the counter and jumped down the
stool. I followed the way he had just walked by pretending I didn’t see Vodka getting excited at my
sudden run. I realized I was barefoot and turned around fast to go get my shoes, but then I
remembered he was gonna get in the elevator and I wanted to get to him before that, so I turned
back again in a hurry and just went for the door.
Outside, the hall was empty, but the elevator light wasn’t moving, so I knew he couldn’t have
gotten it. ‘The stairs!’, I thought, running to the emergency exit stairs without allowing myself a
second thought. I started to jump through the steps two by two and I was on the next floor up when
I saw him one flight above me.
“Harry! Wait!”, I shouted, climbing a step at a time now, getting out of breath. “Harry!”
On the curve of the stairs, between one floor and the other, I stopped as I saw him a few steps
above. He turned back at me, confusion on his face, a hand still in his pocket, the other on the
handrail.
My chest went up and down dramatically as I caught my breath, and I tried to hide it, pretending I
hadn’t run so much, but it was not possible.
Harry was looking at me, still confused. “What?”, he asked.
I was still breathing heavily and I looked around at the walls as I thought of what to say, realizing I
didn’t really stop to think about what I was doing when I started running after him.
He had stopped, ended it. The nonsensical messaging quest was over when I asked him to stop.
That was what I wanted, that was what was better for us. For me. In terms of making the healthy
decisions we had discussed in therapy, this was it. Let him go. Wait for something normal. That
should make me happier.
But it didn’t. It didn’t feel good at all, it felt terrible. I thought of Taylor’s words, ‘don’t take your
brokenness and call it progress’. If doing the right thing was choosing what made me happy, letting
him go wasn’t it. And the moment I inadvertently started running after him was the moment my
subconscious told me that. Choosing happiness, choosing me, right now, was choosing him. Was
not judging him for things out of his control and not punishing me for things that were out of mine.
Heavily breathing and with my hands shaking, I looked back at him, standing sadly in the staircase
in his 6’2” of pure brutishness still wearing the black suit he wore to work with a white shirt
without a tie.
“Go out with me”, I heard my own voice pleading. His sadness disappeared, surprise took its place.
His eyebrows rose and I saw his chest get full as he took in a deep breath at my – clearly –
unexpected words.
He quickly walked down a couple of steps. “Wh-what?”
I shrugged half-smile/half-surrender in my face. “I’m asking you to go out with me, you annoying,
irritating idiot”
He smiled wide now, still speechless for another few seconds. “Wh-why now, I mean, are you
serio-wait”, he walked down two more steps and his hand left the handrail and he waved it around
as he tried to find the words he wanted to say. “What I mean is….”, he said, slower, “Yes. The
answer is yes, I will go out with you”, he took a deep breath, smiling.
I bit my lip, looking down, not sure what to do next. “I kind of never asked someone out before…”,


I mumbled, playful.

“You did… well”, he joked. “Trust me, I have experience”. I laughed. “Although, let’s face it, when I did it, it was a lot cooler”

“And ineffective”, I added.

“Is it, though? We have a date, don’t we?”

I smiled, contradicted. “I guess we do”. We got lost in each other’s eyes for a while, and each other’s smile, and then I got out of the trance and turned back at the stairs. “Saturday. You can pick me up at eight. I need to know what to wear, too, so I don’t overdress, or underdress, so text me when you know”

“Casual”, he said, and I turned back in the steps. He had climbed down the last one and was standing in the top now, where I had just been. “Comfortable shoes. And bring a jacket”

I blinked. “You… already know where we’re going?”

“Yep”, he said. “I’ve always known”. I smiled.

“You know, you set the bar pretty high, Mr. Prince”, I said, turning back and going down the stairs again, slowly. “This date better not disappoint”

“It won’t”, he promised, with a smile, and as I walked downstairs back home, I had a very important realization: I didn’t doubt him.
“You sure I can’t wear this then? I feel so great in it”, the Karen Millen black pencil dress wrapped itself around my body perfectly when I arrived at Taylor’s apartment. Now, ‘sitting’ upside down in her couch, with my legs up the backboard of the sofa and my body in the seat, it was slightly crooked.

“You can, just not to your date”, she said. “You said it had to be casual”

“I mean, sure, I have casual clothes, right? I mean I dress casual… right? It’s not like I’m always dressing up to go everywhere. Like, I go to whole foods. And I work out. I’m sure that’s not what he has in mind, right?”, I thought about it. “Oh, God, what if that’s the date? What if we’re going to a gym?!”

“Why are you wearing that, by the way? I thought you had come here after your therapy session”

“I had a couple of hours to kill before the session so I decided to try and find something to wear on Saturday because I have a busy week and I’m afraid I won’t have time to think about it later on,”

“And because you’ve been overthinking it since you guys made plans?”

I ignored her. “So when I looked at the clock, I was late so I just went out with this outfit and I feel great with it”

“You look great”, Taylor said. “Just not-“

“Casual! I get it!”, Meredith, who was just getting comfortable enough to come out of the hiding place she had been in since I arrived, got scared with my scream and jumped out of the room. I sighed. “Sorry”, I apologized, as if the cat could hear me. Or understand me. Or care.

We let a few moments pass. “It’s just… What does he mean, I’m in a good place? And finally! I’m finally in a good place for a happy and healthy relationship?”

“I think the finally means you’ve never had one”, Tay mumbled.

“I know, but…”

“You disagree with that statement?”

I thought about it. “No, it’s pretty accurate.”

“If he thinks you’re ready for a happy and healthy relationship, then you must be… And that’s good news, right? Means you’ve been making progress and are ready to take the relationship with Harry to a more serious note without fear”

“Yeah”, I agreed, “Yeah, sure… Except I’m terrified! I can’t even find an outfit, how am I
supposed to know how to have a mature, serious, happy and healthy relationship?”

“It’s pretty much what you’re already doing, except long distance, because he’s moving to London”. I closed my eyes, realizing it’s not that at all. Because what she thought was what we were ‘already doing’ was a big fat lie.

“How would you know?”, I interrupted. “You haven’t had one either”

“Well”, she brought her legs down, sitting in the couch normally. I waited for her to finish her thought, but she didn’t. After a while, she finally asked. “What did your therapist say anyway?”

I told her, briefly, how the subject came up on my session. I had spent the entire time telling Dr. Arrow in many details how everything with me and Harry had taken a turn to the complete opposite direction it was going.

He was so excited it was almost pathetic to watch. By the end of it, after detailing exhaustively the events that lead to Harry asking me out, including all the messages and their meaning, Dr. Arrow leaned back in his chair with a bit of a proud grin on his lips. He clicked his pen closed and looked at me reflectively for a moment.

“What?”, I had asked.

“You’ve come a long way, Jenifer”, he said. “You should be proud of yourself. I believe you’re finally in a good place to start a happy and healthy relationship”

“With Harry?!”, I exasperated. “Are you insane? Have you been listening at all for the last six months?”

“With Harry or anyone you’d like”, he said, “You finally know to make the better decisions for yourself and to not sabotage your own happiness because of your fears… I believe you’re ready”

I looked at Taylor lividly. “Wow”, she said, emotionless. I rolled my eyes at her. “No, in all seriousness. I do think you’re working yourself up over nothing”

“Thanks”, I said, sarcastic.

“But I do think we need some more evidence about this happy and healthy relationship thing”. Tay grabbed her phone and googled quietly for a while as I finished my drink and tried to convince myself to get out of my weirdly comforting position to go get more. “Okay, I found a list of 15 signs you’re in a happy and healthy relationship”

“Ugh”, I groaned.

“No, come on. It’ll be fun. And didactic. What’s your idea?”

“I’d rather just drink booze and bitch about my fancy outfit”

“You can do a shot for everything that checks”

“I’m in”, I got my legs down, getting up and going after her minibar to pour us some shots.

“Number one. You are not still holding onto the remnants of an old relationship”. I thought about it. Tay stared at her wall, probably analyzing her own past choices as well. “I mean, I still ponder about past relationships, but I write songs about my life for a living, that’s kind of part of the package. I don’t want anything back, though. So I think that’s a check, right?”
I thought about it. Last I had heard from David he had remarried his ex-wife in a ‘small’ ceremony in Hawaii that he had sold the rights for to Bravo, which made it into a little reality show (“Second Chances”, about a family finding its way back to one another, every Tuesday, 9/8 central!). Way to try and have the last word on a scandal. Janine had called it his ‘pathetic attempt at an image boost’. But that had been back in February. I had barely thought about him since then.

Tyler was quite happy in his new relationship, he had taken the new girlfriend as his date to the Teen Choice and she had been nothing but absolutely nice to every one of us – even me.

I touched the little scar under my left earlobe unconsciously, the thin line of skin just a bit whiter than the rest, thinking about the day it had appeared there. I bit my lip, wondering if I could say I was letting that go, trying to remember when had been the last time I had heard from him. Automatically, I downed my vodka shot and felt my throat burning at the thought of it.

“I’m gonna take that as a check”, Tay said. “Moving on. Number two. It’s not assumed you’re hanging out Friday night.”

“Check”, I said. The way Harry and I were constantly crazy busy we saw each other when we could, and that included going months alone considering I had to film in numerous places.

“Number three. When your partner is upset, you don’t assume it’s about you”

“Check”, I said, pouring me another shot, starting to feel like I was nailing this healthy relationship thing. “It’s usually work or our batshit crazy families”

“Four. You don’t ask each other where you want to eat, you both already know”

“Check”, I said. “Usually pizza. Marguerita is his favorite. Or Chinese, yakisoba for both of us. If we’re going Japanese, then it’s urakamaki fila for me, California rolls for hi-“

“I get it”, she stopped me. “Drink up. Right, five. It doesn’t feel like one of you is always begging for sex”

I laughed. Cause, after all, Harry and I hadn’t had sex. But in six months of a very public fake relationship, I couldn’t say that to Taylor. “Yeah, that’s a check”, I said, and let the alcohol stop me from getting too, ahem, caught up on that thought. But it was too late. ‘I wonder if we’re gonna have sex Saturday. I wonder if that’d be wise. I wonder if there’s any chance I’ll say no if he initiates it. I wonder if I won’t initiate it. I wonder if we’ll even make it out of the building’…

“Six. You can make a stupid mistake without it being the end of things”

“Well, I did lose my phone and got a total of forty-three pictures of us out into the internet, and yet he still likes me, so…”, I drank, remembering our personal pictures horseback riding in Morgan Bay, and in the pier in my parents’ backyard, or dancing in my brother’s wedding, and the embarrassing number of selfies I had managed to snap of the two of us before I had lost that phone, all of which were now being posted time and time again online on twitter, facebook and tumblr, all with different filters and song lyrics on them.

“Right, there was that. Seven. You’re just as comfortable being silent as you are talking”

“Super check”, I said. “I mean, we talk a lot. But we’re perfectly okay just working on our computers or watching something”. I turned on her stereo on the radio and a sappy happy song started playing. I drank anyway, dancing around her apartment slightly now, the alcohol making my feet and my head feel a lot less heavy then before.
“Eight. You don’t have a problem telling each other to chill”

“Please, I had to tell his wardrobe to chill and I had no problem with that!”, she laughed loudly.

I’m not sure I could pin-point exactly which was my one drink too many, perhaps the too many were my too many, but at some point between numbers eight and thirteen the music got louder, so Taylor got louder, and so we danced as we did the shots and answered questions, and we laughed through the pain in our throats and our hearts at each answer.

I found her first album at some point and played it, to which she let out a big “NO!” that I replied with my own big “YES! Classic country-princess-of-revenge-Swift time!”’. Those songs only made as dance more, this time to the sound of her early country days and angry lyrics, pausing the list over and over to sing about the guy who should have known better than cheat on her and drinking now because we felt like it, not because of the answers.

“There’s no time for tears I’m just sitting here, plotting my revenge!”, we sang, dancing around her room, “There’s nothing stopping me from going out with aaaaaaaaaaaaall of your best friends!”, I had a laughter crisis.

“Okay, focus!”, she said, still with her phone in hands, drinking wine which was much more her thing and leaving the vodka to me. “Fourteen”, she laughed when I tripped in her sofa. “You both understand there are real seasons-sorry, reasons why you are a catch”, she stopped. “You are a catch! This lady is wise… ahem, and someone would be lucky to date you. You know these reasons, embrace them- she’s right, Jenny”

“Oh, what does she know? She doesn’t know us. How does she know I’m a catch anyway?”, I asked and raised my glass to the song, “in case you haven’t heard, I really, really, hate that stupid, old, pickup truck you never let me drive-ouch!”, Taylor threw a pillow at me.

“Get your ass over here”, she said, taking her wine bottle with her to her room. I raised the volume so we could hear Our Song from there and followed her to her room.

“I was riding shot-gun with my hair undone in the front seat of his car-“, I walked into her closet, and she turned my around to face her mirror. “What?”

“Look at that!”

“What?”

“You, silly! Look what a catch you are”

“Oh, please”, I laughed, slightly. “I mean, you’re right this dress is quite-“

“Not the dress, Jenny, you!”, she stopped me, “Sure the dress is beautiful and it makes you look extra pretty, but you’re the one in it!”

“You think?”, I asked, in my drunkenness.

“I know! Look at you in your five foot eight height and your long, beautiful, fit, super model legs”

“Ok, now you’re just-”

“We know they’re super model legs! Victoria’s Secret thought so, they cast you, did they not?”

“They casted me for the publicity I’d bring”, I dismissed.
“Well, they hired you for the catalogue when you were in college, you weren’t that famous then, but you already had these legs!”

“Yeah, but just because one of the models was unavailable suddenly and their photographer knew me from a previous shoot for something else”

“God, stop making excuses for yourself”, she shouted, waving her arms around with her glass of wine almost pouring over. “People make excuses for failures, Jen, not success! And look at yourself. You’re a success and I don’t just mean your legs, and your big, pretty boobs, and you’re shiny, long hair. I mean you”. I stepped from one foot to the other watching my reflection in the mirror. “Who won the Golden Globe for best female performance in a supporting TV role this year?”

“…I did”

“I didn’t hear you”

“I did!”

“Yeah, you did! And who was nominated for a Tony at seventeen?”

“I was?”

“Yeah, you were! And who was nominated for a Bafta at sixteen?”

“I was!”

“And who got an acting contract at twelve just one year after being told she was too shy for television?”

“I did! And I nailed it”

“Yes, you did!”

“Yeah, and you know who got cast as Jack Kelly in the 2001 John Cabrillo Elementary School winter show version of Newsies in Sacramento, California?”

Her confident smiled flickered. “I don’t-what-“

“I was!”

“Oh, I had no idea”

“Yes, and I fucking nailed Santa Fe too!”

“Isn’t that a guy-part?”

“It’s a long story”, I said. “And you know what?”

“What?”

“I am awesome”

“Of course you are!”, she agreed, “You can dance! You’ve done ballet! And you can sing! And you play the piano and guitar! And you can act, and act well!”
“Hello, Golden Globe winner, right here!”, drunk-Jen agreed, pretentiously.

“Yeah, and Emmy nominee too! And soon to be Oscar winner too!”

“Amen, sister”, I stole her wine glass once my vodka was done.

“And you do that thing with the hula-hoops?”

“Oh, yeah”

“…with your feet while you’re doing a handstand. That’s badass”

“Years perfecting it!”

“Jen”, she sighed, sitting down in her closet carpeted floor. “If Harry doesn’t see what a catch you are and how lucky he is to be with you, he’s an idiot”

I smiled and I sat beside her, falling half way down and hurting my but a little because my dress was really tight in the knees. “I know”, I said, smiling at her ceiling.

“I guess that takes care of fourteen then”, she said, checking her phone. “And, I mean, let’s face it”, Tay said. “Harry is great. But you could actually do better, you know?”

I laughed. “Don’t say that, he’s great”

“He is great. I said that. And you know I don’t agree with the sexist classification of women in grades, but if it were true you’d be, like, a twelve. And he’s a seven, tops”

“Oh, come on, Harry it’s at least an eight”

“I’ll give you a seven and a half”

“Bullshit!”

“Just because he’s so tall, and because you’ve been styling him”, we laughed.

In her living room, Tied Together With a Smile started playing and we listened to it quietly for a while.

“I guess is true, love it’s all you wanted”, she sang. “Cause you’ve been giving it away like it’s extra change, hoping it would end up in his pocket”, I felt the tears in my eyes as I remembered Dr. Arrow’s words just a few hours before, “but he leaves you out like a penny in the rain, ‘cause it’s not his price to pay”

When I let out a cry, Taylor noticed me. “Hold on, baby, you’re losing it”, she sang, passing an arm around me. “The water’s high, you’re jumping into it and letting go… and no one knows… That you cry, but you don’t tell anyone”, I couldn’t hold together much more after that, so I just let her hug me as I cried to her fifteen year old voice. “And you’re tied together with a smile, but you’re coming undone”

I’m not sure how much time passed as I cried out the mountain of feelings I had been shutting down for weeks, but I had to come out of her comforting hug for air.

“Jesus, why did you write such a depressing song?”, I joked, making her smile.

“I’ll go change it”, she got up, a bit bumpy, and made her way out of the room to the stereo in the
“It’s not drunk-Jenifer unless there’s crying”, I said to myself as I got up and cleaned my running mascara in her mirror.

The upbeat melody of another song filled the house and I finished the wine in her glass, letting it wash away the taste of tears inside of me. I started to pace around the room without really noticing it.

“Friday night beneath the stars, in a field behind your yard”, I heard Tay’s voice as she sang with herself. “You and I are paintin’ pictures in the sky. And sometimes we don’t say a thing, just listen to the crickets sing”, she walked back in the room, in an interpretative dance to her own words, her phone up filming herself. “Everything I need is right here by my side”, she danced her way to me, throwing her other arm around my shoulders, I started to sing with her, louder and louder as the chorus approached. “And I know everything about you I don’t wanna live without you!!!”

“I’m only up when you’re not down! Don’t wanna fly if you’re still on the ground, it’s like no matter what I do…”, we screamed as we danced around her closet as she filmed us. “Well, you drive me crazy half the time, the other half I’m only trying to let you know that what I feel is true… And I’m only me when IIIIIIIIIIIIIII’m”, we pointed at each other, “with you!”, and laughed.

We made our way to her bedroom dancing as we could behind each other so the camera captures as both.“And I don’t try to hide my tears, the secrets or my deepest fears. Through it all nobody gets me like you do”, I hugged her and we spin around laughing while trying to sing and spin faster, “And you know everything about me. You say that you can’t live without me!”, we let go of each other so we could jump and I did my best to get up in her bed with my tight dress, which made her laugh so much she couldn’t sing anymore. She hopped up on the bed, and we jumped around, finally jumping down and lying opposite to each other at the end of the song. “Well you drive me crazy half the time, the other half I’m only trying to let you know that what I feel is true. And I’m only me who I wanna be… Well, I’m only me when I’m with you… With you! Uh huh”, she mimicked the drum beat with one hand, and we finished together, laughing, “Yeah!”

She stopped the video and we tried to calm down our happy heavy breathing.

“What’s fifteen?”, I asked. Tay checked her phone.

“Let’s see… Fifteen. Because you know how awesome you are, you’re not willing to be treated like someone who is beneath their partner, and you make sure they know they’re lucky to have you… Where are you going?”, she asked as I got out of bed, on my way to resolve my number fifteen.

When I walked into the elevator in my building, I didn’t press my button. I stared at the big, fancy, penthouse button, calling my name and I pushed it. For about ten seconds I pressed the little shiny son of a bitch in and finally the door opened, and I walked to penthouse number 1, Harry’s.

I opened the door with my key – that was sign number ten that you’re in a healthy and happy relationship: you have a key to each other’s place and that is not a big deal – and walked up his foyer’s stairwell on top of my five inch heels head held high like a heroine in a history book page, which was another of Tay’s songs.

I should explain something: at this point of the night it was hard to know exactly what the numbers were, but I had had about a third of a bottle of vodka, a third of a bottle of wine and some brandy that Taylor’s driver had in the car I took from her apartment home. I was feeling like someone had
set my interiors on fire and all of my suppressed feelings were now exploding like a firework show on Fourth of July. I was, in fact, feeling like a firework ready to show ‘em what I was worth – and that’s a Katy Perry song.

Here’s a fun fact about drunk-Jen: she quotes a lot of songs. I’m not proud of this particular junction of my life, but the hard truth is it is a very important one. This is the story of how I forgave myself for my past and decided I was goddamn worth of a happy and healthy relationship. I just had to be drunk to do it.

So as I felt like I was making my way to Harry as if the world was my catwalk, turns out I had already taken my heels off in the elevator and was now tripping on my own feet as I climbed the stairs on the foyer to his living room. For some reason I didn’t understand then – it was alcohol – never had I been more pissed at him for replacing the beautiful fucking chandeliers in his beautiful fucking ceiling.

“Jen?”

“What?!”, I asked, rude, raising my hands to the boys as if I said ‘you wanna a piece of me?. “You want a piece of me?”, oh, right. I did say that. “Tryin’ and pissin’ me off… Well get in line with the paparazzi!”. That would be Britney Spears.

They looked at me weird, “You walked in saying something about a chandelier?”

I pointed at him, trying to get my eyes to focus, I couldn’t quite distinguish them but I could tell that wasn’t Harry. “Nah, not you… Who-?”

“What’s going on?”, I heard Harry’s voice.

“Ahá!”, I pointed at him.

“She’s had some drinks with Taylor Swift just now”, Eddy said, coming out of nowhere, or is how it felt to me.

“You were there?”, I asked.

“I was with her security in their apartment? You don’t remember I took you to your doctor’s appointment then went with you there?”, I stared at him. “I came back with you? We were just in the elevator”

“Oh”, I said, not quite remembering him there, but I had more important matters to take care of. “You!”, I shouted again pointing at Harry. I sighed, still with my finger high trying to remember what it was I had to tell him.

Sign number nine you are in a happy and healthy relationship: you don’t hold back when you have to tell each other something awkward or that makes you uncomfortable.

“Do you want us to leave?”, one of the boys asked.

“Sh!”, I stopped them without taking my eyes from Harry. “I…”, I said, taking a couple of steps closer to him. I paused. “… am…”, what was it? We were literally just talking about it at Taylor’s. “… awesome!”, a flicker of a smile now be seen at his concerned face.

“Okay”, he said.

“And I’m hot. And this dress makes me look hot. And I am incredible. And you!”, I tried to
remember it. “You would be damn lucky to have me”. I lowered my arm down. Then I made a sign with my hands like an explosion. “Boom!”

He smiled a bit wider. “Agreed”.

“And you know what? I do have long, beautiful and fit supermodel legs”, I pulled my dress up a little bit, dropping my purse and heels in the floor. “And I’ll have you know I have a Golden Globe Award for my supporting role in Game of Thrones, Mister ‘Prince’”, I made quotation marks on the word with my hands. “What do you have?! Huh?! Huh?!”

“Not a Golden Globe?”, he asked.

“That’s right, you don’t! ‘Cause you’re a seven!”, he looked confused. “And a half, thanks to me! And you know what else I’ve got?! Anyone knows?”, I walked around, looking back at the boys in the living room, “Huh?! Anyone knows?! That’s right, a Tony Award nomination! At seventeen years old! That’s right Professor Harper from my Drama 101 class at NYU, I don’t care if you think Les Mis is the biggest cliché in Broadway’s history, you do not get to diminish my talent!” Harry’s eyes were a bit widened now, and he nodded affirmatively to me. “And, I’m sorry, were any of you nominated for a Bafta Award at sixteen years old?”, he nodded negatively. I turned to the others, who were quick to do the same. “That’s right you weren’t. I was! So what if I caused an accident and broke my tibia and social services removed me from my parents’ custody for three days?!”

“Wait, what?”

“The movie was still awesome and I still got nominated for your fancy British award… At sixteen! And who got an acting contract at twelve just one year after being told she was too shy for television?”

“You did?”

“You bet your sweet British ass I did!”, I agreed. “And I nailed it. Know what else I nailed? Being cast as Jack Kelly in the 2001 John Cabrillo Elementary School winter show version of Newsies in Sacramento, California! A guy-part, I’ll have you know and I nailed every single note of that fucking solo”, I finished, calmly, as they stared at me. “At eleven”, I added.

“Alright”, Harry agreed. I could have walked away then, message given. But, of course, that’s drunk-Jen we’re seeing and that bitch is such a show off. And she had to have an exit number. “Where does it say you gotta live and die heeeere?!” I burst into song, loudly, no warning whatsoever. “Where does it say a girl can’t catch a breeaaak?! Why should you only take what you’re given?! Why should you spend your whole life livin’ trapped where there ain’t no future?! Even at 17?!”, energetic, I went back to that school auditorium at eleven years old, barely speaking English, when Ms. Barnes had cast me in a lead just because she liked my voice – the first time ever my talent had meant more than my conditions. “Breaking your back for someone else’s saaake?! If your life don’t seem to suit ya, how bout a change of scene? Far from the lousy headlines and the deadlines in betweeeeeeeeen?!”. Then, I had not only nailed the notes I was supposed to, I had felt for the first time ever the energy of a stage and the feeling of being someone else, and letting a song speak for me. And in Harry’s penthouse, I took every single one of those notes, and just like I had done it in 2001, I bended them to my voice and made them my little bitch. “Santa Feeeeeeeer, are you there?! Do you swear you won’t forget me? If I found you would you let me come and stay? I ain’t getting any younger, and before my dying daaay… I want space! Not just air! Let them laugh in my face I don’t care!”, I shouted, “Saaaave a place”, and finished, in my Tony nominated soprano voice. “I’ll be there”
Harry blinked, a modest smile in his lips. I took a deep breath and started to walk out.

Not before, of course, I had raised my hands up in peace signs and said, “Jenny out, bitches”

As I stepped down the stairs back to his front door as well as I could, I heard the boys say something about taking someone home, and Harry said he had it.

“Hey”, he said, wrapping an arm around my back, “How about I help you home?”

“I’m fine!”, I protested, hanging on to the handrail a bit too much. He picked me up in his arms as if I was a paper doll, come try it on, step out of that black- John Mayer. Anyway. “Put me down”, I said. And he did, except now I was in my bed. When had we gotten there?

I stared at my surroundings for a while, then tried to get up. Harry gently pushed me back down by my shoulders. “Vodka!”, I cried.

“I think you’ve had enough for today”

“No, Harry, I have to feed Vodka”

“Oh”

“She has a condition she needs to be fed often or she’ll-“

“I know, I told you that, remember? I’ll feed her, it’s fine, just lay down”, he said, and I surrendered. Laying there, I stared at my much less pretty ceiling. “Nice to see even drunk you remember feeding her, though”

He had been pulling the sheets in the bed down from under me so he could cover me with it, and as he prepared to leave I grabbed his shirt and pulled him back. “I forget nothing”, I whispered.

Harry smiled. “Okay… Let me go get your pajamas”, he went to my closet.

“It’s too early for bed”, I whined.

“Yeah, but the earlier you go to sleep the earlier you’ll sober up”, he shouted from my closet. “And you should sober up because you have an early day tomorrow and you don’t wanna be hangover”

“You’d be surprised how many times I went to work hangover”

“I really wouldn’t”

“Besides I’m young!”, I shouted, sitting up, “Hangovers aren’t so bad”

“Wait ‘till you’re older”, he said. “Is this my shirt?”, he came back into the room with sweatpants and a shirt he had left behind months ago for when he slept there.

“Yeah, I forget you’re old”

“Have you been sleeping with my shirt?”, he said, “Wait, older. Not old!”

“Honey, you’re thirty”

“Honey, I’m twenty-eight. You haven’t answered”, he showed me the shirt again.

“Yeah, it’s my pajamas”
“No, it’s my pajamas”

“You never use it, you sleep shirtless”

“Well, why do you use it? You have a lot-“

“It smells like you”, I said, point blank. He stared at me, a bit stunned.

“Oh”

“Twenty-nine”

“What’s that?”

“You’re twenty-nine”

He sighed. “No, I’ll be twenty-nine in about a month, so twenty-eight”

“Well, so you’re twenty-eight, eleven months and, what? Forty days? Basically twenty-nine. Which everyone knows is basically thirty, so you’re old…”, he gave me a face. “Sorry, I don’t make the rules”

“Just…”, he sighed, tired. “Take off your dress”

Now, what drunk-Jen heard was a ‘take off that sexy goddamn dress that makes you look so hot now’. So, feeling naughty, she got up from the bed and obeyed.

“Yes, sir”, she said, smoothly, reaching sensually for the zipper and sliding the entire thing down without breaking eye contact. It’s worth noticing drunk-Jen was not wearing a bra. Sober-Jen had felt too lazy to look for one that wouldn’t be seen with the type of sleeves in that badass dress.

“Oh-kay”, Harry stuttered.

“Do you like my breasts?”, I asked him, stepping closer.

“I…”, Harry sighed, focusing his eyes on the t-shirt in his hands, not before giving my chest a quick look. “Uh, you…”, he scratched his head, trying so hard to keep on looking at my eyes and not my… rest.

“They’re mine, you know?”, I asked, stopping right in front of him, holding the end of his t-shirt. “I paid for them with my money, that I worked for, so they’re mine”

“Wait- what?”

“That’s what the doctors said when I told them they made me feel fake”, I said, my hands under his shirt, feeling his skin hot under my palms, making my way up. “Don’t feel fake, silly, you paid for them, their as yours as your natural breasts were”

“Jen”, Harry called, stopping my hands with his. “You had plastic surgery?”

“Yeap”, I said, taking another step closing the distance between us. I watched my breasts pressed against his chest as I pulled his shirt up. Harry closed his eyes, and I pulled his hand up to my back, slowly across my skin. “Wasn’t it worth it, though?”

Harry’s hand was trembling on my back, but his skin had chills and I could see the way his chest went up and down fast as his breathing got heavier. I pressed my lips gently in the corner of his
neck with his shoulders and I felt his head fall when I kissed it. His lips stroke my ear and neck and his breath painted my skin hot, much like the red lipstick on my lips painted his. His hand got a firm grip on my waist and I pushed it up – I wanted it on my breasts.

But his hands grabbed my arms instead and he pulled me back. He took a deep breath with his eyes closed and pulled his shirt down.

“You’re drunk”, he said, and in a quick move I felt the collar of his shirt – my PJs – cross my head as he dressed me, covering my boobs fast.

“Ugh, great, now you sound like the social worker lady”, I complained, rolling my eyes, struggling with my arms under the shirt to find the sleeve holes, Harry pushed me back to the bed.

“The who?”

“First of all, hic”, I said, the hiccups finally getting to me. “Who decided hospitals should have social workers?”

“I think they’re called if you’re an unclaimed minor”

“Well, I was, hic, claimed”, Harry pulled the covers above me. “My mom just had to leave really quickly to deal with something. But the PA was taking care of me”

“What’s a PA?”

“Production assistant”, I explained, yawning, “Because I was fifteen when I did that movie, the one that got me the Bafta nomination, you know? Because I’m so awesome”

“I know”

“I needed a guardian on set, hic, something about child labor laws”

“Do you water? For the hiccups?”

“It’ll pass”, I said. “But my mom had to leave just for a couple of hours. And Amber, who was the director’s daughter, was there. She was super cool and just a couple of years older than me, and we were the only kids there, so I’d hang out with her a lot. I think her parents were getting a divorce, so she’d spend weekends with him. But she was mad, so she often decided we should break into his liquor cabinet to get drunk”

“You said you were-?”

“Fifteen, hic. But the things were weird, you know?”, I lied down, and stared at the ceiling, “Dad was working so much, mom was worried about my brother who wanted to go back to Brazil and I was just trying to make a movie because it was fun and I was getting paid and Lucas’ college was expensive… hic”

“I didn’t know you paid for your brother’s college”

“Technically my parents did, hic. They were the ones who controlled my money then”

“But it was still you’re money”

“Yeah…”

“So”, Harry sat on the bed near me, “What was your first drink?”
“Whiskey”, I said, smiling. “It tasted terrible, but it made us feel really dangerous and cool, so we kept drinking it… until they called me to shoot”, I turned to him. “You remember the scene in the movie where the girl is biking down a street, right at the end, and she gets hit by a car?”, he nodded. “We were shooting that-“

“You used a stunt or something, right?”

“Well, I was-hic- supposed to. But the whiskey made me feel really powerful, so I just told them I could do it myself and they let me”

“Didn’t they see you were drunk?”, he asked, in a whisper.

I shrugged. “I had a mint before going to set… And, I don’t know, maybe they didn’t wanna notice. My mom had left just for a few hours that day and maybe they didn’t think it was their problem. But I got on the bike and they told me where I had to go and I went and next thing I know I’m in a hospital bed with a cast on my leg and a lady asking me all kinds of questions about my life at home, and if I liked acting or if I was being forced to…”, I didn’t look at Harry anymore. Instead, I just stared at the nightstand, looking at the past more than anything else really. “So I told her our family was going through some stuff, but nothing much, and I loved acting, despite everything… So of everything, she picked on those two words: despite everything. Despite what? She asked. Despite it being hard, lady, I told her. It’s hard, and it’s hard getting parts, it’s why I had the surgery, so I could look younger for longer and be available for younger parts for as long as I can”

“Wait, you mean… the plastic surgery? You had it when you were fifteen?!”

I ignored the desperation in his tone. “Yeah. She was scared as well. But I told her the doctors said my boobs were really big and I was young so they’d probably get bigger and I’d be in pain, so really, the surgery was necessary-“

“Wait, you had a breast reduction?! I thought you put implants”

“No, I was an early bloomer”, I laughed. “That’s what my agent said. She said I looked too old for kid’s parts, so I was losing a lot of jobs because of this… and I should look younger to get more jobs, so she suggested the surgery”

“How did your parents agree to that? How could Richard say that?”

“No, not Richard!”, I raised my hand to cover his mouth, but slapped it instead. “Sorry, no. No. My agent at the time was Tara. Tara Laney, we hired her when I was in Disney and until I went to college… They were doing their best, my parents, but they didn’t know better… and Tara got the doctor to talk to them, and he told them it was a necessary procedure, really, so they ended up signing the forms and I went to the… spa”, I laughed. “That’s how we called it so the paparazzi wouldn’t suspect”

“Jen, that’s…”, he sighed. “That’s terrible. I’m sorry”

“It’s fine. I mean, sure, it hurt like a bitch for weeks. And I felt like a joke. But eventually it paid off. I got the part in the movie with Leonardo DiCaprio and it was cool. But the… the-what’s her name? The social worker lady, she didn’t think so. She thought my parents had forced me to do the surgery, on top of driving me to get drunk and break my leg, so she removed me from their custody”

There was silence for a bit. “I’m sorry”, Harry said.
“I stayed in a foster home for about a weekend and then the lawyers from the studio producing the movie got me out and back to my parents. They gave me a lecture, I promised I wouldn’t drink again and we finished the movie… and I didn’t. Drink again, I mean. I didn’t. The next time I drank I was in college… well, still under the legal drinking age, but, who wasn’t?”

I smiled, Harry didn’t.

“Loosen up, Mr. Prince, it’s fine. I’m fine.”

“This is what’s on your file, isn’t it?”, he asked, I sighed. “You shouldn’t tell me. You’re drunk.”

I got up. “You should know, though. So you know what you’re getting yourself into”

“If you’ll still want me to know when you’re sober, I promise I’ll hear, ok?”, he asked, pushing me back down gently. “Now, sleep… and, Jen?”, I opened my eyes. “I know what I’m getting myself into”

I smiled, closing my eyes again and hugging the pillow. “You really don’t, Mr. Prince”

When I woke up tasting brandy in my mouth, I tried to tell myself it didn’t bother me so I could stay asleep, but I finally got up. The room was still dark, so I knew it should be the middle of the night.

“Hey”, I heard. Harry was sitting in the chair by the window looking like he had been sleeping.

“Hi”, I said, scratching my eyes.

“Are you okay?”, he asked. “Do you want… water? A pain med? A bucket to throw up on?”

I smiled, “I’m fine, I just need to brush my teeth, my mouth tastes awful”

I tripped my way to the bathroom, in the mirror, I realized the shirt I was wearing, the one that was actually his, was on backwards, my makeup was smudged, and I didn’t remember taking off my dress. I did remember some late night confessions, because it caused some kind of pain in my heart it was hard to ignore, and I Santa Fe stuck in my head, so that had to be a bad sign.

I brushed my teeth, washed my face and went back to the bedroom, where Harry was yawning himself awake.

“Did you feed V?”, I went back to the bed. “What time is it?”

“I did”, He checked his watch. “Just about… one”

I nodded, feeling awkward. “Why did you- you didn’t have to stay”

“It’s fine”, he said. “Thought I’d stay and feed her one last time before I left…” I nodded again.

“So…”, I thought about what to ask first.

“Do you remember…?”

“I remember being at Taylor’s”, I said. I remembered the empowerment session with Taylor and feeling very urgently I had to let Harry know how lucky he’d be to date me. I closed my eyes, wondering if it had been as classy as I recalled. “And the list”

“What list?”
I sighed. “I told Taylor about something that Dr. Arrow told me at our session today… that had made me pretty uneasy, so she decided we needed more evidence”

“What did he say?”

“I told him about our date”, I said, straightening the sheets a bit much so I wouldn’t look at him. “And he said something about how I was finally ready for a happy and healthy relationship, that I was finally in a place where I wouldn’t settle for less than what I deserve, that I knew I deserved, you know… Good things. And… he said he trusted me not to sabotage myself anymore”

I risked a quick look. Harry was nodding. “Okay”, he said. “That sounds… positive. How did that result in you guys getting drunk exactly?”

I took a deep breath, wondering if there was any way I could explain my day to him without being mortified at myself, realizing probably not. So I just went ahead and said as much as I remembered.

“So I’ll just go ahead and assume that’s what drove me to your place”, I told Harry, in the dark room as I tried to retain the confidence drunk-me fought so hard for. “What exactly did I say?”

Harry pondered for a bit. “Well, the parts that made sense were mostly about how awesome you are”, I closed my eyes in frustration. “You recounted your biggest achievements-”

“Oh, God”

“And you said I’d be, to quote from you, damn lucky to date you”, I covered my face with my hands and just threw myself back down in the mattress. “Then you burst into song”

“Oh, God!”, I shouted, my voice muffled by my own hands, “was it Santa Fe?”, I asked, mortified, in a whisper.

“I think that’s what it’s called, yeah”

“Oh, no”, I said, and sat back up. “…I’m sorry”

“No, don’t apologize”, he said. “It was pretty great actually. Also to quote from you, you nailed it”

I smiled, embarrassed. “I won an award for it”.

He chuckled. “Of course you did”

“Best Of The Winter Show, 2001”, I told him. “It was voted by the students and teachers, so it was a pretty big deal”, we laughed. “My parents still have it, I think”

“Of course you’d win an award even for a school play”

“Musical. And what is that supposed to mean?”

“Nothing, just… you know, you win awards”, he shrugged. “That’s your thing. I feel like they’d give you an award for breathing, if it was a thing. You just make everything amazing”, I stared at him with a smile on my lips as long as I could, then when I got too embarrassed, I looked down at my hands. “You are awesome.”

I laughed. “Oh, God, this is so embarrassing”

“No, Jen. You’re right. You had something to say today and now is my turn”, he got up from his chair and sat at the corner of my bed. “I agree with you, with what you said today. You are
awesome and I would be lucky to date you, I need you to know that I know that”

I couldn’t stare this time, I just kept looking at my hands instead. Then, mustering every ounce of confidence I had, I looked up. “Thank you”

“Well”, he sighed standing up. “You seem to be okay, so, I guess I’ll just feed V, and go home”

He was walking towards the door already when I gathered the courage to do what I should have done a long time ago.

“It was worst after college”, I said. Harry stopped and looked back. I went on talking looking at the sheets in my bed trying not to stop. “The thing that I told you about social services and being drunk at fifteen and injuring myself on set, it was just the beginning, it got worst after college”

“…I thought you didn’t remember saying that”

“I thought you were gonna ask”, I smiled. “But I guess you are too much of a gentleman to do that”, I looked at him. “So I’m just gonna tell you instead, if you let me”

“You don’t have to”

“I know, but I want to”, I said, then I sat taller in the bed, facing him, ready to get this over with.
“I’m just tired of treating this as some sort of ticking bomb that might go off at any minute and ruin my life. So I’ll just say it, and if you wanna leave, you leave. But I have to stop being held hostage by my past. It’s just a part of my life that is over and it doesn’t define me”. Ironically, that was sign number twelve that you’re in a happy and healthy relationship: you don’t have secrets from each other.

Harry nodded, and sat back at the end of my bed, at a respectful distance.

“So, as I said, I did plastic surgery when I was fourteen - a breast reduction and a bit of a lipo, because my agent at the time said that because of my Latin curves I looked too old to get teenager roles”, I wasn’t looking at him. I just couldn’t at this point. “I was in pain for months. I regretted it, but couldn’t talk to anyone about it. When I was shooting the movie with Leonardo DiCaprio right before I turned sixteen, I got drunk on set almost every day with the director’s daughter who knew how to break into her dad’s liquor cabinet. It wasn’t just once, it was every time she was there. We were careful for people not to notice, we’d brush our teeth and have mints so no one would have reasons to suspect anything and, one day, my mom couldn’t be on set with me because she had to go help my brother with something, so she asked a PA to look after me. And I didn’t just injured myself, I injured a stunt double as well when I drunkenly said I could do the scene. Social services were called in the hospital and I was removed from my parent’s custody for three days until the studio’s lawyer got me back. My parents gave me a lecture, I swore it had been a one-time thing and we just never talked about it again… People would ask me what my favorite part of shooting that movie was in interviews when the movie came out, and I had to make something up because I barely remembered anything from the entire process because I was drunk for most of it”, I stopped for breath, trying not to let my voice break. “You know what comes after this, I finish high school, I was in Les Mis for most of my last summer before college. Then I helped my parents move back to Brazil and flew to New York in September to live with Alessa and attend NYU… There was this class that Alessa convinced me to take with her… Drama 101. She wanted to do it to be less shy, I guess, and I was being supportive…”, I coughed, trying so hard not to justify myself, trying to just tell him, just let him do the judging, but failing so miserably. “The professor was Adam Harper”, the name tasted so bitter in my lips. “He was 38 at the time, a prodigy producer that had been getting increasingly famous in Broadway. He had been nominated for a Tony a handful of times and won most of it, so he was pretty full of himself… and he hated me”. Harry’s look was
unbelieving, at best. “It’s true, he did. He was so… pretentious, I guess. He diminished me from day one. Made me get up in front of the whole class and improvise a monologue in five minutes on the theme ‘why am I here’?”. I did it, he shut up, and we went on in this power battle for a while. We emailed back and forth about classes, always passive-aggressively angry at each other. The students were putting up a play on MLK day and they asked me to direct it, and they asked him for counseling, so we had to have these… meetings at his office so he could give me notes about it… One day, the notes were about the passion of our leads. He decided to demonstrate. On me. So he pulled me up and grabbed me by my waist and brought me close. He grabbed my ass and my thighs and finally he put his hands between my legs, above my dress and I guess he saw something in my eyes… because he just stopped talking and let me go, so I left. That was right before Christmas break. I couldn’t stop thinking about him afterwards… Then he sent me an email on Christmas eve, saying something about how he was surrounded by family, but all he could think about was, and I quote, my skinny, tight, wet, pussy in his hand”

“Classy”, I heard Harry mumble.

“I hadn’t planned on it, but I bought a ticket back to Manhattan and replied to his email saying I’d be in town for new years’ eve. So he gave me an address and I met him there that day, in a bar in the corner of his street. He took me to his apartment and that’s when it started. We were together for two months before I found out he didn’t actually live there, that was just the apartment he kept for when he had to stay late at work… But he had a wife and daughter in New Jersey”, the words – wife, daughter -, were even harder than his name.

“Did you… confront him? About being married?”

I nodded. “He said he never lied, I just never asked and he never said otherwise. He said it was pretty easy to know, since he was sort of famous, it was on the internet that he was married and had a daughter. But he never wore a ring… We were together for about another month after this, maybe more. I never assumed he was gonna get a divorce or anything, but I just thought… I guess I just thought I was worth more to him, you know? I slept in his apartment one night, as I was used to doing by then, and uh… he wasn’t there, he had to go to the school. And in the morning the door opened and it was his… wife”, the word had such a bitter taste in my mouth as I fought the memories, trying to just get the story out so I could go on. “She was with her daughter on her lap. I left the bedroom because I thought it was him and they were there. I kind of, uh… I was on my underwear and wearing his college hoodie. Yale Drama School. I obviously knew who they were, there was a picture of them there that it had taken me the longest time to realize was his family… I used to put it down every time I got there after I found out. She probably realized who I was because I was just wearing panties and her husband’s hoodie, and she put the kid on the floor… She started crying and yelling at me. And then she started hitting me-“. When my voice broke, I knew there was no stopping me from crying. I could still remember the sound of the little girl crying, witnessing the whole scene, so scared seeing her mother lose her temper. “She pushed me at some point, in between punches and slaps and kicks, and I fell at the corner of the glass coffee table with my head, that’s what this is about.” I pointed at the little scar under my ear, “Then she threw me out of the apartment. I barely had time to get my things. It was pretty noisy, I heard the neighbors complained…”, and yet nobody seemed to be bothered enough to go see if the girl being attacked needed help. “I had to put my clothes on in the stairs. I, uh, I ran for twelve blocks straight until I found a subway station. I don’t think I have ever been more mortified. After I got back to the dorms, Ali made me go to a hospital. I didn’t even know my face was that bad, I was bleeding and had cuts”

“Jen, this-this is…”, he stuttered.

“They could see I had been attacked and took pictures in case I changed my mind about pressing
charges, from what I understand they have these pictures in that file about me Thomas did… I
came to class the other week and he didn’t even look me in the eyes. He barely-“, I took a deep
breath. “Anyway, I felt sick and heartbroken and I just missed California and anything that wasn’t
that, so that’s when I sent the audition for The Mediator. And when I was cast I was so glad to
leave just because I wanted to leave him behind so bad…”

“And then there was David”, he said, not in an accusatory way, just, trying to make sense of things.
I took a deep breath. “No, then there was being alone with people my age, filming a successful
show, dealing with all this crap, feeling we had the world on our hands… I told you about the time
before I got my second tattoo when we got kicked out of a club? Well, that was just the first time.
A lot of other things happened, we went to parties and clubs every other weekend the first three or
four season of the show… that was a bit after I had hired Rich and Janine, it took them a while to
realize what was happening to me… Basically, I was dealing with all this stuff in a very bad way…
So, my first DUI, driving under the influence… to be precise, that’s how long it took for them to
notice… Richard managed to sweet talk my way out of the first one, but the second was difficult,
especially considering I was so drunk and on some… pills, that I kind of disrespected the cops. So
they arrested me for possession and Contempt of an Officer. I heard they have my mugshot,
actually, in my file. I was locked up for almost a day until, uhm, Richard found my lawyer, by then
we hired a better law firm to take care of my stuff, so they arranged some sort of agreement… The
district attorney’s office agreed to drop my charges in exchange for the suspension of my license
for a year and community services. I already worked with The Mia Foundation there, so I just kept
on doing that as community service… picked my license a year later… then there was David…
And you already know how that turned out, so… I guess that’s the end of it”

I cleaned my face with the palms of my hands, sniffing slightly. Then, when I couldn’t handle his
silence anymore, I got up. “Are you thirsty? I’m thirsty. I’ll go get some water”

I drank my entire cup of water without stopping for breath and when I finished, I just supported
myself in the granite counter top with my hands trying to convince myself this was a good idea.
That telling him was the right thing to do. That I had meant what I said, I’m free as long as I don’t
have a secret anymore. Everything that had made me so ashamed until now was out in the open and
it didn’t make up for the wrong things I had done or the people I hurt, but at least now I wasn’t a
hostage of my own story.

I guess my heart was beating so loud I didn’t hear him come in, but his arms wrapped themselves
around me and I felt his breath on my neck as he hugged me from behind. I took a deep breath.
Everything was okay. Everything felt okay.

“I’m sorry you went through this”

“…It’s not your fault”

“It’s not yours either”, he said. “Jen, you were manipulated by your agent, by your professor…
even if it was consensual, he was in a position of power over you and he was older and he was
married, he should have known better than to sleep with a student. And of course you dealt with it
however you managed to, and it sucks that it was in bad way, but I get it. I’ve been there. At least
you got out. At least I got out. At least we’re fine now and we didn’t hurt anybody too permanently.
At least we found ourselves and who we want to be”, he paused, and let me go so I could turn
around to look at him. “At least we found each other”

I smiled, nodding, swallowing the knot on my throat down before I spoke again. “Yeah”, was all I
managed.
I leaned my back against the sink, as Harry leaned his against the opposite counter in front of me and we just sort of stayed there for a while.

“…why didn’t you kiss me back?”, I asked. “Earlier… I wasn’t that drunk…. Why didn’t you kiss me back?”

“We have a date”, he said, simply. Firstly, I was happy to hear we still had a date. “And I made a promise to myself I wouldn’t kiss you again unless it’s right, that involves you being fully sober”

“You made a promise?”

“Well… it came to my attention I could have handled the situation better than… You know, kiss you in the middle of a family weekend and yell that I love you in the middle of the kitchen and expect you to correspond me when I had just said I’d be moving back in a month”

I smiled. “Yeah, that day was a bit of a mess”

He chuckled. “So, I decided I wouldn’t give up on you, but I decided we should make it right, the way it’s supposed to be… with a first date, and a first kiss at the right time, and avoiding labeling things, and the ‘are we seeing other people?’ conversation, and-“

“The L word?”, I joined in.

“Yes, avoiding the L word it’s a good start”, he nodded. “So I’ll stay away from it for a while and, we’ll just take it slow… Try not to scare you off”, I smiled.

Sign thirteen that you’re in a happy and healthy relationship was: you take things in a pace that makes you both comfortable - be it fast or slow, what’s important is you decided together. Communication is key.

“I don’t scare off that easily”, I lied, using the words as a sort of promise to myself.

“Good”, Harry smiled. “Now, what do you say we change the attire for our date, ‘cause you seem to have been pretty worked up over that…”

I laughed, letting myself be mocked, happy we still had a date. Sign eleven you’re in a happy and healthy relationship: you laugh at each other, with each other, together. You’re happy together.

“You know I’m an over-thinker”, I said. “And you know fashion is important to me, so, yeah, I’m kind of mad at”, I imitated his voice, accent and all, “Casual, with comfortable shoes, and bring a jacket!”

“I don’t talk like that”, he mocked. “And that was just, an estimative, really? But now that I think about it, it really doesn’t matter how we dress…”

“How can it not matter?!?”

“It doesn’t”, he shrugged. “Okay, I’m changing it. Screw casual. New dress code is… Wear whatever you want!”

“Don’t be silly, if wherever we’re going fit casual before, you can’t just change it now!”

“I just did. Better yet! New dress code is: wear what makes you feel the best”

“Okay, first of all, that’s really dangerous, cut this nonsense and give me some real instructions or I’ll show up in the biggest most fancy red carpet gown I own!”
“Cool”, he said, “I’ll have my tux dry-cleaned”

“Harry, I’m serious”

“Jenifer, I don’t doubt it”, he said, standing up and going to the hall and towards the door. “I’ll see you Saturday”

“Harry, I’m serious. Ball gown. Biggest skirt you’ve ever seen. And diamonds!”

“I’m sure you’ll look beautiful”

“You can’t just change the attire! Did you change the place?!”

“No”

“No, so how could it be casual at one minute and fancy in the other?”

He stopped at the door and I almost bumped into him. “I’ll see you Saturday”, he smiled, and opened the door.

I grabbed his arm before he could leave and turned him back at me, fast. On my tiptoes, I pulled him down and kiss him on the lips. Just slightly, just a little, just a peck. A bit longer than a peck would be. When I pulled back, landing on my feet again, he followed. His face followed mine, his lips didn’t let mine go. I pushed him back gently. Took a couple of seconds, but he took a deep breath and, biting his lip, let me go. He looked at me.

“I didn’t make any promises”, I whispered. Harry smiled.

With one hand in his chest, I gently push him the last step out. He was still smiling when I slowly closed the door, after waiting for him to say something, which he never did. It felt really good to leave him speechless for once.

I smiled, turning my back to the door. This wasn’t how I had imagined I’d feel after I told him everything, but then again, what did I know about happy and healthy relationships?
The First Date

When I opened the door for him that night, his look had been of disappointment.

“…oh”, Harry said, the smile he had started to show dying instantly in his face – not exactly the reaction I had been looking forward to as I overthought my entire outfit.

“I knew it”, I said, frustrated with myself. “This isn’t casual, is it? Dammit, I worked really hard on this, I know is a designer dress, but it’s colorful and printed! And I’m wearing flats!”

“It’s not that…”, he sighed. “…it’s great”, he paused, understanding splashed through his face. “Oh, Jen, you look beautiful! Don’t get me wrong, you look incredible, as usual”, I let a smile on my lips, as I blushed. “But, ahem, didn’t you forget something?”

I stared and thought. Casual? Check. The Giambattista Valli white and green short dress with pink flowery print could be awesome with heels and a badass hairdo, but I was matching it with pink flats and down straightened hair, so casual. Comfortable shoes? Check, see flats! Jacket? Super check, jeans too, so even more casual. What’s more casual than jeans?

That’s when it hit me: Harry wasn’t wearing jeans. He was wearing black pants. Because he was wearing a tux.

“…Oh”

“What happened to wearing your most fancy red carpet ball gown?”, he asked. “I thought we changed the dress code!”

“I thought you were joking!”

“But you said you wanted to dress up, it made you feel more comfortable and feel your best. I even brought you diamonds!”, he showed me the jewelry package in his hand, big enough to fit a necklace. My hand started itching for it.

“Yes, but it doesn’t make any sense, if we’re still going to the same place where it was appropriate to dress casual, how can we now dress up?”

“I told you, it doesn’t matter”

“It can’t not matter, Harry”

“It doesn’t, you’ll understand, just go change”

I sighed. “People will see us and speculate-”

“Jenny”, Harry held my shoulders and smiled. “Go change”

There were very simple reasons why I obeyed: I really like dressing up. I really wanted to leave already. I was really excited about going out with him and also about finding out what was in the jewelry package.

So I marched back to my closet and started to unzip my dress down, thinking of what to wear.

Back when I was still shooting the second season of The Mediator and people were still getting to know me as ‘celebrity’, going to premières, award ceremonies and after-parties were almost just as
big a part of my job description as filming was. Janine used to say I had to ‘build myself as a brand’. The list of people I employed then was as short as just Richard, Janine and Joshua – my lawyer. I still wasn’t as busy to need Monica, whom I wouldn’t hire for another two years, and I refused to pay for someone to tell me what to wear if I considered myself so much a fashion fan, so I had no stylist.

It was at an after-party for the Marc Jacobs fashion show in New York City that I met Rachel Zoe, the biggest stylist for celebrities at the time. When we met, as a fan of both her styling and reality show about her career and struggles, I had to do my best to keep it together, but, in the end, it was her who took me by surprise expressing how she was a ‘fan of my style’(!). ‘Who dresses you?’, she asked, then. Proudly, I answered: ‘I dress myself’. Rachel didn’t really answer for almost a minute as she was stunned. ‘But how do you get the dresses?’, she asked, finally, ‘do you know many designers?’. My answer was quite simple, for it was all I knew then: ‘I buy them’.

The thing is if you have a stylist, someone who knows designers and has a good business relationship with them, you don’t have to buy every dress you wear to a work event, they borrow the dress for you and you return it afterwards, this way you look incredible and the designer gets the best promotion ever. Rachel was so surprised that I was spending actual money buying dresses I wouldn’t be able to wear for at least another five or ten years according to social convention that she tried to convince me to let her style me for the Emmy’s, which would happen a week from then.

‘I already bought a dress for that’, I told her. And it was not only true, but it was a dress I was extremely excited about, for it was the pre-fall 2010 Oscar de la Renta red dress Blair Waldorf had worn in a very iconic Gossip Girl episode that had aired recently. Sleeveless, ethereal and light, the dress was then my definition of perfection and nothing had made me happier then to be able to buy it before any stylist had snatched it for their clients.

As Rachel was kind enough to explain then, there was a reason for it: no stylist wanted their clients to wear something people had already seen on TV, the point was to get the fashion police talking by wearing something new. ‘Also’, she went on, ‘the dress is not exactly an Emmy dress, is more for the Oscars’.

She proceeded to offer to style me again, for free. ‘Just this once’, she said. ‘If you like it, you’ll never spend your own money on a work event again and I get the chance to work with someone who clearly knows what they’re doing, which is always fun’. She has been my stylist ever since, and the dress I almost wore to the Emmy’s that year, my gorgeous ruffled skirted, red, Oscar de la Renta, ‘Blair Waldorf’, dress had been since then safely hidden away in my closet, waiting for an opportunity to come out and play. I had never had the heart to return it. Or the opportunity to use it.

Until that day.

I stared at the big garment bag, biting my lip, for a long time before thinking ‘screw it’ and going for it. I unzipped the bag, feeling I had just opened the doors to heaven and imagining a beam of light fall on me and a chorus of angels singing in the back of my mind. My Giambattista Valli fell to the ground and soon enough I was right where I was supposed to be: inside an Oscar de la Renta red ball gown.

When I came back into the living room, we tried it again, seeing each other for the first time on our first date: he heard the sound of my Kate Spade pink heels on the hardwood floors first, and then turned around, and I was able to fully gather how handsome he looked in his tux, like his own version of James Bond.

My dress, shorter in the front, allowed my shoes to be seen. My purse, a fuchsia envelope Armani
in the same tone as the shoes, was in my hand, ready to go, and I had managed to pull my hair half up and curl the tips of it. Going for simple and neutral, the pear-shaped brilliant diamond drop earrings were the only jewels adorning me – I had almost kept the Hermès bracelet I had been wearing with the other outfit, but finally decided I didn’t need it today. Finally, I had also changed the makeup just a little bit, darkening my eyes and changing the previously pink lipstick to a red one. All ready and feeling like a princess in my own weird version of a fairytale, I stared at him in anticipation.

I saw Harry gulp. “There you are”, he said, his voice soft as in a whisper, his tone and the look in his eyes being all the compliment I really wanted. He blinked, like coming out of a trance, and squinted his eyes at me. “But there’s one thing missing”

I looked at myself. “Well, I don’t have a jacket now-”

“I mean this”, I looked up.

He took three steps closer to me and opened the box in his hands, showing me the most beautiful diamond and pearl necklace I had ever seen – with two rolls of round pink pearls and two rolls of diamonds interleaved until the final roll, of drop pearls.

I smiled, breathless. “That’s gorgeous”

“No”, he said, removing the necklace delicately, and walking behind me to place it in my nude torso. I got my hair out of the way, awkwardly. “Now it’s gorgeous”, he said, after he was done, turning me to the mirror on the wall. I smiled again, touching the pearls and cold diamonds feeling my heart skip a few beats when his hands slid down my arms.

In the mirror, it was easy to see how we managed to easily fool the entire world: in his tux, hair slicked back, head held high as a superhero, Harry looked like he belonged in a James Bond movie; me in my red, sleeveless, ruffled designer dress, with my hair half up and diamonds adorning my ears and neck, I could have been Judy Garland in The Good Old Summertime; Together, I felt like we should be a painting in a museum. Anyone would like to believe we’re real – even us.

“We should go”, he muttered, taking a couple steps to the door and raising his hand at me.

In the movie of my life, an exciting rhythmic melody started playing, first very low, then increasingly higher, until the girl – me – gives the guy her hand with a smile and they go into the night.

We rode the elevator and I felt so intense that I didn’t realize we weren’t going down until the doors opened and I noticed we were in the roof. The night sky and the lights from the skyscraper around us were even more intimidating, until I noticed the helicopter waiting for us – that was worse.

“It’s faster”, Harry justified, jokingly, when I inquired about it. “And this way we get to avoid being followed by the paparazzi”. With a playful wink, he pulled me to the helicopter and I made the mental decision to save everyone some time and just go with it.

“Am I ever gonna know where we’re going?”, I asked, loud, after we were strapped to our seats and up in the air. Harry smiled, but didn’t answer.

I tried to keep track of the places we were flying over, but it was difficult. Honestly, just the view from the helicopter ride was already entertaining. I remembered how Harry had said in Scotland that he knew I loved heights. I wondered if there was an actual reason we needed the helicopter or
if it was just to amuse me. Either way, I liked it. I looked at him, smiling, trying not to give it away how actually excited I was about all of this.

We flew over the East River, and I saw Brooklyn Bridge pass by underneath us. By my calculations, we were right above Brooklyn, flying over Highland Park, Brownsville, so not even the good Brooklyn. I wondered if we were going to the Hamptons, or Long Island, but when I saw that we were approaching the ocean, I wondered if we could be going way farther than I had predicted.

“Harry?”, I asked again. “Where are we going?”

“We’re landing”, he granted.

Soon enough the helicopter started to descend and we landed in a heliport that according to my calculations was by south Brooklyn. Harry helped me down the helicopter and there was a limo and a town car waiting nearby.

“A limo?”, I asked, teasingly. “Black tie, a fancy necklace, a helicopter, and now a limo? If you take me to a restaurant to have a candlelit dinner this will be the biggest rich people cliché ever”

He laughed. “Admit it, you love clichés”, he opened the door to the limo for me.

I rolled my eyes, fighting a smile, and got in, hoping we weren’t really going to a restaurant. With the partition closed and the guys in the other car, we were alone. I expected Harry to roll down the partition and give the driver directions so I could know where we were going, but it was pointless. After he closed the door, we just started moving, so the driver already had his orders.

As the cars made their way out of the heliport and around Brooklyn, I cleared my throat in a cough. “So… we’re in black tie…. In south Brooklyn…”

“Stop trying to think of where we’re going, just… enjoy the ride. You’ll find out soon enough”

“Okay”, I said, sighing, hating to know that he was right: I loved everything about it.

Sitting in the car I realized I had no idea what I was supposed to be feeling. I knew I liked Harry, I knew I liked Harry a lot. I also knew, because he had told me in pretty explicit words, that he liked me too, but I couldn’t help but wonder if Harry knew I liked him.

As I sat there, watching as Harry rubbed his palms in his pants before mindlessly placing his right one in above his heart, as he always did when he was nervous. I smiled at myself, over the effect I had on him, wondering if he knew his effect on me.

“A penny for your thoughts”, he said, when he saw the smile on my face.

I laid my head back, “You’re nervous”

“…that’s what you’re thinking about?”

“Yes”, I said, “I was looking at you and I realized I could tell that you’re nervous”. He nodded, looking out the window. “Am I wrong?”

“No”, he said, and looked back at me, laying his head back too. “I’m nervous. Are you?”

I smiled with the corners of my mouth, very slightly, “You don’t know? Can’t you tell?”

“No”, he chuckled. “I have no idea. I see your cheeks go red sometimes, and sometimes I can tell
you’re thinking about something or other, but usually you just stand there, tall and straight, with this look of confidence about you and I have no idea what is going on in your head. Especially when it involves me… And, you know, us. Then I just have no idea… You’re a total mystery”

I felt the confusion was showing in my face because, after all, it seemed ridiculous he didn’t know… well, everything. What I felt, what I wanted, how nervous I was, and how ridiculous it felt that we had to sit there and pretend we didn’t know we’d both just rather go back home and do it.

I retraced – as I had done so many times since – everything that had happened since the start wondering what he could be thinking. He kissed me in Scotland, gave me time to tell him not to, and I didn’t. Then he said he loved me in the kitchen (‘I’m fucking in love with you!’), and I told him what a stupid idea the whole thing was – not that he didn’t already knew. He kissed me again and told me he loved me, again, to which I responded, channeling my former lover, ‘don’t’. In retrospect I realize now Adam is not the kind of person after whom I should have been mimicking my approach to love. After that, we went about our day until that night in his room, after he apologized for messing things up and expressing he still wanted to be my friend if that’s all he could be, I kissed him again. In retrospect I realize that was not my smartest move considering I was trying to convince him we could only be friends, which is what I said next, to which he responded by vows ‘not to let me forget’, and so the messages ensued. Through them, Harry kept on reaffirming his feelings and I kept on running, until we finally met up again in the building and after I accidentally told him to stop, he listened and left, leaving me alone, until I reached him in the stairs to tell him I would go out with him. Then, of course, there was the amount of drunken confessions I might have made and forgot, which he might have believe or not, and neglected to tell me happened. All I remembered from that night was kissing him right before he left, but that could just mean I was attracted to him, which he had said himself didn’t have to mean anything other than that. I wondered if that’s what he thought was the case, that I was merely attracted to him.

Was it possible he didn’t know I liked him? And, in that case, how long could I still keep the lie up? It felt fun, to think I had this power in me, the power to change this date into whatever I wanted it to be, the power of knowing I had him, and knowing whatever I decided to do tonight, letting him know how I felt or not, he wouldn’t expect it. How long could I still play cool?

The car slowed down gradually until it stopped. “We’re here”, Harry said, opening the door himself and stepping out, seeming surprised we were there already, although if we’re being honest it had felt like torture to sit alone with him pretending it was not a big deal. I couldn’t see much out, but I saw lights.

Careful not to step on my dress, I followed him out. Before me stood the Coney Island Luna Park.

The lights were all on and I could hear music playing from the speakers inside (could it really be ‘You Need Me, I Don’t Need You’?). A little ahead I could see the beach, and hear the soft sound of waves, but there didn’t seem to be anyone there, or at the park now that I thought about it. It was deserted. The lights in the rides were on, the big, differently sized and colored rides, from the wonder wheel to the roller coasters to the carousel, there was music playing and, except for a few staff members I could spot, there was no one in the park.

Squeezing Harry’s hand - that I was still holding since getting out of the car - I couldn’t hold my laughter when I realized how crazy we looked, wearing black tie in a mostly empty amusement park near the beach.

“Are we alone here?”

“Well… there’s a few staff members-“
“I mean beside them”

“Yes, we are... Do you like it?”, Harry asked, smiling, after I was still laughing seconds later.

I looked at him, sighing, imagining an answer that would cover exactly how happy I was with the amount of thought, time, energy, and frankly, money he had put into this. I just nodded, smiling.

“So I didn’t disappoint then?”, he asked, starting to walk towards the entrance and pulling me with him. The anxious excitement in his eyes warmed my heart.

“That’s why the clothes didn’t matter... Because we’re alone in the park? You closed the park for us?!”

The expectant look on his face made me smile, he mimicked. “You get it right?” He asked, excited, “The reason why we’re in Coney Island?”

The song, the park, soon it had started to make sense. “Maryland?”, I tried.

"Yes!", he said, enthusiastically, "Our fake first date story you made up on the boat-"

"...because I didn’t have one", I smiled.

"Well... Now you do"

I turned to him, realizing that, consciously or not, by making our first date story real, he was making us real.

I stared at the park entrance, the four big circle lights shining in the night, the red lights of the tall wonder wheel in the back, the song playing (the more acoustic version, from the You Need Me EP that was more melodic), and I felt like the movie of my life had just started to be real.

“This is incredible”, I mouthed. Harry pulled us in, and to the chorus of our song we walked into the park. “Did you pick this song?”

“Yes”, he answered, confident and satisfied. “All of the music for tonight was picked specially for you”, his tone was fun and laid back, as in an ironic joke, but I could tell he meant it, and I could tell how excited he was at my surprise.

As we walked in, and I saw the rides properly and the song changed to ‘So’, I started to accept this was real and got into the game very easily.

“Oh, my God, I can’t believe that you did this”, I ran a few steps ahead, to walk around the ticket stand to see the park properly.

Harry saw me spin around holding my dress up with my hands. “Have you really never been here?"

“No”, I said, outraged at myself. “I wanted to come when I was in NYU, but all my friends thought it was lame... and ever since I’ve just been busy”

“Good, then...”, he approached me, clearing his throat, “Ladies and gentleman!”’, he said, grandly with arms opened, “Tonight I present you, Jen and Harry’s perfect first date!”

“We... have a theme?”

“Don’t mock, you’re the one who made it up”, he teased. “And tonight, I’ll make it come true. All of it. Exactly as you said it. From playing the kids’ rides that are too small for us-"
“Oh, I can get on board with that!”, I laughed, dying to see his big legs inside a kid cart.

“To roller coasters without lines—“

“Oh, this is a dream”, I laughed.

“To me letting you win a few of the games”

I challenged the smirk on his lips with one of my own. “Really? We’ll see about that”

“To me winning you a stuffed bear…”, he said, walking slowly pass me, with a smirk on his lips. I knew exactly where this was going.

“To you losing it…”

“Well, I don’t think I’ll mind losing it”

“…because you’ll lose it by being too distracted by me kissing you?”

“Hey, you’re the one who invented the date”, he said.

I laughed. “You’re saying I’m going to kiss you”

“I’m saying that’s what you said it happened… It’s like in Doctor Who. You created it, now is a fixed point in history… We just have to go with it.”

I smiled. “Mmhm… Why?”

“Well… because we want to”

“How do you know I want to?”

He gave the ground a sad smile, which told me that he really didn’t know how I felt. “Ok, I want to. I can’t speak for you. I guess I can just give you your best date ever and hope for the best. How am I doing so far?”

Truth be told, he was doing amazing. But I wasn’t about to end the mystery of my feelings. “… Let’s just ride the toy, Harry”, I said, going to the one with airplane-shaped cars that seemed to go round a lot, which I guess kids thought was interesting.

“No, seriously, how am I doing so far?”

“I’m not gonna kiss you first”, I said.

He made a face. “You might”

“I’m not. I think you’re gonna kiss me first”

“Well, I’a gentleman. And you forget I made a promise… I’ll only kiss you when it’s right. And that is after you kiss me”

“I think you forget I already know how you feel about me. That gives me an advantage. I can seduce you into kissing me.”

“I’m a strong willed man”, I laughed. “And I think you’re the one forgetting that you were the last one to kiss me, so we know you’re likely to want to do it again…”
“Okay. It’s a bet. I bet you’re gonna kiss me first”

He smiled. “I bet you’re gonna kiss me first”

“Deal”

“Deal”

“This may just be the most idiotic bet we’ve ever done”, I said. “And that’s saying something…”

We got to the first ride, Air Race, with cars that fit six people shaped like airplanes, so we assumed it was one of the kids’ rides.

“Good evening”, the smiley girl in a Luna park tee greeted us at the entrance.

“Oh, I forgot”, Harry said, after we had greeted her, “Wristbands”. He rolled up his sleep just a bit to take out one of the two silicon yellow bracelets he had on his wrist. He gave me one. “This will get us everywhere”

I put on mine, and the girl showed us to our seats and straped us in. There were prints of control panels in front of us, to make us feel like we’re in a real airplane.

“Ok, you’re a pilot”, I said. “So you know what you’re doing here…”

“I fly helicopters, it’s a tad different.”

“I’ve always wanted to learn how to fly.”

“Really?”

“Yeah… seems, you know… yeah”

He chuckled. “Seems what?”

“It’s stupid…”, he gave me a face. The girl went back to the control room after checking our big seatbelts were properly tight, which seemed a lot of work for a kids’ toy. “Fine… Look, knowing how to fly an airplane… looks like something useful to save yourself from an apocalypse in movies”

He laughed. “Are you serious?”

“Yes”, I said, knowing the mockery was well-intended, and sort of well-deserved. “Look, did you never see 2012? Half of that plot was the characters trying to find someone who could fly an airplane… when the day comes, I’ll be ready”. He laughed again.

“All ready?”, the girl asked.

“Just a minute”, Harry told her. “Here, I’ll teach you how to fly an airplane”

“You’ll teach me how to fly an airplane in a toy in an amusement park?”

“I’ll teach you the basics”

“Didn’t you just say you’re a helicopter pilot?”

“Yeah, but I learned how to fly planes before helicopters, I have a license and everything”
“You have a license to teach? ‘Cause then I could just get mine from you”

“No, you’ll have to go to someone official for that. But I can save you some time and money by teaching you the basics”

“Okay”, I said. “Question. Does that mean you can fly any plane and any helicopter in the planet?”

“…Not exactly”, he said. “I mean, helicopters, yes. You fly an apache you can fly any helicopter out there, it’s the hardest. But planes are different. I’m more used to the small ones. Commercial planes are a lot harder. The control panels are gigantic, there’s too many buttons. But, the core of every plane is the same, so if you know that, at least you could take over in case your pilot died mid-flight or something”

“That’s exciting”, I said, energetic, “Go!”

He grinned. “Okay”, he looked at the pretend panel in front of us, badly printed in the car, probably imagining the real thing. “So, first thing you do is you make sure you have fuel, and that the electric panel is off before turning the engine on. You check every part of the panel to make sure everything’s working properly, if it is, that’s eighty percent of the work, you just have to remember the right number and keep it that way. So, there’ll be two switches about here”, he pointed at the air, “Which you’ll pull out, turn and push back in and turn again, to make sure all the fuel goes to the engine when you turn it on. Now, if you’re already with your seatbelt fastened, you test your breaks, it’ll look just like pedals on a car, there’s two too, you push both to break”

He looked at me, attentive, but focused on the lesson, and then looked at the air in front of us, to the imaginary control panels and wheel. He spoke confidently, calm, on the one subject he knew the most in his life, all with the amazing accent I loved, and I had to remind myself to pay attention, because he just seemed so perfect at that very moment.

“There’s a master switch on this side that will turn on, then will take this plunger-“, he spoke about two sentences of technical bullshit where I just lost myself in his accent, until we were in the good part again. “So after this you use the key to turn on the engine, and now you’ll make sure the wing flaps are up, there would be a button here that you would put up… go ahead”

I looked at him, uncertain I knew what he meant, then raised my hand and pretended I was turning an imaginary button up. “Good”, he went on, making me laugh. “Now, the carburetor heat needs to be in the cold position, we’ll check that again…”, he pretended to turn another button around. “We make sure we really did pull full throttle, and cold carburetor heat, and now we’re all set. So now you call the control tower central to ask permission to take off, ahem”, he pretended to hold a radio to his mouth, “Central this is… uh… Luna Park 187”, he read the random number printed in the car, “asking permission to take off. Usually”, he told me, in his normal voice, putting his hand away as if to make sure central wouldn’t hear us. “Usually we tell them our position, and which lane we’re taking, then after they give us the go ahead, we can take off”

“We just drive the plane to the lane?”

“Pretty much, we drive the plane on position, is like getting it out of a parking space, pretty much like driving a normal car… You need to make sure you’re at the very end of the lane so you have optimized space to get a lot of speed to take off. After you check one last time all your control indicators are working properly, you increase the throttle to about two thousand rpms. So, that’s it. You take speed… “, he gestured to the girl in the cabin now, and she turned the toy on, so we started spinning around in our toy-planes slowly, “You take speed, and then there’s a couple indicators here you look to. The first tells you the pressure on the back of the plane. You can start pulling the steering wheel up when it’s at, say… 55 knots, and then wait until about 75 knots to
bring it up again and start to fly, go on, you can do it”

He looked at me expectantly, I laughed slightly, before holding the imaginary wheel and pretending to pull it towards me, “Wow, okay!” I said, as we turned almost completely to the side.

After almost a full spin around itself, the car we were in started to take up and turn to the sides, and the use of the very tight seatbelts became clear.

“I don’t think this is a kids’ toy”, I said, as the car went back to the original position and quickly turned to the other side.

“I think you’re right”, Harry laughed, and we laughed as we were turned upside down, and around faster and faster, yelling. “Well, this was supposed to be lesson two!”, he joked, and we laughed as the adrenaline kicked in and we rolled around ourselves wishing it wouldn’t end.

We walked the park, pointing at the rides and deciding which ones we should do first, before settling the next one should be The Tickler, a roller coaster of sorts with a big round car that twisted around itself as it went down its course: very fun, and also a very easy way to get yourself nauseous.

Flowers in Your Hair was playing now, and we felt just felt just like the song, and decided on something calmer next. We went to Magic Bikes which was, now truly, a kids’ ride. It was basically a lighter version of the first, with a twist: the toy-plane-car only took flight if we pedaled it.

“Now, this is just cruel”, Harry said, “It’s just tricking kids into exercising”

We went for the Electro Spin next, a big circle of chairs pointed out, that also went around itself along a big platform in U form.

“Let’s get your pretty dress a bit up, so we can make sure you’re all strapped down”, another woman said as she helped us up this one.

“Yes, somebody”, I looked at Harry, “told me I could wear whatever I wanted”

“Okay, so I overlooked this small detail”, he granted, “You still look gorgeous, though”

I chuckled, blushing. The woman strapping my seatbelt smiled. “That you do”

When it started, and the small thrill of the initial movement began, the one before we know if a ride will be thrilling or terrifying, I saw Eddy and the new guy, Joseph, laughing together looking at us at a distance, as Clark and Nate stood behind in opposite sides, overlooking the park.

“You know we should make them ride these things too”, I told Harry.

“We’ll pick the worst one and dare them to go”, he said, and we laughed, right before our wheel of torture went around fast, going down and making us shout.

After that, we took a turn to the left and went for the Brooklyn Flyer – a double swing which rode around and very high, overlooking the park.

I sat with Harry and we started to lift and to spin until we were flying around seeing the whole park.

To the sound of a new song, I saw the moon, the stars, the reflection of the sky in the sea, and,
most impressive, the park, all with its lights on, but almost nobody in it.

“I can’t believe that we’re actually alone here”, I said, smiling, feeling the wind blow softly on my face.

He looked at me. “You like it?”

“Do I like it?!”, I laughed. “Yes, Harry, I like it a lot… Since when did you know this would be our date?”

“Since you invented it”, he said.

“July?”, I asked, in disbelief. “You’ve been planning this since July?”

“Well, no”, he grinned. “I wanted to go out with you since before, but I didn’t start planning in July. Not actual planning. I just knew when you said you didn’t have a good first-date story that I wanted to give you one, but I didn’t know if I’d have the chance”

I let that sink in for a while, as we watched the lights fly by. “Since when?”, I asked. “Since when did you want to go out with me?”

Harry stared ahead for a few seconds. “Since I’ve had real feelings for you?”

I wondered if that was what I meant. Did I want to know? “You don’t have to say it… But yeah, it’s kind of what I meant”

It felt like we had been spinning around another five turns before he spoke again. “It’s complicated”, I grinned.

“Isn’t everything with us?”

He nodded, smiling. “Remember your birthday?”

I remembered the dinner, with a violinist serenating us, in his terrace, and my Mary Katrantzou dress. I remembered getting Vodka, and dancing with some of my closest friends, and realizing Tyler was hurt. I remembered dancing with Harry, twice, and fake-kissing Harry, also twice.

“It couldn’t be that long”, I said, realizing, timidly, it was probably around that time that it had started for me too, in the sad realization in our dance in the rain when the night was over that I wished it was real.

“Not really”, he said, and we started to be brought down gently. “But… I guess if I could pinpoint a moment when it started, it would be then. I didn’t notice right away, though. Or if I did in some way, I guess I just buried it inside and didn’t think about it as to not complicate things”

We remained quiet as we stopped on the ground, and a girl – the first one, I noticed – strapped us out. We walked out of the ride, still in silence, looking around.

“You kissed me”, he said. I looked at him in wonder. “After I gave you Vodka, you got really happy, and then you kissed me. And, I guess for about two, maybe three seconds before I realized you were just doing it because the guys were watching us through the windows, I did thought you had just kissed me because you simply wanted to. I thought you were making a move and we’d have to talk about it, and that’d be weird. But then it was just because we were being watched and I let it go, but in those three seconds, I did feel something, and I just pretended to myself that I didn’t”
My stomach seemed to be twirling inside of me at his words.

“Right… Well, the guys were watching”, I started, interrupting him, realizing saying this would put him one step closer to realizing how I felt. I still wasn’t sure I wanted him to know. Still, I kept talking. “… but I didn’t know that until after I had kissed you”. He looked puzzled. “On my birthday? After you gave me Vodka? I was just… really, really happy, and excited, I guess, and I kissed you as a thanks, and just afterwards I realized I shouldn’t just kiss you for that, and so I said the guys were watching, which turns out they were. But I didn’t know at first…”

“You-“, he stopped walking. I went on to the Water Racer tent, having an idea and hoping he wouldn’t hang on to the subject. “Oh. So…”, I sighed, “Were there other times… when you kissed me without knowing if someone was looking?”

I waited until he reached me, right before the tent. Holy Ground started playing.

“I’ll tell you what”, I said. “Let’s play water race, and if you win, I answer a question. If I win, you answer”

“Okay”, he smiled, taking his hands off his pockets and walking to the tent with me. “But I must warn you, I’ve been shooting since ever, so I’ll probably win”

We showed the lady our bracelets and sat on the stools in front of water pistols. The goal was to shoot the biggest amount of water inside the mouth of a toy-clown head a few feet in front of us.

“Ready?”, the guy behind the counter asked. “One, two, go!”

Harry and I pulled the triggers on our water guns, which were too loose, and splashed water everywhere, laughing before we could actually point it where we were supposed to.

“Okay, you got me wet on purpose”, Harry said, and I laughed.

“I didn’t, I swear!”

“Five bucks says Jen wins”, I heard Eddy behind us.

“I’ll take it”, Clark agreed.

Ten minutes later we’re walking to the Tea Party and I’m carrying a Teddy bear in my arms with a victorious grin in my lips.

“Think about it this way, Mr. Prince”, I told him, “At least I still got my bear, everything is going according to the script”

“Oh, okay… you won”, he said, and we showed the bracelets again to the girl at the tea party before she let us in. “What do you want to know?”

I really did consider asking more about how long had he had feelings for me before we actually kissed, but I thought it just wouldn’t be as fun.

“Let me think…”, I looked at the guys standing outside. “Hey, you two, you wanna come in?”, they laughed.

“No, thank you”, Nate and Eddy said.

“You know what I like about this?”, Nate asked. “It’s not just some rubbish tea-cup set, it’s a really fancy tea-cup set!”
“That might have been the most British thing I’ve ever heard you say”, Eddy said, making us laugh.

When the tea cups started going around, and we started pulling the wheel inside so we would spin around ourselves, I thought of a question. “What is your favorite movie-?”

“Pulp Fiction”

“I know, I wasn’t done… I’m thinking of new questions… Like, what is your favorite movie to watch on Christmas?”

“Oh”, he said, thinking as we twirled around faster and faster, faster and faster, “The Cat In The Hat!”, he shouted, a bit too loud, because we were starting to spin too fast.

“Ugh!”, I let out. “I hate that movie!”

“You do not!”

“I do, that thing is scary! I can’t believe that was a kids’ movie”

“That’s ridiculous, everyone loves Cat In The Hat”

“I don’t, and I don’t understand people who do, that… Cat is a monster, it’s horrible. It’s just like Grinch. God, I hate The Grinch”

“Would you prefer me to say Love, Actually?!”, he scorned.

“Oh, no, that movie is terrible”, I said.

He held the wheel in the center of our tea-cup-car strongly, stopping us from spinning, so we just kept on going around the ride with the other tea-cups to the sound of a different song blasting through the parks’ speakers.

“You don’t like Love, Actually?!”, he asked, and in his serious look I couldn’t decide if I saw more disbelief or outrage.

“It’s not that I don’t like it. It’s a good movie. It’s nice. It’s just not everything is cracked up to be. Like, the guy literally tries to get with his best friend’s wife? What the hell?”

“Marry me”, he said and we laughed. “Come on, what is your favorite movie to watch on the holidays?”

“Nightmare Before Christmas”, I replied, “which is the only right answer!”

“Okay…”, he agreed. “That’s a good one”

“Now I’m gonna give you an easy one”, I said, “If you can stand up on your seat while I spin us around as fast as I can, I’ll answer a question for you”, I grinned.

“Okay, give me all you got”, he stood up trembling in his seat, and I started to spin us as fast as my arms allowed me.

“You can’t bend your body like that, you have to stand tall!”

Harry laughed, the sweet sound of his laugh unraveling things inside of me as I tried to keep myself in place
“How long?!”, he asked, trying not to laugh and not to move too much.

“How long can you?! That’s the right question!”

“Okay”, he chuckled, “I’m starting to laugh, I’m gonna fall”

I finally decided this would end up being a crappy date if he fell to his death – imagine what a way to go, ‘banged his head in the Luna Park Tea Party’ – so I slowed us down and he got back to his seat.

“That was easy”, he said. “Let’s see… what was it I wanted to know?”, he pondered.

“I think we should go eat now”, I said, just as the cups started to stop, and I got down and started to walk out.

“Okay, my question is, what was…your…”, I chuckled, as he seemed to be making the question up as he said it. “Dance theme?”

“My dance team?”

“You know, after you finish High School, you have a party beside graduation, right? The dance!”

“Oh, prom? God, why do you wanna know that?”

“Take me on a trip to high school Jen!”, I groaned, miserable at the thought of ‘high-school-Jen’, and he laughed at me.

We ordered ‘Hawaiian smoothies’ at a place called Maui Wowi, and pies at Pie Face, and I suggested we go eat by the beach, so we exited the park and walked the boardwalk to the pier, the beach on one side, the park by the other. It was late at night now, and summer was over, so there was barely anyone around, which was good. Anyone could have been drawn to the couple in black tie drinking smoothies in the Coney Island beach boardwalk.

I told Harry about High School Jen, and how despite thinking ‘Casino night’ was a very lame prom theme, she was really excited about it. I told him about Aiden Jackson, my date, who got high on the bathroom between songs and got mad that he didn’t win prom king and insisted we left early, but instead of taking me home tried to have sex with me in his car to the sound of Smack That, by Akon. That got some loud laughter out of him.

He calmed down to the sight of my timid smile, finally. “Yeah, you-“, he cleaned his throat, “You’re definitely not the type to have sex for the first time in a car…”

After a quiet few seconds of an awkward look I gave to the beach, he spoke again. “You had sex for the first time in a car, didn’t you?”

“Listen!”, I justified. He laughed. “I was seventeen, he was nineteen, we both lived with our parents and were way too prude to get a motel room or something, where else were we supposed to go?”

As we walked farther along the park through the boardwalk, the music got harder to hear, and I asked about his, ahem, experience and Harry told me about his ‘dance’, which was themed ‘Mardi Gras’, and how girls didn’t really care that he was a prince until he ‘grew into his own face’ – his words, not mine – and started looking better by 2002, also when he started throwing small parties for friends in his house with alcohol and weed, which suddenly got everyone interested and lent him a one-day visit to a rehab clinic once this leaked and the public grew concerned he was an
addict.

I laughed so hard at this I almost choked on my pie.

“You laugh, but you weren’t the one who grew up being told any mistake could end everything generations of your family took years to build”, he said.

He told me about the girl who finally took his virginity when he was 18 – between the party reputation, the tittle and the promise he was about to leave for his gap year adventure, this ‘Charlotte O’Dell’ person assumed it was now or never, and so it happened.

“Wait”, I asked, “Are you telling me I lost my virginity before the so-called ‘party prince’?”

“I hate that nickname”, he said, grinning. “And listen, I had a weird face, ok? And my hair was all over the place."

“Your hair is still-“, I mumbled.

“A tittle only gets you so far is what I’m saying so, yes, it took a while”, he stopped me. “And technically by the time I was losing my virginity you were… oh, yeah, twelve and being cast in Disney Channel…”, we were quiet, as I thought about that, realizing he was right. “Ok, you know what? Never mind. That thought just makes me feel old”, we laughed.

And we laughed.

And we laughed about how he almost tripped trying to prove he still remembered how to dance samba. And we laughed about how his physics teacher in high school was surprised he managed to graduate. And we laughed about the time Alessa and I decided we needed to try every type of alcohol in our senior year as to not be caught off guard in college – and ended up spending an entire weekend drunk while her parents were away, writing weird fanfiction and making stupid videos on her computer. We laughed about how he almost got killed by his own horse during a polo lesson while attempting to make an Indiana Jones pose once. And we laughed about my worst audition ever (“I had just come back from Brazil, literally, just gotten in the country, went to the audition straight from the airport, and I had been feeling crappy the whole flight, I had spent the previous whole week on the beach. I get there and read through about two pages before I start to get really nauseated and next thing I know I’m vomiting on camera… you’re laughing, but I’m not done. There’s this unbearable silence for a while before I clean my lips with my hands and try to continue to read like nothing happened until finally one of the directors tells me to stop and go home. It was mortifying”). He asked me what my favorite book I had to read for school was, which generated a whole discussion about literature.

“Les Misérables”, I said, “Mostly because by the time we read it for school I had seen it on Broadway and loved it. That was also the book that got Ally into French literature, which is why she’s getting her doctorate in it, but all the way to the one lit class we had in NYU I kept disagreeing that English lit was the best”

“Mhm, okay”, he sounded sarcastic, “You say that but you didn’t have to take three years of Shakespearean interpretation at Eton College. Name one British book you like besides Pride and Prejudice and Harry Potter”

“Oh”, I said. “…The Secret Garden”

“Oh, yeah”, he agreed, “Although I hated the movie”

“Oh, it was nice”
“Yeah, but they cut out all of the part in India about how truly awful Mary’s parents were. In the movie, you could almost believe they just happened to die at a party, but would have come back for her if they had the chance. In the book they had days to leave the country before the plague, but they choose to leave her behind!”

“You’re right”, I realized. “I always wanted to know if the song the author envisioned had really that melody they used for the movie”

He looked confused. “What song?”

“You know… how was it? ‘Mistress Mary, quite contrary, how does your garden grow?’”

“Jen”, he said, appearing cautious, “that is the song. It’s a years old nursery rhyme”

“Really?”

“Yeah, ‘Mistress Mary, quite contrary, how does your garden grow? With cockleshells, And silver bells, And fair maids all in a row’”

I realized my mistake in silence, and then smiled timidly. “You know, that makes a lot of sense because I always wondered how did those kids who were mean to her managed to make up that cute song”

He laughed. “Yeah, England is pretty great with children’s books. Just look at Alice in Wonderland, a classic –what?”

I was nodding negatively. “No, sorry, I like Alice in Wonderland but I have a problem with it”

“How can you have a problem with it? It’s great”

“The Disney movie scared me for life, Harry! A child shouldn’t be forced to watch sweet little Alice falling down a gigantic whole, somehow not bruise herself, and then almost drown in her own tears, and that just in the beginning of the movie. How was Alice not crying for help, desperate to get home?!?”

“Oh, God…”, he smiled.

And he smiled at the bit of pie crust in my chin. And he smiled when I twirled around in my dress to see the long red circle that formed when my skirt lifted. And he smiled when I asked him what place he had most liked to visit, and he smiled when he answered Lesotho. And he smiled when I answered the same question saying I still wanted to see so many places.

“Everywhere I’ve always been has mostly been at work, in a hurry. I wanna take time and enjoy a place at a time, you know? See the touristic parts and the urban parts, and the slums no one wants to go to, and the places you can’t help but imagine yourself in at those articles like ‘beautiful places you can’t believe actually exist! Like the Love Tunnel, in Ukraine, and the pink lake in Australia. And the Salar de Uyuni, in Bolivia. And Machu Pichu, which I’ve never been to, and Cambodia, and Mount Roraima which they used as inspiration for Up, and actually exists! And the Cherry Blossom Avenue, in Germany? I wanna go everywhere!”

And he smiled.

And I thought about how he seemed to be smiling ever since we got to the park, maybe even before. I thought about how his smile made me want to smile too, and about how I just wanted to kiss him. About how I wanted to kiss him and get this over with, the suspense, the tension, the big
what if hanging on the whole night. And every time he smiled I wanted to cover his lips with mine. And he smiled a lot.

We burned topic after topic of conversation and when we were leaving the pier back into the boardwalk, Harry walked to the rail separating us from the beach.

“Come on”, he said.

“Where are we going?”

“To dance, of course”

So he helped me jump the small rail to the sand. I took off my shoes so I could walk to the beach, complaining about the cold a little, which made Harry take his shoes and socks off as well, making me laugh at his excessive manners. I let the trail of my dress sweep away, and we stopped by the water when he put our shoes – and the Teddy bear - on the ground and placed both hands in my waist, bringing us close.

We had our bodies together and I could smell his cologne. The sand felt powdery and cold but my body was hot in anticipation.

“How now?”, I asked, softly, bringing my hands up to his shoulders.

“Now we dance”, he said.

We were far enough now so we couldn’t hear the music from the park anymore, but I remembered what I had said about it when I made up that date, so I had started grinning at what I knew he would say.

“This is the part, according to the script, where I tell you to sing so we can dance”

I nodded, we were both beaming now. “Right. But what should I sing, I ask you”

“Whatever comes to your head”, he said, as expected. So I chuckled a little, and gave it my best.

“Now I’m in town, break it down, thinking of making a new sound, playing a different show every night in front of a new crowd”, we got really into it, acting out as best as we could. I did my best no to laugh and Harry started spinning us around softly in a calm dance that did not go with the song at all. “That’s you now, ciao, seems that life is great now. See me lose focus as I sing to you loud. And I can’t, no, I won’t hush, I’ll say the words that make you blush. I’m gonna siiiiing this noooow, oh-oh. See, I’m true, my songs are where my heart is. I’m like glue, I stick to other artists. I’m not you, now that would be disastrous. Let me sing and do my thing and move to greener pastures!”, he dipped me, in a fast move, and brought me back up to the beat of the song in our heads, I needed a break to laugh. “…see, I’m real, I do it all, it’s all me I’m not fake, don’t ever call me lazy, I won’t stay put, give me the chance to be free…”, then he shouted the next part with me, “Suffolk sadly seems to sort of suffocate me”

We laughed, and went on spinning around softly, more to our own rhythm than any song, and I laid my head on his chest. Smelling the salty ocean air, the music I heard became the waves and his heartbeat, getting increasingly fast as we moved slower and slower.

I raised my head to look at him. Harry leaned in and touched my forehead with his. We closed our eyes together as we felt each other’s breath in our skin and I felt myself gulping for strength. His hands caressed my waist where they rested. I felt my skin burning up and opened my eyes again. He was looking at me.
I didn’t care about getting sand over my dress, or that we were in a pretty public space. I didn’t care he’d know what I wanted and how I felt. I didn’t care about the park, the limo or the helicopter, or the diamonds. I didn’t care about my career or his family, or that he had a date to go back to England. When he looked at me, it was hard caring about anything other than him; and him with me, and us.

So I got on my tiptoes and covered his lips with mine. Harry responded immediately, he leaned down so I could be on my feet and held me tighter as I touched his hair, his neck, feeling his soft, warm tongue with mine, making my entire body tingle.

When we stopped for air, still with our foreheads together, Harry was grinning. So was I.

“You lost the bet”, he whispered.

“I don’t care”, I told him. And I meant it.
Chapter Summary

Harry and Jen talk about the future in the aftermath of their relationship.

Chapter Notes

There is a, ahem, mature scene in this chapter (spoiler alert? oh well, we all knew it was coming). I didn’t use any warning beforehand because I feel like it’s pretty obvious, but let me know if you want me to use one and I will. ALSO: I have never, EVER written anything like this before and I am SUPER nervous, so if you could please let me know if you want me to not do it anymore (and just sort of like, hint at it and fade to black in the future) LET ME KNOW! Any and every kind of feedback is welcome!

When it happened, when it really, really happened, it felt like we were the only people alive in the world. It felt like there was no one and nothing out the door. It felt like there was no family drama, careers, or exes that could ever stop us.

When Harry turned back to me in the kitchen at the end of our date, in the middle of some rambling about the best way to make tea, I walked up to him and threw my arms around his neck, shutting his lips up with mine. I felt my body getting hotter and hotter as he responded, wrapping his arms around my waist, intensifying the kiss, leaving me tingling everywhere.

He had his jacket and tie off at this point of the night. I was barefoot and we were alone in my apartment. His tie was in the pocket of the jacket he had given me when we got back into the helicopter at the end of the date. My shoes had stayed at the door, where, after not knowing how to tell his POs he wouldn’t be staying the night, he just let them make their usual round on my place. When they left in the elevator, with snarky ‘behave, kids!’, we were left at my door, with tension feeling the space between us.

We had been trying to act like this was just a normal date, and therefore we didn’t know what was gonna happen. Harry didn’t assume he’d be staying the night – he wasn’t even sure how I felt. But, of course, I couldn’t handle the thought of not having him right at that moment for another second, so I just walked in, taking my shoes off, asking if he wanted some tea. He followed me in, closing the door as I put my purse and his jacket on the couch. He walked into the kitchen talking about tea and I knew I couldn’t pretend everything was casual and cool when all I wanted was him.

After our kiss in the beach – or should I say kisses? – we went back into the park through the second entrance, closer to the other roller coasters and the carrousel, which I ran to immediately, pulling a giggly Harry with me excitedly.

I sat in one of the ceramic white little horses with both my legs to one side and my pretty dress falling down. To my surprise, Harry sat right behind me in the little space I left behind, instead of going for another horse. I looked back at him inquisitively, but as he hanged on to the metal pole in
front of me, his face was right before mine and it left me so breathless I couldn’t even remember what was it that I was gonna say. So I just smiled, nervously, and faced forwards again, feeling his arms around me. The sappy song started playing, over our music through the speakers, and we started to go up and down and around in the dim colorful lights. Harry’s hands found mine in the pole as he held himself closer to me. His soft lips touched my naked neck and I felt like my heartbeat was louder than the songs as my skin grew hotter. Then, his lips got creative on my neck and by then I only knew three things: 1- it would leave a mark; 2- weirdly, I wanted it too; 3- I wanted him. More of him, all of him, all to myself and no one else.

I felt like I was gonna explode after a few rounds in the carousel, feeling his lips in my neck and his breath on my skin. Harry held me tighter and after I couldn’t handle it anymore, I jumped down in the back of the ride, where our security detail couldn’t see us. I pulled him with me, and made my way through the lines of ceramic horses and carriages passing by, and went to the center of the carousel, leaning back against the wall. Harry followed and I pulled him close so he wouldn’t be hit by a horse. Also because I wanted him close.

And I kissed him. I framed his soft, warm, lips with mine and explored his tongue with mine and ran my hands around his waist up his back, under his jacket, making patterns down with my nails very lightly. I felt him press his body stronger against mine and even through the two songs I could swear I overheard a small moan, soft as a whisper, coming out of him when I bit his lips ending the kiss.

We breathed strongly together, our hands still hanging on to each other, before we heard the guys calling out to us.

“Are you guys serious?!”, Clark said, seeming distressed and looking like he had just ran to where we were. “They’re fine!”

“What?”, Harry asked.

“Maybe don’t just disappear out of thin air when our literal jobs is to ensure your safety?!”

Harry and I tried not to laugh, awkwardly. “Sorry”, we said.

“Come on”, I pulled him after Clark was gone, stepping out of the running ride. “I wanna beat you on the race cars!”

“Let’s see about that!”, he said.

We made the guys race with us, and Nate had us all beat with the best time, actually.

After that, we went on the roller coasters we hadn’t gone to yet, holding hands in the way and smiling at nothing and everything.

Finally, the last thing on the script was the wonder wheel.

“Why is there two entrances?”, Harry asked. I saw the guy on the staff getting ready to answer and interfered.

“Nothing, really, this is the one we should go on”, I said, pulling him to the one on the left, having an idea on the spot about something I had heard before about the Luna Park Wonder Wheel.

“Oh, would you look at that”, Harry mentioned, as we got into the cars and sat across from each other, “The cars are, in fact, closed”
I laughed, remembering the single mistake that had almost gotten the story ruined when we first came up with it back in July.

We went up, slowly, the sound of the engines filling the delicious silence as we looked around.

“Why are we sitting so far from each other?”, he asked, looking at me now.

I shrugged, playful. “The view?”

He smiled. “My view is, indeed, great”

I chuckled, realizing his view was me.

I laid my head back and sighed, looking at him. “Tonight was… great”

“I had a great time”, he agreed, smiling.

Suddenly, our car started to move to the center of the wonder wheel, at first very slowly, then faster. I saw the smiled disappear from Harry’s face and realization take its place.

“Look out, we’re falling!”, he yelled as we moved, jumping from his seat faster than I could make sense of it, sitting by my side and wrapping his arms around me protectively in despair, trying to place himself between me and the ground. He closed his eyes tight and with a firm hand lowered my head.

I tried to hold it in longer, but couldn’t help it and started laughing. Harry came out of the cocoon he had made with his embrace and looked at me, unamused.

“What is happening?!”, he asked, still distraught, as our car swung itself in place when it reached the end of the trail.

“I’m sorry”, I pleaded, covering my laughter with my hands, “I couldn’t help it, you should have seen your face!”

“What is happening?!”, he asked again.

“The white cars stay in place on the ends of the wonder wheel, the colorful ones swing to the center and back throughout the ride”

He stared at me, serious. “Are you kidding me?”

“No, I’m sorry”, I laughed again.

“They move?!”

“Yes”

“Why?!”

“Adventure?”, I suggested. “I’m sorry, I heard about it once and I always thought it would be a good prank idea for someone who didn’t know. You shouldn’t have seen your face-“

“Jenifer”, he started, serious, but I could see the smile trying to make its way into his lips, “I thought we were about to die, there’s nothing funny about this”

“I know, and you protected me, that was so sweet”
He stared at me for another second, then sat straighter in his new seat next to me, still trying to play mad. I tried not to laugh anymore, but then I started again.

And his hand found its way to my neck, turning my face to his delicately and he kissed me mid-laugh. He still had his other arm around my back, which pulled me closer to him, as our tongues intertwined.

His hand left my neck to my leg, my arms brought him closer, and we kissed and kissed until it was time to leave the wonder wheel.

We walked back to where the cars were parked in silence. Harry slid his hand to mine gently, and I crossed my fingers with his until we were back at the limo.

We took one last glance at the lights in the park and got into the car to head back to the heliport.

Once we were moving, still with the partition closed, I was very aware once more of how alone we were. I was sitting in the middle seat this time, though, and I enjoyed the closeness.

I leaned my head in his shoulder, sighing, happy.

“This was the best date ever”, I whispered.

I felt him kiss my forehead. He grabbed my hand and crossed our fingers together again.

“I’m glad you’re happy”, he whispered back.

I bit my lip, realizing it was a twenty minutes ride back to the heliport, and there was only one way I wanted to spend that time.

I raised my head and he turned his at me, too close. I kissed him. His hand found my cheek, and he held me with his other arm, spraying his hand on my back. I guess more than the smell of his cologne, or the touch of his soft, wet lips on mine it was really the speed and intensiveness of his response that set my insides on fire.

It was the way his hand grabbed me, how fast I was in his embrace, and, before I knew it, I raised my dress so I could throw one leg up and sit in his lap. Harry’s arm hugged me, bringing me even closer with passion – our lips never got away from each other.

I sprayed my legs open wider so I could sit closer to him – our crotches thrusting against one another. His fingers went from doodling up and down my arms gently and sensually to grabbing my tights so intensely my dress came up. His hands were in my skin now, in my legs, and as more time passed, more I wanted his hands to be on all of my skin.

I didn’t remember doing it, but I untied his bow tie and unbuttoned his first few buttons, and I hated that he had an undershirt. Took a little work, but Harry took his jacket off. I ran my long nails up and down his torso, his back, his neck. I held his hair firmly between my fingers and bit his lips gently.

When the car made a turn into the heliport, we were still kissing and I was strongly thrusting my waist against his crotch area. Harry’s fingers had found the lace of my underwear and were teasingly playing with it. When we had made that journey to the park it had seemed excruciatingly long, now, on the way back, when we were happily entertained, the way passed faster than we cared to realize.

We forced ourselves apart, breathing heavily. My hands on his chest, his on my arms, we smiled
with our eyes closed.

“I, uhm”, he sighed, “I’m gonna need a minute”

I hoped off of his lap, feeling the volume that had emerged between his legs, smiling proudly at myself. I politely pretended I needed a minute as well, fixing my dress down and my hair – letting it all down now that his grip had messed it a little bit. I reapplied my lipstick, Harry picked his jacket and we got out of the car and back into the helicopter.

Harry put his jacket around my arms on the way, the late night in south Brooklyn had gotten windy, and he kept his arm around my shoulders until we got into the helicopter.

The flight back home was slower than the first time around as well, probably because I couldn’t stop asking myself what would happen next.

We landed in our building, and Harry followed me to the elevator with Eddy and Nathan. Eddy said goodbye after we got to my floor, and went home. Nathan, as usual, followed us to the door and searched the place before we walked in to make sure all was well. Harry was polite enough to act as if he wasn’t sure what the next step was.

In the kitchen, after I couldn’t pretend anymore and kissed him, his hands found my back. Mine found his buttons, all the ones I couldn’t reach in the car, and unmade each one, pulling his shirt from inside his pants when I was done. Harry’s hands left me just long enough so he could take his shirt out – I used that time to lift his under one as well, splattering my hands in his chest until the shirt was on the floor where it belonged.

Harry’s hands were unquiet, from my back to my hips, he grabbed my dress not knowing where the zipper was until I reached it myself and opened it. I took off the necklace and placed it in the counter. Soon enough, the dress was also on the floor where it belonged. I wasn’t wearing a bra, only the black lace panties he had playfully touched in the car. Harry took a couple of seconds staring at the sudden sight of me. I refused to look down, I stared at him, contemplating the breathless desire on his eyes. One second later, he took a step closer again and his hands brought our lips together once more. His hands left my face for my neck and torso until they cupped my breasts firmly once, and this time the small moan I overheard was my own.

His hands then left my breasts for my ass, and the next thing I know is he’s lifted me up to his lap. I wiggled my feet so my heels fell to the ground. Harry walked us out of the kitchen and through the hall, to my bedroom. We stopped kissing so he’d know where he was going, but my lips found his neck this time, and I too could be creative.

We stumbled against a wall in the hall. “If you keep doing that we’re gonna fall”, he whispered, playful, getting a better grip at me before walking us the rest of the way until the bed, where we fell together.

I held his belt before he could do anything and opened it. I unzipped his pants and he took them off, along with his shoes, as I placed myself better on the mattress. He came back at me and I threw my leg around his waist to pull him closer faster and felt the volume between his legs against me again. His forehead touched mine in a pause and he smiled slightly.

“What?”, I asked in a whisper, not being able to contain my own smile.

Our loud heavy breathing was the only sound in the room, and Harry ran his hands against my skin.

“I just”, he gulped, “I’ve fantasized about this for the longest time”
I smiled, holding his hand with mine and bringing it to my breasts, that he started to press gently.

I kissed him. And then I kissed him again. And again.

“I want you”, I whispered, in a moan, as he kept on playing with my breasts and thrusting himself tighter against me, the volume in his underwear against my crotch driving me insane. “Harry, I want you now”

My request was his order, and his tongue found my nipple. His other hand was on my tight, when I grabbed it, impatient. I slid it over my hip all the way across my waist under my underwear, between my legs, until his bulky fingers were over my big lips. He didn’t need any more direction than that.

His hand moved down and up again firmly a couple of times before his fingers made their way in between my big lips, where they started to rhythmically circle around until I was arching my back up in pleasure, moaning at his body over mine after so many nights of having only my imagination; and his warm, wet, soft tongue on my nipples; and his hand, faster and faster, moving around in me.

“Oh, fuck”, I whispered, my nails leaving marks on his skin as I tried to let him know how good it felt. “Oh, oh- Harry!”

As I breathed heavily in bliss and stroked his hair with one hand, scratching him gently with the other, Harry raised his head from my breasts. He placed a kiss on my lips with his eyes opened. His hand between my legs never stopped moving, but got faster.

I moaned breathily inside his kiss, until the pleasure felt so good my head turned to the sides in spasms of bliss. Harry kissed my neck, and my earlobe, and his hand in me reached a place I couldn’t let him let go off, so my hand met his down there again.

“Here”, I whispered, “Here”

“Like this?”, his voice was deep and rough when he spoke and I wanted to fuck it – I wanted to fuck his voice, and his blue eyes, and his smell of man’s cologne and after shave cream.

“Yes”, I said, in a breath, all that I could muster.

His hand got faster and my breath got so heavy I started to breathe in gasps.

“Oh”, I moaned, again and again as I felt his breath on my ear and neck. “Harry”, I cried in bliss. It was like I could hear the smile in his lips when he spoke.

“I love it when you say my name”

“Harry”, I repeated, smiling in a whisper as the movements of his fingers grew faster and stronger. “Don’t stop”, I begged. “Don’t stop”

“I won’t”, he promised.

“Harry!”, I cried again, pulsating with pleasure, as my legs jumped time and time again in spasms. Harry kissed my neck again. “There, don’t stop. Don’t stop!”, I repeated, breathless.

Harry didn’t stop. And he kissed me, his tongue so intertwined with mine I couldn’t know which was which.
“Hhmm”, I moaned, with his lips on mine and his fingers on me until I felt my back arching one last time as my muscled contracted in pleasure before I breathed out.

I sighed, strongly. I laid back into the mattress and pulled his hand up from my legs. He held my ass, bringing my leg up, and I hugged his waist with it. I breathed heavy as he kissed my cheek slowly as I calmed my own body a bit – but I couldn’t. It was still alive and excited with his body above mine and his lips on my skin.

We let some time pass, I ran my hand over his back slowly, feeling his skin on my palms. I turned my face to him, and our lips glued together like magnets. I pulled his lip with mine, feeling his breath on my skin, and his tongue made way into my mouth. His hand cupped my breast again, and I broke the kiss.

“Get a condom”, I breathed out.

“Now?”, he asked, “Don’t you need some time to-?”

“Harry, shut up and get a condom”

He jumped up from the bed, leaving my body aching with his sudden absence. I bit my lip while I waited, smiling with my eyes closed feeling so grateful for the box of condoms Monica would send along with my groceries every month – that every month I had to throw away so she’d buy new ones and think Harry and I had a sex life. Every month the ritual of throwing one away without her seeing it and finding a new one in the bathroom cabinet made me very depressed with the thought of how pathetic was my life. Not today.

Today Harry came back from the bathroom and took his place between my legs again. I felt his rigidness in my crotch and pushed his chest with my hands fast, rolling him over so he’d lay one the bed and I could sit my wet big lips on his now exposed crotch.

I sprayed my hands open on his stomach and kissed his belly button, then moved up slowly kissing him up until his chest and neck, moving my hips in circular movements on his hard cock. I heard his breath get heavier and he gripped a handful of my hair between his fingers, and pulled my head back, gentle but eager.

I felt his teeth lightly trace the delicate skin on my throat until my ear, teasingly rehearsing a bite that only came in my earlobe. I pressed my hips onto him harder.

“Now”, he begged, whispery, in my ear, one hand in my ass pulling me closer, begging to go inside of me. I could feel him hard between my legs as I adjusted my position, sitting on him.

“Now?”, I asked, teasingly thrusting myself forward again, rubbing us together. I heard a breathy moan come out of him and he nodded emphatically.

“Yes”, he begged.

I kissed his neck, making a trail from his jaw line to his chest. I ran my nails up his sides, and saw the chills on his skin. His hand was on my breast, pressing it tenderly, but firmly, his index finger and thumb rubbing my nipple deliciously.

I kissed him, thrusting my tongue deep into his mouth after his, feeling our lips together. I was aware of how wet everything felt, form the sweat in our bodies, to the soak between my legs, to our lips everywhere, and I didn’t mind; I loved every ounce of everything between us because for the first time in what felt like forever, there was nothing between us.
So I reached down, closed a gentle grip around his cock and pulled it up between my legs.

“Yes”, Harry begged, breathily.

I teased him, rubbing his knob up and down my wetness a couple of times. Harry eyes were closed but I saw how the veins on his neck were protuberant now and how red his skin looked.

Finally, I sat down on him, bringing him into me, moaning as I felt his thick, hard self finally where it should be: inside of me.

I arched my back erect as I started to grind him, forward and back, in and out, my hands still on his stomach. I saw his chest go up and down as his breath got heavier.

I laid down again on top of him, kissing his nipple, to his neck, before he grabbed my hair again, bringing my mouth to his. Harry kissed me, differently than he had kissed me before, all the other times before, with consuming passion as I increased the speed of my hips on his cock.

His other hand made its way down my back to my stomach until his fingers were again between my wet lips, in my clitoris. He started to rub it, fast and I had to break the kiss because I just needed air now. I kept our lips close, not wanting to let him go, not wanting to let any of him go.

“Oh, fuc-fuck, Jenif-“, he gasped, as I shoved myself onto him with ardor, faster. He let go of my hair, and cupped my face with his hand. “God, I lo-“, he gulped. “I like you so much”

I bit his lip, finding a faster pace now, hearing his moaning get more frequent before I couldn’t tell which were his and which were mine.

“Oh, oh”, he shouted, “there!”

I smiled, seeing the bliss in his face. Then I stopped. His eyes opened, and he looked at me in agony, for about two seconds, before I started again, faster than before, and I watched as he threw his head back in the bed, his eyes closing in desperate pleasure.

Harry took an impulse then, grabbing my legs under my knees and threw me on my back again. With the movement, he had to slide himself back into me, which he did, fast, making me scream in ecstasy.

He grabbed my hands and put them over my head in the mattress. He intertwined our fingers, and touched my nose with his, biting my lip this time. Then, he began. He pulled himself in and out fast.

“Is this- oh- good?”, he asked, in a whisper, his own voice was a moan.

I pressed myself to him as well. “Yes”, I cried. “Faster”, I begged, closing my eyes, feeling his uneven, heavy breath on my neck as we grew closer to climax. “Faster!”, I begged again, knowing it couldn’t be humanly possible, yet we did it.

We went faster and faster, until my muscles hurt with pleasure, and I couldn’t control the spasms. I heard Harry’s barely audible ‘there!’, and felt his hand let go of mine and go to my thigh. His fingers brought me closer, as if it was possible, and his breath got rarer and rarer as he reached peak after me. We cried out each other’s names once more, the chorus of breathy ‘Harry!’, ‘Jen!’ being the loudest song in the room.

We hanged onto it as much as we could, and finally our throbbing muscles gave in and we sighed together, heavily. We didn’t move as we tried to control our trembling breaths, still with our arms
around each other.

His lips found mine once more, and with a gentle peck, he pulled himself out and laid by my side. Ecstatic, my body complained against the movement, wanting, needing to stay still, to hang on to what it had just gone through.

Harry sat up. I avoided looking, but just assumed he was taking the condom off. I climbed to the top of the bed, and got under the sheets. I laid in my stomach and hugged the pillow, staring at the other side of the room before sighing, satisfied, and closing my eyes.

It was a trick I had learned early on to avoid awkwardness: I’d turn my back to the guy, instead of clinging on to cuddling, to give him an easy way out. So if he wanted to leave, he could just say so without worrying about looking in my eyes to do it.

I heard Harry stand up, and heard his footsteps to the bathroom. I tried to be as okay with it as I had been in the times before, but, with anticipation, I knew this was different. I closed my eyes, trying to drift off, trying not to care.

I heard his footsteps back as he made his way to the bed. I felt the mattress and the blankets move as he made his way into it after me. I felt his arm sliding in with mine, and his nose in my hair as he held me close. We sighed together.

I smiled, turning to him slowly, and passing an arm under his to hold him by his back like he held mine. Our legs intertwined, and we looked at each other, as we mindlessly traded slow eskimo kisses. We smiled.

Then, that was it. As we laid there in our silent embrace all of the cards were on the table. All of our walls were down. Our vulnerability was as naked as we were. There were no longer fake-dating agreements, unspoken rules, or games. There was no more guessing or pain, it was just us. It was just Harry and Jen, Jen and Harry. And it felt incredible.

I moved just a couple of inches, and touched his lips with mine in a peck. Once. Twice. Three times before sighing again. A pause. Harry then kissed me. Once. Twice. The third time at the tip of my nose making me smile. Then in my chin, and my lips again. Then my nose. And my temple. And my eyebrow. I laughed. He took it as a sign of encouragement and kissed me gently in my eyelid and down my face multiple times faster until my neck.

“You’re tickling me!” I laughed, trying to push him away from my neck, burying my face in the pillows to the sound of his lips on my skin and my own laughter.

He laid down again, smiling, and I got my hair away from my face, looking at him in quiet amusement, biting my lip. We were laying on our sides facing each other, mere inches between us. I saw the big smile dim slowly in his lips until there was just an air of joy about him.

As my lids grew heavier, I watched as his eyes went from mine to my nose, my lips and my chin. I watched his eyes rover over all of my exposed skin – in my arms, my chest – until my hair. He leaned in and placed a kiss in my forehead.

“I like you a lot. Did you know that, Jen Silva?”

The ghost of a smile never flickered from his lips and when I drifted off into sleep, I could still feel mine.

When I woke up a few hours later, in the middle of the night, I heard the sound of the bedroom door closing. I turned around to see the bed empty and realized Harry had left. I was still sleepy, so
that didn’t leave much room to think about it too much, but part of my brain hanged on to consciousness to see if he’d come back; maybe he had just gone to get a glass of water. I waited and waited and after a while I gave up.

I sat up and saw his shoes by the bed, still where he had left them. He wouldn’t go back home without his shoes – I thought. I took a deep breath, considering if it’d be too ridiculous to go after him and, before I knew what I was doing, I was wrapping my robe around my body to go to the kitchen. Nothing weird if I just need a glass of water, right?

I found Harry sitting in the couch, staring at his phone wearing my big golden headset. I approached him from the hallway – from both behind the couch and him, and realized he was on skype with Lame-Fucks before he turned to me.

“Oh, hey”, he said, turning to me and getting the headset off of one ear.

“Who’s that?” I asked, pointing at his phone, to the toddler Edward was bottle-feeding.

“Edward”, Harry said, raising his phone so I could see.

“No”, I said, “That”, and pointed at the baby.

“Oh, that’s Nene”. In the screen, I saw Edward’s lips move as he said something and his face grew annoyed.

“Nene?”, I asked as Harry said a ‘shut up’ on the headset.

“She’s Edward’s daughter”, he told me, “Eponine”

“He named his daughter Eponine?”

I saw Edward say something. “She doesn’t care, Edward, I gotta go-“

“No, what did he say?”

Harry sighed. “He said, yes, that’s her name, and what do you think he is? Some kind of uncultured, medieval man who’s never seen Les Misérables? And that’s when I cut him. Ed, I’m gonna go. I’ll talk to you tomorrow. Or, in a few hours for you”

I went around the couch as they said their goodbyes and sat in the other end while Harry took the headset off and placed it in the coffee table with the phone. He was still shirtless, but with his pants on.

He looked at me, sitting on top of one leg, trying to keep my robe closed. He rested his head on his hand, his elbow on the back of the couch.

“What was so urgent that couldn’t wait ‘till morning?”

He took in a deep breath. “Uhm. Just work stuff”

“At three a.m.?“

“It’s seven there”, he said. “He was just getting up”

“He always calls you first thing in the morning? That’s dedication. That’s actually worse than Monica and me”
He smiled, staring at the couch. “I called him, actually. Couldn’t sleep. Thought since is morning there, I’d get some work stuff out of the way”

“What’s up, Harry?”, I asked.

He looked up, sighing. “…I told him I’m not moving back”

I felt my heart skip a beat, and then go back to beating in my throat. “You- Uhm. You- what do you mean?”

“I told Edward that in two weeks, after the Halo concert is done, I’m not going back to London”

I pinched my own thumb with my nails, just to have something to look at that wasn’t his eyes. “… why?”

I heard his muttered laugh. “What do you mean, why?”

I looked at him. “Well, don’t get me wrong…”, I mumbled. “I’m not asking if it’s because of me, I just-I mean, I’m wondering-“

“Jen”, he said, getting up from his seat and crawling across the couch closer to me. He sat down in front of me, holding my hand. “It is absolutely because of you”

I hanged on to his hand, realizing the knot on my throat. He intertwined our fingers, and I bit my lip, trying to think of what to say.

First, I realized how it hadn’t yet downed on me that his date to go back home was so close. I hadn’t realized that we only had two weeks. Then, I realized how bad I wanted him to stay.

I thought of our late night Friends binge marathons, eating breakfast food at two in the morning, laughing in the kitchen watching Vodka do tricks. I thought of the day I took him to the old Bowery Poetry Club near NYU that I used to go to every week in college to perform slam poetry, and how he made me go up so he could see it (it was news for about two weeks, considering the club filmed every poem for Youtube, and so everyone found out).

I thought of the weekend we went up to the Hamptons to his friends’ house and just laid by the pool in the sun all day before playing Cards Against Humanity at night with the guys, and the weekend we went to eight different restaurants trying to prove everything they mentioned on a list of the most unique places to eat in the city.

I remembered the laughter-filled night we had had just a few hours before, the roller coasters and his desperate face on the wonder wheel, and how his body pressed against mine in the carousel, and how he had stopped himself from saying he loved me during sex (‘I lo-like you so much’), like he had said he would, as to not scare me off.

I looked at him, at the way he smiled looking at me and remembered something else too.

“I didn’t ask you to do that”, I said, soft as a whisper.

“I know that”, he said. “It’s my choice. If I’m being honest the only reason I agreed to setting a date to move back to London was because I, I needed to get away from you. I thought, you know, since I had no chance with you, I should get away from you as fast as I could… try and get over you… but now, Jen”, he came closer, “I don’t want to leave. I don’t want to leave you. I wanna be with you”
“Harry….”

“And I know you don’t believe in long distance relationships, but is fine. You don’t have to. I’m not going anywhere”, he squeezed my hand, “I’m not leaving you”

“What did Edward say?”

“Well, he’s gonna take some convincing. But I can do it-“

“Harry, stop”

He sighed. “What?”

I took a deep breath. “Even if you’re not leaving in two weeks, I am”, he seemed confused. I pulled my hand from his. “You know what I’m doing in two weeks?”

“Me?”, he offered, with a cheeky grin. I laughed.

Then I slapped his knee. “I’m serious”

“Sorry”, he said, going serious. “What?”

“I’m flying to Canada to shoot a couple of episodes for-“

“Right! The Walking Dead”, he nodded, “Yeah, you were all excited about that, I remember. So, that’s… that’s just a couple of weeks, right?”

“Almost three, actually”

“Well, I’ll be here when you come back”

“After Canada, I’m-“, I sighed, “I’m flying straight to Los Angeles for the Emmys. I’m attending both ceremonies, the smaller one on Saturday and the main one on Sunday”, he was nodding, and I knew he’d say that was just a weekend, and I’d be back to New York on Monday, so I just went on. “And after California, I’ll fly to D.C.-“

“D.C.?“

I gulped. “Yes, I’m shooting the Winter Soldier there”

“Well”, his confidence flickered. “Okay… so, that’s… that’s, what? Another two months?”

“One and a week, my part is small”, I said, and he smiled.

“That’s not much! I can handle it, come on. I’ll be here when you come ba-”

“After that I do come back to New York, for about… one week for the Victoria’s Secret Fashion Show”. We stared at each other. “And then what? You’ll go to the show with me? Sit in first row?”

“Well, I can watch from home”

“It’s not on until December”

“Still, I’ll- I’ll just wait here then”

“Don’t tell me you won’t get a lot of media backlash for having your girlfriend walk down a catwalk in lingerie”
He laughed, but nothing was funny anymore. “I’ve had worse”

“Harry”

“No, Jen, I’m serious. I’m serious about this. I’m serious about you, about us”

“There is no us”, I said. “Remember? Taking it slow? No labels? No exclusivity?”

“Okay, fine, yes. You know what I mean. What I’m saying is…”, he shrugged, taking a deep breath. I wondered if he even knew what was he was saying.

“After Victoria’s Secret, I’m flying to Europe for the press tour with Wild & Free”, he sighed, then nodded.

“Do you have any days off of that?”

“Yes, a few. But I’ll be in a different country every three days, I won’t have time for anything but sleep in the day off. We go all over Europe, before coming back for the premieres in LA and Manhattan…”

“Okay, so-“

“And after press, I go back to Brazil for Christmas with my family. Which is a big deal, since I didn’t go last year…”

“Right, of course”, he nodded, understanding, looking down. “And after that you have the award season”

“Well”, I shrugged, “If we get nominated, but that’s a big if. I start shooting another movie in January, if we do get nominated and I have to attend award season, then I’ll be flying in and out of LA”

He gave me a sad smile. “You’ll get nominated”, I grinned, just slightly. “That’s until February, right?”

“The last ceremony is the Oscars at the end of February, yes. After that I go full time to shoot the movie until at least May, and after that I have to get ready to go represent Adidas in the World Cup in Brazil”

His face brightened up. “I’m going to that! I’m the royal sports ambassador for my grandmother, I’ll be there for about a week”

I gave him the sad smile this time. “We’re probably not even gonna be in the same city, and even if we manage to, Harry, that’s almost a whole year from now”

“No, it’s not”, he stopped, mentally counting the months in his head, and then sighed, looking down. It was eleven months – I had made that count just a few minutes before.

Harry turned to sit straight in the couch, with his legs down, not looking at me.

“You’ll still be here in those two weeks in November”

I gulped, feeling guilty. “You want to take on a fight with your family and your advisors to see me for two weeks two months from now?”

My eyes started watering up, and I felt the knot on my throat again. ‘I will not cry over this’, I
thought. ‘I’m the one bringing him to his senses, I cannot cry over this’.

I waited for him to say more, to complain or try again, to be honest, I hoped he would. I hoped he’d say it would be alright, that he’d fly to see me wherever I was shooting, that we would talk on the phone, and it surprised me to realize I was wanting a long-distance relationship when that was the one thing I hated the most in the world.

“If you…”, he started. “You know if-“, he cleaned his throat, pausing. He let some more time pass. “If you don’t want me to stay, you can just say it, you know that, right?”

“It’s not that!””, I said.

“’Cause I know it sounded like I was trying to put us in a relationship and all, but it wasn’t like that, and I’m sorry if I freaked you out, but don’t just push me away. If you don’t want me to stay, or if you don’t really want to be with me for longer than two weeks, you can just tell me as my friend, as you have told me everything for the last eight months”

“Harry, is not that at all”, I said. “It’s not like that”. I cleaned the tears from my eyes, and moved to sit by him. “I have work…”, I shrugged. “I, I’m sorry, but… you know that… you know how it is, I can’t help it”

I raised my arm and held his hand, intertwining our fingers, and laid my head on his shoulder. Harry sighed, and laid back in the couch pulling me into his arms, caressing my back.

“So you don’t…”, he started, “not like me?”


“So maybe you even like me a little bit?”, we laughed.

“I like you a little bit”, I said, and he touched my forehead with his. We sighed.

“I don’t want to say goodbye to you”, he gulped.

I nodded, biting my lip to keep the tears away. I wanted to say that I didn’t want him to either, that maybe we could do it, that I didn’t just not not liked him, or liked him a little bit, that I liked him a lot, that I wanted the serious relationship, with the whole process of talking about seeing other people and labeling us as boyfriend and girlfriend, and making plans for a future that was longer than two weeks. Instead, I tried not to make it hurt even more, so I stayed quiet.

“Yeah”, I whispered.

What do you do when you have something amazing that you know will only last for the next sixteen days? Do you end it as soon as possible so it’ll hurt less? I know that’s what I would have done a few weeks before, but now that I had him, I couldn’t. Not when I had seen the joy in his eyes that the idea of staying with me brought him. Not when I had been the one to turn it into sadness and the pain in his eyes hurt me so.

So I took a deep breath, and decided to expose a little more of me, to try and brighten up a bit of him.

“I didn’t tell you this in the park”, I started, and paused, biting my lips thinking of how to admit it.

“What?”, he asked, when I didn’t say anything.
“I also kissed you a couple of times when there was no one watching us”

He raised his head, smiling largely. “What?!”, he laughed, and I smiled, the happiness in him warming up my insides.

“It’s not a big deal-“

“It is! It is a big deal”, he said, “You wanted to kiss me”, he teased. “You wanted to kiss me so bad you lied to me. You wanted to kiss me! You wanted to kiss me! You wanted to kiss me!” he sang, teasingly and annoying, like a kindergartner.

“Okay, calm down”

“You know what that means? You liiiiiiiiiike me. You wanted to kiss me!”

“I just slept with you, that can’t be that surprising…”

“When was it?”

I sighed. “Well, there was my brother’s wedding in Brazil… and we were dancing at the reception… it was right after I was teaching you how to dance forró, and they suddenly started playing a slow song-“

“Do I Wanna Know!”, he shouted, enthusiastically.

“Yes”, I agreed.

“I remember”, he smiled. “You had your head on my shoulder… like this”, he approached me slowly, touching our cheeks making me giggle. “And then you raised your head just a little to speak in my ear, like this”, he whispered, his lips touched my earlobe, sending a quiver through my whole body. “I remember because it was so hard pretending that it wasn’t making me feel anything…”

I smiled at his confession. “And I told you that my family was watching, and gossiping about us, and I asked if I could kiss you to rub it in their faces”, we chuckled.

“And I said, sure…maybe a bit too eagerly?”, he joked, making me laugh.

“You did, I remember that I was overthinking that whole thing… and then you said sure, and I was like, well, that was easy”, he smiled.

“And then I just looked at you, like this”, he ran his lips over my cheek, from my ear to mouth, but didn’t kiss me. “And let you close the distance between us”

I smiled, and then closed the distance between us in a simple kiss, framing his lips with mine for a while.

“I remember”, I whispered, when we broke apart, “that we stayed like that for a while before you started kissing me harder, and I had to stop it, because, you know, we were still in a room with all of my family, and making out with my boyfriend in public was frowned upon”, he laughed.

“I couldn’t help it”, he said, “That was the day I realized I had feelings for you, I was jumping into every opportunity of kissing you… I actually almost did kiss you when nobody was watching us the very day before”

I felt my eyebrows frowning in confusion. “When?”
“You know, when we were in the pier? You were having an anxiety attack and I hugged you and jumped in the water with you in my arms…”, he smiled. “When we came out of the water I was still hugging you, and I just, I had never had you that close to me… and the way the sun was shining in your face, I just- I went this close to kissing you”, he brought his fingers together, leaving almost no space at all between them. As he spoke, my jaw had been dropping more and more. “What?”

“I just-“, I shook my head, getting out of my trance. And then I laughed. “I almost kissed you in the pier!”, I told him, when I had calmed down. His expression was of disbelief.

“No, you didn’t”

“Yes, I did”, I said. “But then…”, I sighed.

“Clark”

“Yep”

“Damn it, Clark… Think of how much time we could have saved… we could have been together this whole time, maybe you would even let me call you my girlfriend by now”

I laughed. “No, it was good that we didn’t kiss then”

He looked at me. “It was?”

“Yeah”, I said. “I wasn’t ready then… I was still… I wasn’t ready. For you. For lo-“, I gave him a side eye, trying to think of how to fix it, “lo-iking someone again, you know? I mean, I would have just… ruined it. I would have pushed you away. We probably wouldn’t even be friends anymore”

Harry was kind enough to pretend he didn’t hear the new word I had just invented (‘lo-iking’), and instead just wrapped his arms around me tighter, bringing me closer to him. We laid there, in my couch, me in my robe, him in his pants, shirtless, at three in the morning on the night of our first date, trying not to think about how much time we lost.

“Jen?”

“Yes, Harry?”

In the dim lights of the buildings around ours, getting into the apartment by the floor to ceiling windows that had the curtains pulled open, I saw him turn his head to me.

“What are we gonna do?”, he whispered. I realized I could be wrong, but I just knew exactly what he meant: what would we do with all that we were feeling and the very little time we had with it?

I sighed, enjoying the smell of his skin and his embrace on me, “Well”, I started, trying to be my practical self, the one who had come up with all of the rules for our dating-stunt. “We can… We can just be friends…”

“Just friends?”’, he asked, disappointed, not letting me finish.

“You don’t wanna be friends?”, I asked.

I remembered Tyler, who decided he couldn’t be my friend anymore after I told him I didn’t want a relationship after we slept together. I remembered how it was another piece in the down-falling domino line in my life. My heart was pounding heavily in my chest.
“No, I do. I do!”, I took a deep breath, relieved. “But, you know... just friends?”

“Well, for the next couple of weeks, we can be friends who, you know, really, really enjoy spending time together...”

“...just to make it clear, by spending time together you mean making out and sleeping together, right?”

I laughed. “That too”

He smiled. “Okay”

“Really?”

“Yeah”, he said, “I can do that”. I smiled.

“Maybe we could start by going back to bed”, I said, getting an impulse and throwing one leg above him, sitting in his lap. “You could carry me like you did before... that was really hot”

He grinned. “Really?”

“Mm-hm”

“Or... we could stay right...”, he gave the couch a look, “…here!”, and then threw me laying on my back, lying on top of me.

I giggled. “Really? My white couch?”

“Do you know how many times I sat here with you watching sitcoms and eating pizza and daydreaming about this?”, he asked, filling me with joy.

“A couple of times?”, I asked, playfully.

“Many times”, he said, before he leaned in and put our lips together taking my breath away. “…Jen?”, he asked, eyes closed, pulling our lips apart for a moment.

“Yes, Harry?”, I asked, in a whisper, wrapping my legs around him. He opened his eyes, and looked into mine.

“I’m really glad we’re still friends”
I was dragging Harry by the hand through cold, white and gray hallways in the huge backstage maze of the stadium, passing by people wearing comfortable shoes and tablets in their hands, hair up and name tags hanging from their neck. They all seemed sweaty and in a hurry, but then again, so were we. So was seemingly everybody who had been working hard for the last couple of weeks – and some of them for the last couple of months – making sure that day went as perfect as could be.

“Miss Silva, your badge, please!”, we passed by Charlotte, the head production assistant, who had a millionth time reminder.

“I’m wearing it!”, I brought my plastic badge form under my shirt. “I swear!”

“Calm down, Char, have a cup of tea”, Harry said as he let himself be dragged away. I laughed. “What?!”

“Well, nothing…”, I said, as we ducked under yellow tape to make our way upstairs to one of the unused sections of the stadium. “It’s just that you’re one to talk, you know, about stress…”

“I’m not stressed”, he said. “I’m on a roll, I’ve dealt with every pickle we’ve had all day with perfect poise-“

“I know…”

“And you know, Tedd had a meltdown after lunch with an intern, I was the one who calmed him down and-”

“and comforted the intern, yes, I know”, I finished it for him.

“Not to mention the drama with the switched up guitar-”

“Well, James had another one, and it was great”

“And the dramatic mysterious disappearance of every single electric chord right before the McFly set?!“

“Oh, they were so great!”, I squealed. “I still can’t believe you got them to sing my favorite song… it’s so old! Tom said they haven’t played it live since 2005!”

“Well, there had to be some perks with being the girlfriend of the events planner”, they giggled.

“Yes”, we had arrived at one of the corners of a section of the stadium that wasn’t being used
because it was too close to the stage and had a terrible view of the performers. “Yes, babe, everything was handled and everything is great, but-“

“But what?”, Harry asked, stopping in front of the roll of seats I tried to pull him through. It was darker there, and completely empty except for one photographer up ahead over another section, too far to hear us. “Oh, did someone throw up in here? ‘Cause there’s no need to show me, we can just call a janitor, it’ll be faster. Or, wait, is someone making out in here? Jenifer, call security!”

“Harry, Jesus Christ, just come”, I took his hand a little stronger now and pulled him a bit farther into the roll, before putting two seats down and making him sit by my side.

“I have things to- yes?”, he touched his earpiece, and his eyes were void as he heard someone speak in his ear. I sighed, looking at the stage.

Asher Archett was on it, in his 14th outfit of the day, a joke he had made with the public the first time he stepped out, about how that was the closest he’d probably ever get to hosting an award show, so he planned on doing it right, and so he did. Not even Tyler Oakley changed as much. They were reading tweets now, being shown on the big screens by the stage, from people around the world watching by the livestream online, making jokes about the acts, the excitement for the last show of the night and the donations made so far – a record breaking amount since the website went live.

At first, they had called it “Halo Night”. Prince Harry of Wales and the Halo Trust’s fundraising concert night in honor of the victims of war debris in third world countries. It started as a couple of artists (Taylor and Selena) performing their biggest hits in a hotel events center to a bunch of wealthy socialites and their families who had paid the usual absurd amount of money for a plate of good food ‘for charity’. The response was so broad, they had to move the Halo Night to a bigger space, proper for shows, but as time passed, Harry talked to Ed Sheeran, who was touring with Taylor and had grew close to Harry over the past few months, and he too agreed to play at Halo Night. People complained they wanted to see him perform, but didn’t know he’d be there, so didn’t even tried to buy tickets, but since nothing could be done, planning went on as usual. After a few calls to numbers I got from Richard, the number of performers grew again, as they added new sensation HAIM and my good friend Brigit Mendler to the mix. I dug more numbers out of my phone and next thing you know I got my favorite band from my teenage years, McFLY, whom I had met a few years back, to come and they brought The Vamps, a beginner cover band from England that had recently been making a lot of success on youtube. Harry then hired Asher Archett and Tyler Oakley to be the hosts of the event, to fill the spaces between the acts as the stage was prepared for the next numbers. Halo Night quickly grew much bigger than expected, and they had to put the starting time earlier, and planned to end the night much later than expected, to be able to fit all of the attractions.

Suddenly the whole thing got a lot bigger than anyone could have predicted. The location changed to Radio City Music Hall, until it also became too small. After calling in a few favors and asking a few to friends in high places – the mayor and Jay Z might have been involved – Harry got the Madison Square Garden to host Halo Night. Except it quickly became ‘Halo Day’ – a festival-like charity concert starting at two in the afternoon with smaller acts playing twenty minutes sets, up until the bigger acts, later at night, playing sets of thirty or forty minutes.

Two things happened once the Madison Square Garden was in the picture: The first is that they had the opportunity to sell more tickets, but it meant they had to return the ones that had been sold for the people who thought they were buying a place in a fancy dinner. They did keep a VIP area on the highest level of the stadium with an open bar and snacks all around for the whole day. The second thing was that with Harry getting Jay Z’s help (they met when he attended a basketball
game a few months ago as a representative of Halo) he also got Beyoncé’s attention. And that meant that after a dinner party in their house that we both attended, using all of our convincing abilities we were able to get fucking Beyoncé to make a thirty minutes pocket show for Halo Day (!!!). Obviously, when they reopened the ticket sales it sold out in a matter of hours.

It was both ridiculous and crazy how beloved Harry was in America – and everywhere, to be honest. Celebrities started to voluntarily ask what they could do to help and from a ‘tweet about it, maybe?’ things suddenly escalated to ‘can you be in a video to promote it?’ to ‘do you wanna come? You could introduce an act!’, and that’s how we (and by ‘we’ I mean they – Halo – I was just tagging along to help) got a bunch of celebrities to come to Halo Day and introduce certain acts and talk about the Halo Trust and how important their work was, to incentive people to donate. That got more media attention, more people’s attention, and more donations, which meant more resources for the cause and suddenly there was a lot of buzz going on for Prince Harry’s much anticipated Halo Day.

There was also a website being launched for donations from around the world (for a certain amount, anyone could have access to a livestream of the whole day’s shows). Harry agreed to be interviewed on Good Morning America to promote the shows and the website and to incentive people to donate – and he was so nervous I had to give him an interview prep talk.

But, at the end of day, and that was the point I was trying to make by bringing him to one of the empty areas of Madison Square Garden, everything turned out perfect.

I took a deep breath and raised my hand, pulling Harry’s earpiece out.

“Hey!”, he protested.

“Hi, Jonathan?”, I said in it. “Aham… Yes, it is a problem. I’ll tell you what. Can you find Charlotte? She has the list of sponsors in the food and beverage area, yes. Ask for the number and call him, I think his name is-“

“Timothy!”, an anxious Harry said by my side.

“Timothy. Tell him we need more ice delivered ASAP. Thanks, Jon”, I pressed a button and the earpiece was off. “Now…”, I looked at Harry, and adjusted myself in the seat. “My point is, Mr. Prince, everything is going perfect-“

“Did you not hear about the ice crisis?!”

“Not a crisis, Harry. Ice is over. We’re getting more. It’s handled. Now do me a goddamn favor and sit back in your damn seat, take a deep calming breath and look around you, for God’s sake!”

Rolling his eyes thinking I couldn’t see it, he sat back, and took a deep breath seeming annoyed. The lights went out when Asher and Tyler announced the last performer of the night and, with an explosion of red lighting, Taylor Swift started her set to the euphoric screams of Madison Square Garden. Harry’s expression softened.

“Look at this”, I told him. “Madison Square Garden”, he smiled at the words. “Sold out. Most of these people have been here since this morning, hours before the gates were opened”

“I heard about thirty spent the night in the sidewalk to get good places”

“I know. That’s how excited they were! And look over there…”, I gestured at the stage and his eyes followed. Taylor’s shape could be seen in the red lighting and her voice came up through the speakers singing softly to State of Grace.
“Taylor Swift, who just this morning flew across the country just to be here for this despite being in the middle of a very busy tour schedule, is performing the last”, I said the word carefully, “last set of the night. Halo Day came and conquered, and it was a success and everyone loves you”. He smiled, and looked over at me. I saw the question in his eyes: ‘do you?’ and spoke again before he could voice it. “Look at this,”, I gestured to the crowd, shining their light sticks and phones up in the air, singing as loud as their lungs allowed. “And look at that number”, we saw the digital counter up above the stage quickly moving past U$ 950,000, “All of this, and all of that money is happening because of you. All of the people that will get to live because the war debris they have to fear will be gone. Thanks to you, Harry. You did this.”

He took a real deep breath now, and passed an arm around my shoulders, bringing me close. I rested my head in his shoulders and he got suddenly very rigid.

“Oh, my God”, he said. “We’re gonna break a million!”

“Yeah”, I said. “I think we just might”

“Look at that number, I just realized it. Jenifer, we’re gonna break a million!”, he giggled, and I wrapped my arms around him in a grip, that he tightened with his own. “I can’t believe we did it”, we sat back.

“You did it”, I said. “Nothing of this would be here if it weren’t for you”

He laughed. “Well, most of the donations were made before today, when we opened the website… and that wouldn’t have generated such attention if it weren’t for your idea”

“Then I guess the credit goes to Brandon for promoting it and getting people donating…”

We looked over at the next section of the arena, where Brandon Stanton, the organizer of the Humans of New York project – that posted pictures and stories of normal people around Manhattan and was widely known online – was photographing Taylor’s show from above. Brandon had been, for the past week, posting pictures of Harry and all the staff members from Halo as they worked on the concert, sharing their stories and why they decided to work for Halo, telling about the lives they’d impact with the money, raising awareness for the cause, the concert, and promoting the selling of tickets and donations.

“Isn’t it funny how things work? We met him the very next day after our date, and with his help we got Halo Day to where it is now”

We had met Brandon two weeks before, in, let’s call it, unusual circumstances, on the Sunday after our date. It seemed like a whole life ago.

“Admit it, you just wanted to make sure he really wouldn’t post that picture of us”, we laughed. “Why can’t you accept your credit, though? I know you’re all about team effort, Harry, but you did this. You made this happen. You rolled up your sleeves and got to work, and called people, and stepped out of your comfort zone and did interviews and posed for Brandon, sharing your thoughts and ideas about the organization, and how your mother inspired you to do this. His facebook posts about you went viral and you didn’t even complain like the old man scared of technology that you are at heart…”, he laughed. “At the of the day, people accepted to help because they like you”

I saw his shy smile as he sighed. “I can’t believe it’s done. I just can’t believe it’s over.”

Unfortunately, I knew he meant that in more than one way. It was Sunday, the first of September of 2013. The concert had had to be pushed to a Sunday so Taylor could attend, because she had a
show in Washington the day before. In less than twelve hours from that very moment, both Harry and I would be leaving New York – me, for DC to shoot Winter Soldier, and him… for good.

I tried to hang on to the joy of the last two weeks, and the fact that at least they had been really good two weeks.

It was the middle of the night of our first date and Harry and I were wide awake, in a midst of happiness, sadness and euphoria over what had just happened, and what was to come in two weeks. But in that moment, we tried to focus on the present, deciding there was no need to worry about the future before it arrived. So tried to think of what to do next.

“I can think of something…”, Harry said, with a cheeky grin as his eyes quickly hovered over my body as we laid on the bed.

“Besides that”, I rolled my eyes, smiling. “I mean…”, I sighed, “This is so frustrating, I wish we had more time… there’s too much to do!”

“Like what?”, he asked, with a husky voice as we had just woken up from an after-sex nap, which was the only sleep we got that night.

“I don’t know… we could, like… go around town doing all the things we’ve never done before, like in Breakfast at Tiffany’s”

“I wouldn’t know, I’ve never seen it”

“You’ve never seen Breakfast at Tiffany’s?!”

“Nope”

“That’s impossible”

“Never seen it”

“You never saw it in like college? In some hipster cinema class?”, I stopped. “Oh, you didn’t go to college…”

“I went to Eton!”

“That’s like high school”

“That’s debatable”

“You never had a girlfriend who made you see it? Didn’t your mom see it?”

“I don’t know. No, I guess”

“Well, I know what we’re doing now”

He chuckled, as I got up from the bed to go find copy of the film so we could watch it.

We watched Breakfast at Tiffany’s, commenting on every scene like we usually did with everything. Then, in the early morning (by early morning I mean it was still dark out), I pulled him out of bed to go get ready so we could go out.

“We’re not really gonna go to a Tiffany’s, are we?”
“No!”, I said, “We’re gonna do our things, things we’ve never done”

“Okay”, he agreed. “What about the paparazzi?”

“Put on a hoodie to hide your hair. If we disguise ourselves, I know how to get out without them seeing us”, I winked at him, already dancing my way to my closet.

“Yeah”, he agreed, sarcastically, “That should be easy considering the posse of tall, angry looking men we have to take with us everywhere”

“First of all, please never say posse again”, I started, and he rolled his eyes. “Second of all, it’s still dark out. Sneak in at your place, change quietly and hurry back here. With some luck the guys won’t know we were gone until we’re back!”, I smiled, excited.

Harry stared at me for a few seconds, seriousness and a playful smile fighting for space in his expression. “That’s a really stupid idea”

“Isn’t that half of our relationship?”, I suggested, “Come on, you know it’ll be fun! Just trust me!”

“…Okay”, he said, “But I have a condition. We leave the cellphones here. No work. All day”

“…okay”, I agreed, uncertain.

“I’m serious!”

“Okay!”, I repeated, with more conviction this time, laughing. “Now go change and come back fast. Go, go, go!”

When he came back, Harry had a puma hoodie on, and I gave him one of my big fake-prescription glasses and a Yankees cap. I wore a light brown overcoat with a collar that slid back into a big hoodie, hiding my hair, and covering more of my face with big, round, mirrored sunglasses.

“Are you sure the guys didn’t hear you?”, I asked.

“Yeah, everything was silent, except for Vodka, but I managed”, he answered, in a giggle, and, feeling like mischievous children, we took the service elevator down to the underground parking floor of our building, where we waited until someone showed up headed to their car.

“Good morning, sir”, I said, smiling, as Harry followed close by. “Early bird gets the worm, huh?”, I joked.

He smiled. “Yes, someone ought to pay the bills”, he said, and I noticed he had a driver turning on the car.

“Would you be so kind as to give us a ride down the street? We just need to get past the photographers outside”

“Don’t say another word”, he said. “I hate those men. They ruin the visual effect of the building. What are we paying for?! Get in”

We did so, and the car exited the building with Prince Harry and Jenifer Silva hidden away behind the tinted windows in the backseat.

It was still dark when we hopped off a few blocks later, thanking our unknowing fairy godfather. The city that never sleeps wasn’t exactly empty by then, it never was. There was actually quite a few people around, wrapped up under their jackets, getting out of the subway stations on their way
to work, or home after a night shift. With our hoodies, hand in hand, Harry and I blended in just fine enough.

We walked around town like fugitives, our own version of Bonnie and Clyde, robbing only the knowledge of our location from our friends, whom as the sun rose up in the sky, continued to believe we were still in bed after our date the night before.

We went to Central Park first, and laid down in the grass in the Great Lawn, watching the stars and the anonymity that was so foreign for both of us. We watched the sunrise there, then took the subway to the East Village (looking down the entire time, to scared to even talk to each other as to not drag any more attention than we needed) to have breakfast in our favorite place in town: Veselka Coffee Shop – a 24hours Ukrainian dinner that was open since 1954. We ate waffles in the tables in the sidewalk, watching people walk by, trying to guess their identities and where they were going, laughing at each other’s attempt at dubbing conversations we couldn’t hear, protected by our hoodies.

From there we walked to the Other Music store, one of the most influential music stores in the country for over two decades. We browsed the records, old and new, to the weird sound of the music this old man was playing in his guitar that day, in a corner. We bought his independent album just for fun, and pulled our hoodies up so we could venture out again.

We walked to NYU, I pointed out to him where I had most of my classes, and the library I made my home back then, then we sat in Washington Square Park, overlooking the arc. Harry broke into a loud laugh when I took him to sit down by the exact tree where I tried weed for the first time.

“I kept looking around”, I told him, “terrified some police officer would come by and arrest me”, he laughed. “I was so young and innocent…”

Then we took a bus (Harry said he couldn’t remember the last time he just walked around without security, and it was the first time he took a bus) a few blocks to West Village, to have lunch at La Bonbonniere, a shabby decorated, cheap and unpretentious dinner open since 1954. There, we were comfortable enough to take our coats off as we ate, since the day had gotten warmer. We didn’t feel like we could be recognized and there was no paparazzi to be seen – the place just didn’t agree with ‘celebritydom’, I guess.

We took the subway again to High Line Park, and Harry started to feel like he could start to understand the subway. High Park was the elevated section of a disused New York Central Railroad spur that, inspired by the 3-mile (4.8-kms) Promenade plantée, a similar project in Paris completed in 1993, had been redesigned as an aerial greenway and rails-to-trails park.

We walked amidst the tourists and New Yorkers jogging and chilling in the benches, reading their books or talking, sulking up the sun. We were back in our hoodies, with our sleeves rolled up, and we sat by a bench we found in a particular narrow section of the park that pointed out to the city. We sat in the tip of the bench, Harry behind me, with his arms wrapped around my waist, watching the city live as we breathed in and out each other’s smell.

Harry rested his head on my shoulder. “I wish we had done this a thousand times before”

I smiled, and turned back to him. I sat facing him, one leg over each of his, wrapping around his waist, and kissed him. It was a weird feeling kissing like this – out in the open, with no security – knowing what would happen if we got caught. It felt vulnerable, which only made the kiss better. Thinking about this, I pulled my hoodie closer, and pulled his too, closing us inside our little hoodie-fort, making him laugh. We had fun trying to imagine what people though when they saw us.
We took a cab to the Empire State Building, bought a ticket and waited in line for our turn – just for the fun of it since every New Yorker knew the best view of the city was of Top Of The Rock. Still, we went up, overlooked our favorite town, and I told him about the Gossip Girl episode when Chuck waits for Blair there and then misses her because Dorota had to have her baby right then and ends up sleeping with Jenny, ruining everything. He wasn’t impressed by my trivia, but still smiled as I told him. In return, he said he could only think about the How I met Your Mother episode we had watched once where Ted can’t shut up about the history of the building.

From there we walked Fifth Avenue – the whole six blocks until Grand Central Station, with just a minor detour to eat burritos at a little place in 39th street.

I dragged him into the New York Public Library just so I could show him the beautiful ceiling – all adorned in hard wood with sections painted with pretty colorful skies.

“For my finals week”, I told him, “I didn’t feel like studying in the NYU library anymore, you know… too high a risk of running into Adam, who tutored some people there… So I started coming here… During long hours studying for tests when everything seemed too hard or too painful I used to lay back in my chair and take a deep breath looking at that sky… it made it feel like it would be okay, like it would be all over soon… It was so hard caring about schoolwork; I just wanted it to be over. But that sky made it a little bit better”

Harry’s eyes left the ceiling and went to me. He leaned in and gave me a little kiss on the cheek. It felt warm and sweet and now I did feel like it would be okay. Unfortunately, it also felt like it would be over soon.

So I grabbed his hand and we ran out to Bryant Park. We walked to the lawn and laid down, letting the sun light warm us. I made his arm my pillow and we stared ahead, making shapes out of the clouds. Unlike in Central Park, the buildings weren’t far in Bryant Park, they were amusingly close, as if we were intruders in their meeting and work days, even though it was a Sunday. Harry could even spot the Halo’s offices from there.

“How mad would the paparazzi be if they knew they could be getting this many pictures of us today, out in the open?”

“Maybe they are”, I said. “Maybe they’ve been following us the whole day with long lenses cameras and we’ll get home and find out our entire day has been documented”

He was silent for a while. “Well, that’s a warming thought”, we laughed. “No, seriously. I kind of wish we had something to remember this day”

“You’re the one who made us leave our phones back home”, I said. “We could be taking pictures”

“At least you’re not working”, he said, giving me a peck in the cheek.

We took the subway again to The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and made a left to the art collections. Sunday guaranteed us a pretty secluded visit, and I marched fast through the empty halls leaving an amazed Harry behind until where I knew we would find the Vincent Van Gogh’s self-portrait, standing tall in the middle of a white room full of his paintings. He was at arm’s reach inside a glass box and I stood looking at him until Harry caught up to me.

“Wow”, he said. “Vincent”

“Yeap”, I said. “You know, having watched Doctor Who now I like this one a lot more…”, he smiled, and raised his arm closing the distance between us with our intertwined fingers together.
We stayed silent for a while, until we heard someone calling out to us.

“Excuse me?”

We immediately let go of each other’s hand, and pulled our hoodies up to cover up our faces more. I put my sunglasses back on.

“Yes?”, I asked the young man, as Harry turned back to the wall so he wouldn’t be seen.

“Hi, my name’s Brandon”, he said, a polite smile on his face and a big camera on his hands. An alarm started sounding in my head: ‘paparazzi, tourist or fan? Paparazzi, tourist or fan?!’. “I have a project on the internet where I post pictures of people in New York to tell their stories and I was wondering if you’d mind being a part of it. I just took this nice picture of you…”, he showed me screen in his camera, where stood a picture of mine and Harry’s intertwined hands out of focus with Van Gogh’s self-portrait being seen just above it. It was very Humans-of-New-York-y.

“Wait”, I said, looking at Brandon a little better now. “Are you the guy from Humans of New York?”

He smiled. “Yes, you’ve heard of it?!”

“I love it! You post such great stories-“, I hear Harry cough. When I looked at him, he signaled for me to come. “Just a minute…”, I asked Brandon. “What?”

“Let’s ask him to delete the picture and get out of here”, Harry said, in a whisper.

“No, it’s okay! I know him, he has this page online-“

“Exactly!”

“Harry, trust me”, I said. “The picture doesn’t even have our faces in it, so it’s fine… he just wants a quote to go with it, he very often posts anonymous stories, we could be another one’

“What are the chances he’s not gonna tell anyone after he knows who we are?”

“I’m sorry?”, Brandon called. “I can delete the picture if you’d like”

I gave Harry a look.

“It’s a trick”, he mouthed, and I rolled my eyes, getting my sunglasses and hoodie off.

“Brandon”, I started, walking back to him, whose eyes widened as he, I assumed, realized who I was. “You can keep the picture. You’re good at keeping secrets, right?”

“I- of course”

“Good”, I said, giving him an intense look. “Because no one can know we were here”

“…got it”, he said, a bit in awe. Then blinked, “Of course”

“Jen”, Harry started, louder so I could hear, and so could Brandon, “That’s a bad idea”

“Look”, Brandon said, “I can delete it if you’d like”

“Yes, please”, Harry said.
“No”, I told him. “Harry, you’re the one who said you wanted something to remember this day by… someone decided it was a good idea to leave our phones at home”, I explained to Brandon.

“Yes, because otherwise someone would otherwise be working the whole day”

Brandon seemed unsure of what to do.

“Harry”, I whispered, “Trust me”. He held onto my look for a long while before sighing.

“Fine”

I smiled. “Brandon, you won’t tell anyone, right?”

“…Of course”

“Good, because a verbal agreement is binding according to the laws of the State of New York and we could sue you”

“…I’ll keep that in mind”, he said. He didn’t seem to think the picture was worth the trouble anymore. “So I can, like… never tell anyone?”, we nodded. “Even if you two get married one day? I mean, it won’t matter, right?”

Harry and I awkwardly avoided eye contact. Then Harry looked at him with renewed optimism.

“I’ll tell you what”, he said, stepping closer. “If one day, say… five, ten years from now you wake up to the news that we are engaged, you can tell people”

I looked at him, suddenly very unsure myself that the picture was worth the trouble. “Uh, babe?”, I whispered to Harry. “What are you doing? We won’t… You know, we can’t- I mean, you know we can never-”

“Then we have nothing to worry about, do we?”, he smiled, smug. I stared at him for a while, knowing what he was doing and knowing that I was playing right into it.

Harry was betting on us, he was making this a bet and this was the moment where I was supposed to raise the stakes. I tried not to, I did. But the competitive side of me was louder.

“Brandon, do you have an extra memory card on you that won’t trouble you to lose today?”, he nodded, still very unsure of what on earth he walked into. “Here’s what we’re gonna do. You keep the picture of our hands with good, old Vincent here, and post it with some incognito caption. Change the memory cards in your camera, and take another picture of us, with our faces-“, Harry started to protest, “You started this, Henry, now let me finish”, he got quiet. “Then you’ll give us the memory card with the picture of us. You can’t tell anyone about us, of this. Except if one day we do get engaged, in which case we will email you the picture back so you have proof when you tell people that the first picture posted way back in 2013 was us”

They both looked at me for a couple of seconds, processing my plan, then Brandon shrugged. “Okay”, he said, changing memory cards in his camera.

“Jen…”, Harry started.

“What?”, I asked him. He looked at me for a moment, but didn’t say anything. He knew we were safe as long as we kept the memory card. He also knew no one would ever hear about this, because he knew we were breaking up in exactly sixteen days, and to imagine a future where we ended up marrying each other was just as unrealistic as anyone believing Brandon if he tried to convince
people the picture of two hands were Prince Harry of Wales and Jenifer Silva.

“Okay”, Brandon said, pointing his camera up at us. “What if you just stay like you were in the first picture, facing the painting, but looked back at the camera to show that was you?”

We did as he asked, and smiled for the camera. Or tried.

“You’re not smiling”, I told Harry, who blushed.

“I can’t, this is to weird”

“Hold up”, I told Brandon. “I can make him laugh”. I leaned in to Harry, very slowly, and got up on my tiptoes to whisper in his ear. I waited a few seconds so he would be on the expectation of what I would say, then I whispered the most random thing I could think of. “Butthole”

Harry bended over from laughing so hard. I laughed at his reaction and went back to where I was supposed to stand so we could take the picture, still holding his hand. Brandon called out, and when we looked at him, still laughing, he took the picture. He took a few, as we calmed down and smiled more naturally until he finally said he got it.

He gave us his memory card and we gave him some money to buy another one. Then he asked a couple questions to have a quote to go with the first picture (about us, about that day) and after chatting with him for a good few minutes, we said goodbye, as he wished he’d hear from us in a few years. We smiled at him, trying not to let the uncertainty of the future ruin our perfect day.

“You’re too trusting”, Harry said after he left and we went on through the halls of the MET to see the other paintings.

I intertwined my fingers with his and laid my head on his shoulder as we walked slowly. “At least we got a picture to remember today”, I said, and he smiled.

We grabbed dinner before heading home, a way to bribe the forgiveness of the guys, who would undoubtedly be mad at us for leaving without them. We knew they’d have to find out because we couldn’t get back inside the building without being seen by the paparazzi. So Harry took the fake prescription glasses out and looked at the ground as we made our way through the shouting and flashes together.

The guys were surprised – and then mad, then okay since there was nothing they could do anymore - to learn we weren’t still in bed. In our defense, that’s where we stood for the whole next week whenever we weren’t at work. We stayed in bed snuggling and loving each other as much as we could trying to ignore the fact the day was soon approaching when we wouldn’t be able to do that anymore. If we had a choice, we would have essentially spent every single waking minute of the last days with each other, but we still had work to get done.

Harry’s Halo concert – also known as our deadline - was two weeks away, and I had to attend meetings, give interviews, and shoot the last episodes for the mini-documentary for Adidas, not to mention start the pre-production training for Winter Soldier (shooting and fight training).

It was easy getting Harry off my mind when I was busy, when I had to say a definitive ‘yes’ or ‘no’ in something that could potentially end my company before it started. It was easy focusing on the right muscles to flex as I tried to break my own bar pulling record at the gym.

But when I left my business manager’s office building ready to go home that Monday afternoon, I didn’t have anything to distract myself with anymore. I thought about how it would still be hours until he came home, and how much I missed him. Hugging him, kissing him, touching him. I
thought about our last two nights together, and how different everything had been since our date and then I asked myself what was stopping me from going to meet him. He already knew I liked him. He probably missed me too. I remembered the one other time I had gone to his office, and how everyone assumed I had gone to either break up with him or for a quickie.

And then I couldn’t stop thinking about a quickie, and, biting my lip, I leaned forward and told the cab driver we were going somewhere else.

The paparazzi saw me coming this time, but I still focused my look ahead and walked inside the building with Eddy behind me. I knew the way this time, so I went to the nice receptionist and told her where I was going. She gave me visitor’s badge and I followed Eddy to the elevator saying hi to Clark on the way.

Harry was by the receptionist’s desk when I arrived to his floor, giving orders to his secretary with a tablet in hand. He had his jacket off, and the sleeves of his button-up shirt rolled up. I took a deep breath to control the heat I felt inside just at the sight of him.

“And don’t forget to email them the lights protocol sheet, not the normal one- Jen!”, he said, seeing me approach.

“Hi”, I smiled. Then looked at his young secretary whom I had met last time around. “Jonathan, nice to see you again”

“Ms. Silva, hello”, he said, appearing surprised I remembered his name.

Harry seemed awkward. Embarrassed sort of awkward, but in a good way. It was the first time we saw each other out in the open since everything had changed – at least in front of other people. I almost forgot I was supposed to be his girlfriend, not realizing now it should be easier than ever.

“To what do I owe the pleasure?”, he asked, remembering himself of that little detail and giving me a kiss on the cheek.

“Just saying hi”, I lied.

“Harry”, another man, slightly older, approached us. “I saw the plan for the location and placement of the gallery. Everything looks good, let’s just try to leave some circulation space behind it”

“Of course, Paul”

“Hello”, Paul said to me.

“Hi”

“Right. Jen, this is Paul, my boss. This is Jenifer, my-“

“Girlfriend, of course”, Paul said. “The famous Jenifer. Pleased to meet you. So, you’re the one who’s been keeping him busy, huh?”

We laughed. “I try”

“Margaret, did Joanne called back about the invitations?”, Paul asked the receptionist.

As he was distracted, I got closer to Harry to whisper in his ear, soft enough no one would even know I said something but him. “I’m not wearing underwear”

Harry’s eyes widened a bit, and his polite smile froze in place. He wasn’t blinking now and he
gave me a long look until after I had already looked back to Jonathan to enquire about his life.

“Well, I hope we do see you in our Halo Day festivities, Jenifer”, Paul said. “I heard you’ve been helping a lot. Thank you!”

“I wouldn’t miss it!”, I smiled.

“Harry, let me know if you hear back from the governor”

“I will, sir”, he said, before looking at me. “Let’s go, uh- shall we talk in my office?”

“Sure”, I smiled, as if nothing was out of the ordinary. “See you later, Jonathan”

After we stepped into his office, it was just a matter of time before his door was locked and his hands were making their way up my thighs under my dress all the way until my nude butt.

“I thought you were bluffing”, he admitted, whispery, walking us to his desk.

“I wouldn’t dare bluffing about something this serious”, I responded, playful, reaching for his belt to open it. I pushed him to seat in his big leather chair and lowered the arm supports to sit in his lap – his hands still on my waist and thighs. “I spent some time today not being able to focus on anything just imagining you sitting in this chair without me on you”

He smiled, biting his lip. “I spent some time over the last few months not being able to focus on anything just imagining you here… on me”, I smiled. He leaned in, framing my lips with his and bringing us closer together. I pulled his zipper down, pulling ‘him’ out.

After that, his office and the world faded out amidst our bliss and time stood still as there was only each other in existence.

I gave him one last kiss after many before I stood up from his lap with a deep sigh a while later. Harry had work to do, but I didn’t feel like leaving him yet, so he asked if I wanted to help. He gave me a phone and a list of numbers of companies and people who were supporting the event, and I was supposed to call them and ask the number of seats they would be taking.

When I had to check something in a spread sheet in his computer, I saw the picture that he was using as a background image. It was our Humans of New York picture – not one of the ones in Brandon’s memory card, that we still hadn’t touched. The first one, of our arms and Vincent Van Gogh’s self portrait in the back. I smiled at the thought of him going through the trouble of finding the page just to see our picture, and saving it so he could have it, so I did the same.

I found Brandon’s facebook page and went down just a little bit to find the picture. It had almost two hundred thousand likes and the quote Brandon choose to go with it made me smile. It was something Harry had told him, and it read:

‘We’ve both studied art history for a long time in the past but our favorite part about this painting is still the fact that it was in a Doctor Who episode’

I smiled at the comment section, with some Doctor Who fans showing appreciation or making puns. But the most liked comment had come from the page itself. Brandon had enigmatically written: “See you in a few years. This comment will make sense then”. I giggled, closing the page, and went back to work wondering if people would ever get what he meant.

That’s how that week passed. I’d do the Adidas shooting and Winter Soldier training in the morning, then go home to shower and meet Harry for lunch, and attend meetings in the afternoon. I
usually got done before Harry, who was having to stay later more often in his office with the concert day approaching, so I got the habit of buying food for everyone he worked with and go to there to take it to them and help with whatever I could.

And when that Sunday came, everything was hectic and fast and a few times, everything almost went downhill, but at the end of the day, everything turned out like we had hoped it would: perfect.

The idea to call Brandon Stanton for help had come to me after I had seen Harry’s background picture and the quote he used for it in his page. I remembered how some time ago he had used the page to raise attention to a cause and ask people for donations, so I told Harry about it, and we call him. He joked when he arrived to meet us that he thought we were gonna tell him we were engaged and return his memory card, but then we just asked him to help us raise awareness to Halo Day and the donations website by posting a series of photographs profiling the people who work on the Halo Trust – starting with Harry.

The pictures and stories he posted – especially the ones of Harry – went viral quickly, as Harry told him about how he was inspired to work with that particular organization because his mother used to before she passed away. He also told him about the move to New York and how it had impacted his life (‘It felt like when you stop to breathe after a long run. New York felt like breathing. Everything felt easier and it was like this huge weight was lifted from my shoulders. I owe that to this city, and the people that I met, and the work we’ve done’).

Now, sitting in the dark section of the stadium admiring the work he had achieved, Harry had a special glow in his eyes. Achievement. Closure.

“I think…”, I said. “I can’t say that I know it, but I really do think your mother would be so proud of what you’ve done here”. He smiled, avoiding my eyes. “I know I am”

He finally looked at me, and leaned in on his seat to kiss me. After it was done, the company meetings, the docu-series, and Halo Day, we had nothing else to hold onto. We had nothing else to distract us from the fact all was left to do was leave. Break up. Get back to reality. And in that kiss, it felt painfully obvious that our time was up.

“Harry”, Charlotte showed up, and we broke the kiss, blushing. “Sorry. We need you on stage when the counter reaches a million to celebrate with everyone”

I turned at him, smiling. “Go”. He held my hand, and I knew, somehow I knew, he’d ask me to come with, so I just nodded negatively. “This is yours. Go”, so he kissed my hand and stood up, following Charlotte downstairs, ready to ask Taylor to make a little pause in her show when the counter marked a million dollars donated to the Halo Trust.

I was proud of him, and proud of that day, and happy everything was going so well, but a big part of me still wished we could just go home and cuddle until it was time for me to go to the airport.

It took a long few hours, but we were finally able to do just that. We went home after wrapping up every last detail of Halo Day. Now, as we cuddled naked in bed, staring at the colors of the sky changing outside in between the skyscrapers, we tried to avoid the inevitable feeling of goodbye… failing miserably.

“I don’t want you to go”, I said, letting all my walls down. I felt his arms tighten a grip around me and heard him take in a deep breath. “I know that technically I’m the one who has to actually leave for the airport first, but still… you know what I mean… You’re the one crossing the ocean with no plans to come back… and I know it’s pointless, but I- I don’t want you to go”
“I could stay”

I filled with regret. “You know it makes no sense”, I said. “I still have to go”

“You wanna go?”

I gulped. “It’s my job… I like my job”

“So you do wanna go”, it wasn’t a question anymore, or an accusation. Just his conclusion.

“I don’t wanna say goodbye to you”, I said, honest. “But we can’t change that”

We sighed, in synch, making our intertwined fingers dance together. I turned to face him in bed, our faces close enough to each other so that his breath was warming up my skin. I stared into his blue eyes wanting to memorize them, taking a mental picture knowing in a few hours I wouldn’t be able to look at them whenever I wanted.

“I’m going to marry you some day”, he said.

I giggled, seeing the smile freeze up on his lips. “Oh, you’re serious”

“Well, maybe not marry. Not officially. But the way I see it, we’ll either end up together in some way or another, or we’ll be one of those couples that keeps coming back to each other. We’ll have other relationships for a while, try and move on from each other, and then we’ll run into each other at some point and realize we can’t say goodbye again. Then we’ll keep trying, like that, in a vicious cycle forever”

We stood quiet for a while, thinking about his words, and I noticed he wasn’t really joking. He wasn’t smiling at the thought. I figured he just honestly believed that’s what we were destined to be… and the thought scared me.

“Would you like that?”, I asked, softly.

He didn’t answer for a while, but his face was rigid, serious. He gulped, finally speaking again. “It’s not the plan”

“No, it’s not”, I agreed. “What is the plan?”

“Well, plan A is you surrender and we get married”, I laughed, thankful for the return of his playful tone, and the smile on his face. “Plan B is…”, he sighed. “Hell if I know, I guess if you really snub me forever I’m screwed”

I giggled. “Ok. Unsurprisingly, you suck at this”, he pretended to be offended. “So let me make the plans for us, since we both know that’s my thing”

“Can’t deny that”, he said.

I laid on my back, and stared at the ceiling, deciding what would be the perfect outcome for our lives. Something realistic, that left everybody happy. Slowly, I started writing the script of our future. “Plan A is…”, I thought about it. “Okay. We go about our lives. We find someone else to fall in love with. Someone we like. Someone that can make us laugh. Someone interesting that we admire, that we can respect. Someone that’d not necessarily understand us, but at least try to. And we date them, for a while. Say, at least five months before we make it serious. If in five months we like them enough we feel they’d be someone we could be proud of, we make it serious and date exclusively for another six months”
I gave him a look. He was listening, attentive. “… Okay”

“You’ll probably go for a blonde”, he started to protest, “It’s fine, just pick someone cute. Let’s be honest and admit that I’ll probably not date another ginger, because, frankly, what are the odds? Then we introduce them to our families, hope for the best”, he giggled. “And if that doesn’t scare them away, we ask if they’d like to move in with us. Then we get a new place, that has at least two bedrooms for when we get tired of them and need time alone.”

“Why can’t they just move in to our place?”

“Well, you barely have a place to call yours”

“Yes, I do!”

“Your apartment sucks, Harry”

“I live in a palace!”

“In a small staff apartment in a palace”

“Many people live in those in Kensington”

“Many people actually furnish their apartments and make it cozy, you didn’t. And you don’t let anyone in to organize it. And those people are single, you need an extra bedroom when you live with someone”

“What if I don’t get tired of my person?”

“You will”

“How do you know?”

“Because she won’t be me”, I smiled, smug. “Besides, what if their family come to visit?”

“Hotels are a thing, you know?”

“What I mean is”, I said, louder, ready to move on with the subject, “Is always better to get a new place, that’ll feel like both of yours, not just yours, or hers, both of yours. And you’ll furnish it together. Together! Not just ‘hey, do whatever you like, I don’t mind’. Together!”

“Okay!”

“And then we’ll live together with them, and start doing holidays together. Or, in your case, at least new year’s and other ones you don’t have to be with your family. And we’ll go on trips, with family and friends, and take them as our dates to weddings and stuff. And we should at least do one grocery shopping trip with them.”

“You don’t cook”

“I intend to!”, I protested. “Someday… I’d like to have the time to. Oh, and a garden. I really want the time and space to actually make a garden, you know? But anyway, after a year living together, we can try and use the L word”

“You still can’t even say it”, he joked. “Not even in this fictitious, hypothetical plan you’re creating”
“The next step I guess would be an engagement”, I said, ignoring his remark. “But there’s no right time for it. You just have to come to an agreement about it… We’ll talk about it. We won’t be those jerk couples that expects the other to bring up the subject and then resent them if they don’t. If we feel we’re there, we’ll say it, and ask if they’re in the same page”

“And if they’re not?”

“Then we’ll give it time. Maybe they need more time to stabilize their careers… Maybe they still wanna travel more before getting married. Hell, maybe they’re not the marrying type”

“Then, what?”

“Then we give them time, let them do their thing, ask them to let us know when they feel like we’re in the same page. When they do, then it’s time for a proposal”

“What if they’re still not the marrying type?”

“Well, then it won’t work, will it? You wanna get married, right?”

“Yeah”, he said, a bit too serious, his eyes staring straight into mine.

“Me too. So if we’re not with someone who has the same goal, what’s the point? But if they do, then score”. He giggled, slightly. “Then next, you… uhm… You take her somewhere nice, okay? And make it a surprise.” I felt a knot in my throat, hating the fact that I was planning the perfect relationship with the love of my life for some lucky blonde in our last night together. “Some place pretty, like, uhm… Like that Cherry tree blossom street in Germany I told you about! Or the Love tunnel in Ukraine! Or, just, you know… your house. And you get her out and prepare the place real pretty with, uh…”

“Candles?”

“No, fire hazard!”

“Rose petals?”

“Too cliché”, I said. “No, pictures. Get your favorite pictures of you and print a bunch of copies and display them around. Maybe… maybe flowers, but not rose petals. Actual arrangements, like in Great Gatsby, all over the place! Her favorite flowers, in her favorite colors, and…”, I sighed. “And music. Make sure her favorite song is playing. Hopefully she’ll have as good of a music taste as me, but if she doesn’t… then just play Ed Sheeran. And make sure you asked her parents beforehand. Yes, that’s important. But not just the father, since the whole idea that a father owns a daughter is ridiculous and misogynistic, so both parents. Or just one if she has a stranded relationship with one of them, it happens… and you ask their blessing and then you propose”, I turned to lay on my stomach, both excited and sad at the thought. “And when she walks in, this is important. What you should say is… you should say that you love her”, I looked at him. “And you should mean it, you should love her. You gotta promise me, Harry, that you will love her. Do not- don’t you dare marry a girl you don’t love, okay? Tell her you love her and tell her that nothing would make you prouder than being able to call her your wife. And that’s when you get down on one knee and show her the ring. And if she knows what’s good for her… she’ll cry and run into your arms and say yes”, I smiled, trying to get the knot on my throat to disappear.

“I’ll make sure to get in touch with your guy to let him know that’s the proposal you want”. I giggled.

“It isn’t… that’s for your girl. Your girl is gonna be into that stuff… I…”, I shrugged. “I don’t
know what I want… I just want, you know… the guy”

He sighed. “Knowing you, you’ll be the one to propose”

“You know what, that’s a cool idea”, I said, smiling. “I could do that!”

“Well, but you’d have to buy your own ring”

“Well, not really… Because in the Brazilian tradition, we don’t wear engagement rings. We only
wear the wedding bands. We wear them, both bride and groom, mind you, in the right hand from
the moment we get engaged and change it to the left one after the wedding… so, really, I could
propose”

“…That’s gonna be one lucky guy”, he was smiling, but his eyes were sad. “Make sure he’s not
another dick, okay?”

I smiled, nodding. “I think that’d be a good time to see each other again”

“Us?”

“Yes, you and me”, I said. “When we get engaged, we should just google the other, you know…
look at the pictures, see what we feel… to see if we’ve let each other go completely”. We looked at
each other, but didn’t say anything. “Then we just… Get married. You, with your big, fancy,
traditional wedding, with all the pomp and circumstance, your cool, handsome white military
uniform, the classical music in that big abbey Will and Kate got married at… Me, in my small,
private affair, with a white carpet and baby’s breath covering the saints’ statues”

“And the song from Tangled”, he said.

“Yes!”, I smiled. “You remember”

He smiled. For a long time before his lips went back into place and the sadness took over, enough
to make him look away. “What if we haven’t?”, he asked. “What if we’re not over each other?”

I tried to ignore the knot on my stomach, and the gut wrenching desire to vomit. “We will be”. He
looked unsure, but didn’t say anything. “That will be a while from now… Maybe three, four
years… Days will go by and we’ll not talk to each other. You’re gonna lose my number, yes, you
will, because I’m telling you to. And you’ll go back to hanging out with your old friends, and
you’ll get things done. And you’ll meet someone. And one day you’ll wake by their side and you’ll
turn on the TV and see me, maybe in a movie or something… And it won’t feel terrible, you
know? It’ll feel okay. You’ll think, ‘oh, there’s Jen. I used to go out with her’. We’ll get over it. We
can do it…”, he looked at the ceiling now, not even pretending to agree with me. “And if we’re
not, then, maybe we’re just not with the right people yet… We deserve to end up with people we’re
sure about… We’ll be happy, Harry. We deserve it”, I said, in a whisper.

I waited for him to say something, fearing he’d buy the fight and insist I was wrong. Thankfully, he
didn’t. He just stood quiet, his hand splattered on the skin of my back, going up and down
calmly.

“Oh”, he finally said, turning in bed and hugging me with both of his arms. I held him close and
tight, knowing there wasn’t much more time left. “Next time I see you, you’ll probably be an Oscar
winner”

I couldn’t help but smile. “Let’s not raise my expectations that high”
“I’m serious. I honestly believe that”

“Okay…”, I smiled. “What about you? What are we gonna do when you get back?”

He sighed. “I honestly don’t know… I have to get back at working closely with Sentabale, so I’ll probably go to Lesotho to check on things… And Edward told me Walking With The Wounded has invited me to another challenge for the end of the year, so that could be fun. They want to walk the South Pole, so I’ll have to do some heavy training”

“That sounds awesome”

“Yeah… Other than that, I don’t really know”, we didn’t say anything for a while. “Will you send me a kiss when you’re in the Victoria’s Secret Fashion Show?”

I laughed. “Yes, I’ll wink sensually at the camera thinking of you”

“Good, I’ll be watching and drooling”, we giggled.

Outside, the night sky was getting clearer as the sun came up. So I gulped, took a deep breath and closed my eyes, and I gave myself fifteen seconds. And in those fifteen seconds I intertwined my fingers on his, and I caressed his arm with my hand until his shoulder. And I kissed his chest and his neck, until his face. I kissed his cheeks, his forehead, and his nose. And I kissed his mouth, locking his down lip in mine for a long time until my fifteen seconds were over. Then I closed my eyes tight and got up before I changed my mind.

I took a shower, I blow dried my hair, and put makeup on. I put my clothes on, something nice, but comfortable for the flight, and I put the last things in my bag before getting out of the closet back into the room.

Harry was up and dressed, and he had Vodka in his lap. He had given her the sedative already, so she was ready to go. He put her in her travel carrier (‘Take care of mummy for me, okay? Be a good girl! I’m gonna miss you’) and I picked my electronics and chargers and so was I. The doorbell rang, so Harry helped take my bags to the living room. Eddy and Monica had arrived, and they took the bags down to the entrance hall to give us time.

I locked my door and went with Harry up to his apartment to say goodbye to the guys. The elevator ride was silent and weird and I pretended to check things in my phone. Suddenly, I couldn’t remember the right tone of his hair. Or the pattern of his red cheeks. I didn’t know if his nose was pointy or blank and I knew his lips were pinkish, but I couldn’t remember how much. I kept yelling at myself in my head to turn around and see while I still could, but I couldn’t bring myself to. Then the elevator’s doors opened and my stomach felt to the ground as our time was up.

Thomas had made me a cup of coffee when I got there (because he ‘knew I wouldn’t have taken the time in the morning to have some’). I drank my coffee taking a look at the hallway, all of the polaroid pictures were gone now. I asked if they had thrown them out or just packed them away, and they looked offended.

“Packed, of course! We wouldn’t throw them out!”

I hugged them because I couldn’t wait anymore. They went a bit rigid, not expecting the physical contact, but it just made me hug them tighter. “I’m Brazilian”, I reminded them. “I’m a hugger”

“Keep an eye on him for me, will you?”, I asked Thomas, on a low tone so only he’d hear, when I hugged him.
He smiled. “That’s kind of what I’m paid for”, he joked. “Keep an eye on Monica?”

I nodded. We exchanged another smile and I gave him my cup. With a heavy heart, I raised my hands in peace signs and gave those three wonderful man my last words. “Jenny out”

The sound of their laughter was the last thing I heard as I walked down the stairs to the foyer. There, I unhooked Harry’s keys from mine and put them in the table, knowing he had to return them to the landlord. The sound of the keys hitting the marble table broke my heart.

Harry was about to hit the elevator button when he stopped himself. His hand froze in place before he finally hit it.

“You changed my life”, he said. My eyes must have widened a bit, because he let out a little laugh. “That sounds so dramatic, but it’s the only way I can think of phrasing it. What I told Brandon, about moving to New York, I was thinking about you… Knowing you was like stopping to breathe after a long run. I was exhausted, not just from the engagement, not just from the drama, from my entire life, from not being able to accept what I was born into. And you made me feel new again. You-“, he sighed, as my heart beat loudly in my chest. “Thank you”

I didn’t really know what to say, or how to make him believe I meant every one of those words right back at him. So I just took a couple of steps towards him and wrapped an arm around his neck, kissing him. I felt once more the uproar in my stomach, the chills in my skin as he kissed me back, his tongue dancing with mine, his smell intoxicating me one last time, and the fatal desire not to let him go. We heard the elevator doors open, and broke apart with one long sigh. I stared at the elevator without moving, his arms still around me.

Then, going against what every single one of my muscles was begging me to do, I pushed his arms down and stepped away.

“I’m officially breaking up with you”, I said, softly. Harry smiled, sad, our publicity stunt coming to its end. “Go be awesome, Mr. Prince”. With a last squeeze of his hand, I let him go, and stepped into the elevator.

I pressed the button fast knowing there was only so much my resilience could take and the doors took a few intense seconds to start to shut. Harry stepped in in a hurry before they did, and my heart skipped a beat. He didn’t say anything, all he did was to walk me to the back wall of the elevator and press me against it in a kiss so strong it made me burn. At some point, the doors closed, and we went down the entire building until the entrance hall, by when we had to break apart again. Harry gave one last quick kiss in the lips. And another, and another until I really had to step away. I stopped at the doors, so they wouldn’t close, trying to bring myself to tell him.

I wanted him to know he was the summer breeze in a heat wave summer day, when all you can think of is finding a shadow to hide under. I wanted him to understand that I had felt like my life was the longest heat wave in the summer, and I was using every last ounce of energy I had and I didn’t even remember why until he came along. He was the breeze in a hot day that takes the heat away for a moment making you not only feel better, but realize that that is actually a beautiful day, and you just can’t see because the temperature is making you hate everything. Harry made me feel renewed, refreshed, he gave me the energy to look around and see the beauty that the pain in my heart had made me ignore. And I wanted him to know, I needed him to know he reminded me why I was fighting, why I was dreaming, but I couldn’t find the words – or the courage. So I just picked my sunglasses hanging from the pocket of my jeans and stepped away from the elevator.

“Ready to take over the world, Jenifer Silva?”, he asked.
I turned back to smile at him one last time. “I was born ready, Mr. Prince”

Ignoring the pain in my heart, I put my glasses on, and trotted out of the building to the town car waiting to take me to the airport with Monica and Eddy right behind me. Sadness and optimism fighting for space in my heart, I felt ready to take on whatever was next.

It was almost a full year before I saw Harry again and when I did, everything had changed.

Chapter End Notes

[A/N: If this chapter makes you sad, clap your hands, *clap clap clap*. If this chapter makes you sad, clap your hands, *clap clap clap*. This chapter broke my heart but it’s an important part. Next chapter we’ll see a one year jump in time (not a year, like ten months) and Jen and Harry will run into each other. Don’t worry, we’ll talk about all that happened in the meantime! Look forward to some social media posts until then! Will Jen get an Oscar nomination? Will Harry start dating someone new? I promise I’ll try to update as soon as possible so you’ll find out! Sorry about the wait and thank you for the love!]

PS: the title refers to the song Goodbye Until Tomorrow, from The Last Five Years, and was very much the feeling of this goodbye. I big time recommend it!

“I stand on a precipice
I struggle to keep my balance
I open myself
I open myself one stitch at a time

Finally yes!
Finally now!
Finally something takes me away
Finally free!
Finally he can cut through these strings
And open my wings!

So goodbye until tomorrow!
Goodbye until my feet touch the floor
And I will be waiting
I will be waiting for you”
I reached for a champagne flute when the waiter passed us by, replacing it in his tray with the empty one in my hand. My mother’s eyes followed my move, disapproving, and I disguised the roll of my eyes by turning my head back as I downed all the bubbly liquid. It was a double-edged sword having my parents know that I drink alcohol: by one side, I no longer had to pretend I didn’t; by the other, the disapproval was a constant. I wasn’t, however, willing to get through that night sober.

“Jen”, Monica reached us, “The hosts will greet you now”

I sighed, getting my game face on, following her through the other guests in black-tie – most who seemed to be looking at us-, wondering how long could we go before the inevitable happened. Wondering why I had said yes to come to this stupid party.

My mother was smiling. “My daughter”, she said, emotional, “A guest of honor of an ambassador!”

“Not a guest of honor, mom”, I said, gentle. “Just a guest. It’s really not a big deal”, especially considering we knew who the guest of honor actually was – a little fact that was so hard to ignore.

“Why, of course it is!”, she whispered. “You are a national treasure now! They should be lucky to have you!”

I rolled my eyes again, a bit annoyed at her over-excitement, knowing despite the cons I would still take this over the loathing she and dad used to have about my career.

“Jenifer Silva!”, the British ambassador in Brazil greeted me. “Brazilian pride! We are honored to have you, welcome to São Paulo!”

I gave him a genuine smile, trying to leave the reasons of concern behind. “Thank you, it’s good to be here! This is my mother, Vanessa Ferreira”

They shook hands. “Her Majesty would be honored to have you here celebrating her birthday. We’re sorry to bother you with these boring political events, though”

I was about to answer, when my mother found her voice. “Oh, she’s used to it!”, she said, “We met the president just last week!”

I flinched. “Mother”

They laughed. “You should be proud!”, the ambassador said. “Of everything you’ve achieved! And meeting the president, just as big an honor!”

“She is handling the protests a bit poorly, though, don’t you agree?”, I asked. I didn’t look, but I
knew Monica was sighing in disapproval from behind me. ‘Don’t let her talk politics!’, Janine had told her before going to walk the room to grab the next reporter to interview me.

It was the 25th of June on a windy, winter night in São Paulo. The British ambassador in Brazil was hosting a party to celebrate the birthday of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II at his home to a selective number of guests from all areas of Brazilian society – including me.

“Well, the protests are unfortunate, but this country does put up a great party”, he said, diplomatic. “And I’m sure many of our guests will be thrilled to meet you, they hold you at a high pedestal over here, rightfully, of course”, I smiled, and we heard some sort of commotion nearby. “Oh, I see our guest of honor has arrived. I believe you’ve met him. Your Royal Highness, we’re honored to have you, sir”

The ambassador, a handsome man in his fifties, curved his head down in a bow and I looked back.

In a small second, the room went out of focus, the word was on mute, and Harry walked towards us picture-perfect in a tuxedo with his piercing blue eyes focused on me. I felt as if my organs were twisting inside of me.

Harry took his eyes from mine to greet the ambassador, and I looked at the ground, confused of what to do. Monica had walked out to go find Janine, and my mother was just as clueless, so really, I was on my own. ‘Do I curtsy?’. I thought. ‘There are no photographers here, so no one will know. Do I call him by his name?’

“…you’ve met Jenifer Silva, of course”, I heard the ambassador tell him. Coming out of my trance, I brought my polite smile back from the dead and looked at Harry trying not to make the math in my head of when had been the last time we were in the same room. ‘Ten months’. Too late.

“Yes. I- Jenifer”, Harry stuttered. Then, putting an end to my doubts, he leaned over and touched my cheek with his, both of his hands holding onto my arms.

I was caught of guard for a moment, but managed a whispery ‘Hi!’. I was also completely overwhelmed by the familiar smell of his cologne, bringing back memories that I had spent a big part of those ten months trying to forget. “Mom, you remember Harry”, I said, using the opportunity to look away and take a deep breath.

“Of course! Hello, sweetie!”, she said, and as he leaned over to greet her, she threw her arms around his neck and brought him into a tight hug. I closed my eyes in embarrassment. “We’ve missed you over the summer! You owe us a sandboarding trip”, Harry laughed.

“Mom”, I told her. “Harry is… busy. He walked the South Pole over our summer, I believe”

Harry looked at me, seeming surprised I knew that. “I did”, he said, his voice a bit higher than I remembered. Than he coughed, cleaning his throat, and it sounded normal again. “I did, yes. I’ve been a tad busy. But then again, so is Jen from what I heard… Ms. Oscar winner”, he winked at me.

I laughed, nervously, feeling the blood rushing to my cheeks and a warmth gathering in my chest. I wanted to say something, about how glad I was he had heard, and how I hoped he knew it was all thanks to him. I wanted to make another joke to keep the mood light – if you can call it that when I could feel my palms sweating – but I didn’t trust my voice. Not when he had such… pride in his eyes. My mother had her voice at ready, though.

“Yes, our Jenny has been so successful, we’re very proud! And I’m a grandma now!”
“So I heard, congratulations!”, he said, as I groaned in frustration at my mother’s oversharing.

“Why, thank you… do come see us soon. Just because you’re no longer dating my daughter doesn’t mean you’re no longer welcome at our home”. I knew for a fact that was true. He might actually be more welcome due to it. “And my husband would love to see you”. I knew for a fact that was bullshit.

“Mom, let’s not monopolize the guest of honor”, I told her. “I’m sure the ambassador would like a chance to properly chat with Harry”

“Right of course, good to see you, Harry, dear”

“Good to see you, Vanessa”

“Mr. Ambassador, thank you again for having us”, I told him, who had been quietly standing by us.

“The pleasure is ours, Ms. Silva”

“And Harry”, I looked at him. “…Good to see you again!”, I squealed.

“Yes! I- We- Let’s catch up!”

I nodded, nervous. “Mmhm”

I grabbed my mother’s arm and walked us out of there as fast as I could, feeling everyone’s eyes on me, wondering why the fuck couldn’t I have thought of something other than ‘mmhm’ to say.

“See, that was okay. I don’t know why you were so worked up over being in the same party as he is. He was lovely”

I sighed, grabbing another champagne flute from a waiter, and reliving the conversation in my head trying to make sense of it. That was it. The horrible and awkward conversation I had been dreading the entire night had passed.

“He looks older”, my mother said.

“He turns 30 in three months”, I said.

“Well, he still looks handsome, though”. I did not need that in my life right now.

I saw Janine come over with Monica, who was acting as her translator, right behind her. Janine now had began to accompany me in my business trips as my ‘brand’ grew bigger – which was the respectable way of saying that now that I was really famous she had to give me more of her time.

“Jen”, she smiled at me. “This is Hugo. He runs a famous fashion blog here in Brazil and we agreed you could spare the time to answer a couple of his questions”

“Of course”, I said, in Portuguese now, looking at Hugo. “Hello”

Hugo, a short man in a fuchsia suit, turned on the recorder on his phone and started talking in his own flamboyant way, letting his online persona take over. “Queen of the internet, Jenifer Silva, so nice meeting you!”, I laughed. “I have so much to ask, but first of all, you looked amazing in the Shakira music video for the world cup!”

I laughed. “Thank you!”
“About three months ago you became the fourth youngest Oscar winner, and the first Brazilian Oscar winner! Are you used to that yet?”

I smiled. “That’s not something that you ever get used to. Some mornings I actually forget that is a thing that happened. It hits me when I see the golden statue in my dresser, but everything is a blur, it’s almost as if it was a dream”

He laughed. “And of course, you took home most of the best actress in a leading role awards from award season… the press started calling you this year’s Jennifer Lawrence. You know her, you’re shooting a movie together… Did she give you any advice on how to survive the madness?”

“We’re actually just done shooting the movie. Is called Leah, and we’re very proud of it. It premieres in the end of this year. Jennifer is a sweetheart, we met last year, and I was so happy to be cast in a movie with her. We got to work really closely together, which was great, and yes, she had some great advice. Most of it could be resumed by ‘fuck them, do your thing’”

He laughed. “What about the future? You’re due to start shooting a movie soon opposite Chris Pine, and with George Clooney, who is rumored to be getting married soon, do you know anything about that? And are you gonna be in the Victoria’s Secret Fashion Show this year too, slaying like last year?”

I smiled, giving Monica and Janine an alarming quick look as he walked into the dangerous questions zone. “I don’t know anything about any of that, actually”

“And of course, you’re here now. Are you enjoying the party? Have you talked to your ex-boyfriend Prince Harry yet? Are you pro or against the protest-“

“Okay!”, Janine, who had Monica translate for her the entire conversation, intervened. “We’re out of time now, thank you, Hugo”

I gave him a polite and smiley blank expression. “Can I get a quick selfie?”

“Of course”, I said, and he got his phone up. We smiled, he took the picture, and Janine pulled me away by the arm.

“I swear to God, is like no one knows the meaning of ‘no personal questions’”, she said.

“I wouldn’t mind answering the protests question”, I said. She let go of my arm to look me upfront. “You know your contract with Adidas forbids-“

“Forbids me of making political statements, yes”, I finished her line for her. “I wouldn’t have signed that if I knew my country would be in such bad shape by the time I got here. A lot of changes are happening and I can’t do anything to help it!”

“Do you wanna get sued?”, she asked me. “You don’t. Then stay in your lane, Jenifer. Yes?”, she touched her earpiece, turning away to answer a phone call.

I sighed, irritated, and Monica gave me a reassuring smile. I noticed her eyes hovering the room and remembered that with the turmoil of emotions from meeting Harry, I didn’t even notice if Thomas was with him.

“Go”, I told her. “Go say hello, I know you want to”

She looked guilty. “I’m working”
“Monica, when was the last time you saw him?”

“I haven’t been counting…”, I gave her a stern look. “Forty eight days”

I giggled. “Then go say hello to your boyfriend already, we’ll be fine”

“But Janine”

“I’ll handle Janine, I’ll translate. Or my mother. Just go”

She smiled. “Okay, I’ll be just a minute”

“Take your time”, I told her. “Go be with the guy you love”. ‘One of us should’, I thought, nodding my head quickly after the thought. ‘I’m fine’, my mantra resonated in my head. ‘What am I saying? I’m over him’.

“Okay”, Janine said, turning off her call. “Now- Where’s Monica?”

“I’ll translate”, I told her, smiling.

She sighed. “She went to see Hill, didn’t she? She told me they had arrived”

“She’ll be right back”

“Honestly, Jenifer, I love Monica, but-“

“Good! Me too”

“What are we talking about?”, my mother asked, coming back from a trip to the lady’s room.

“How much we love Monica”, I told her. Janine rolled her eyes.

“Oh, me too. Such a lovely girl. Although I do wish she had taken better care of you with your, you know… drinking”, she whispered the word as if just saying it was a sin.

“I pay her to make my life easier, mother, not harder”

“My point exactly”, Janine said. “And with this new relationship of hers she’s traveling even more than she did before to be able to be with Max-“

“Oh, don’t bring Max into this. We knew she had a son when we hired her”

“And that wasn’t a problem before… but now there’s a son and there’s a long distance boyfriend!”

“She and Thom are having a hard time making it work, but they want to try, and I’m not gonna make her choose between her job and him”

“Why not?”

“Because no one should have to!”, I told her, in a low, irritated tone, letting go of her arm to get yet another glass that didn’t stop me from seeing the look she exchanged with my mother.

“…so”, Janine said. “How was it? With, you know…”

“Fine”, I said. “I’m fine. He was… very-“, as I struggled to know how to describe my conversation with Harry, Janine gave the people behind me a stunned look before abruptly interrupting me.
“Don’t forget we have the photo-op tomorrow, we can go do that after your lunch meeting with your charity’s chairwoman”

“I-what? I know”, I was about to tell her if she didn’t want to hear the answer, she shouldn’t have asked the question, when I saw that someone had approached me from behind, and turned around to find my ex-boyfriend standing there, looking just as surprised to see me despite the fact he was the one to come over.

“Hi”, we said, together, and then giggled, together, nervously. This entire night was making me so embarrassed I felt like puking.

“Well, I guess I should go see if they have those little shrimp appetizers”, Janine said. “Vanessa, translate for me?”

“Oh, sure. Excuse us, kids”, my mom said, leaving with Janine, making me so grateful there’d be no witnesses to the awkward convo about to happen.

Harry and I stared at each other for a couple of seconds, both trying to think of what to say. ‘God!’, I thought, ‘someone shoot me right now!’

“You look good”, I said.

He smiled, looking down at his tuxedo and touching his bowtie. “Well, you…”, he looked me from my Bonnibel by Beston Women’s sandals, up to my long and white Zuhair Murad dress, to my eyes, then sighed.

“Thanks”, I said, smiling, a bit breathless. I wanted to say something, so I talked more about the dress. “It’s American. Not the dress, the dress is… well, It’s Zuhair Murad, so technically it is Lebanese. What I meant is, the dress is white. Clearly. I have to wear soft colors so I don’t look Brazilian. Which is weird, considering, you know, I am Brazilian. So you could argue whatever I wear, I still look Brazilian, because that’s what I-”, I sighed, realizing I was babbling – but that now I had to finish my train of thought. “…am. But the-“, ‘where was I going with this?’, I thought. “The dress, yes. The dress is supposed to detach me from that image. Because I guess everyone would assume I’d only wear bright colors just because I’m here. And my management team thinks it’s more profitable for me if people relate me to America and not Brazil when they see me so they have me wearing a lot of white and pastel tones these days”, I laughed, nervously. “Which is ironic considering they really wanted me to wear blue to the Oscars in February, and it was my idea to change the dress last minute. I had told Oscar de La Renta I was gonna wear his dress and then I didn’t, which in the fashion world is a huge offense, because, you know… nothing is set in stone, but is really good for designers to have their dresses in award shows like this, especially if you’re nominated because it means more exposure for them. But when the day came, there was this beautiful Stephane Rolland on my mind, and then it hit me. I’m supposed to wear that dress! And everyone told me I shouldn’t, because is really revealing and stuff, but I said ‘screw it’, and I wore it. And I don’t regret wearing it because I stuck with my gut and that’s what matters, and all the fashion critics seemed to be pretty positive about it, so all was well”, I sighed, deeply, out of breath. “And, you know, you can get into this conversation whenever you want…”, I joked. “Which I’m sure you will as soon as I stop talking”.

He laughed to the ground. “This… this is awkward”

“Wow”, I said, sarcastic. “Thank you for your contribution, Harry, if I’d known I’d keep talking”. He laughed again.

“So you’re an aunt”, he said.
“Yes”, I smiled; glad for a topic I was comfortable with. “Arthur. He’s… perfect”

He smiled. “I saw the pictures… Congratulations”

“Thank you… you… saw? Pictures?”

He smiled confident, but I noticed the blood rushing to his cheeks. “I don’t have an Instagram, but I do get internet in London. I googled you”, he shrugged.

“You googled me?”

He seemed to instantly regret his words. “Not like that. Not in a creepy way. I just… when I heard something in the news, I googled you to get details of-“, he sighed, looking at me. “Wow, there’s no way to make that sound normal, is there?”

I laughed. “Don’t worry, I get it…”, I sighed, wondering if he had any way of knowing the embarrassing amount of time I had googled him.

“I went to America!”, he changed the subject, making me look up at him. “Memphis. In, uh, May. For a wedding. Guy got married. Not a guy, the Guy. That’s his name, Guy. Well, I guess technically, he is, too, a guy. It was good, quite… pretty”

I smiled. “I heard about that actually… actually I read that your lookalike was in town too, pretending to be you and no one could tell the difference”

He looked frustrated. “Yes, that’s… happening”, he said. “Did you hear about the reality show?”

“If I heard about it?! I’m so gonna watch it!”

He laughed, blushing, “Oh, don’t to that-“

“Oh, I am”

We let the laughter die out, then he looked serious. “I’m sorry about the…”, he said, and looked like he regretted the words as soon as they came out. “… you know, the… drunk dials… about, what? A month after I left?”

“Right”, I said, unable to hide the smile in my face. “It’s… fine”

“You told me to lose your number… clearly I should have”, we chuckled.

“We’ve all been there”, I said. “If it makes you feel any better I got drunk a number of times after we broke up too, it’s part of the ‘moving on’ process”

“But you didn’t left an embarrassing number of voice messages on my phone”

“Well, I’ve always been classier than you”. We laughed.

Of course he didn’t know I copied his number in a note on my phone and deleted it from my contacts, knowing I’d never be able to dial his number or copy and paste it while drunk. You learn a few tricks after drunk calls. But Harry didn’t know this.

Harry didn’t know that I had to google him on my phone most nights when I couldn’t stop thinking about him, sorting through tabloid headlines, ignoring the ones that were so obviously fake, until I found the real bits of information. He didn’t know I kept finding comfort in the fact I already knew what they were about, that I still knew what he was doing. That I still knew him. He didn’t know
the gut wrenching feeling I got when the headlines stopped making any sense.

Harry didn’t know I had to force myself to put on makeup, and a dress, and go out. And how I let cute guys flirt with me, only after a while trying to flirt right back. He didn’t know how long it took to be able to say yes when they asked if I wanted to go back to their apartment. And to be able to have sex again, for fun; or how long it took for me to stop thinking about him while I did it. He didn’t know I missed being able to sleep with someone merely because the opportunity presented itself.

He didn’t know it took all of me not to call him back after the drunk voice messages. He didn’t know I still had them saved on my phone and I kept listening to them whenever I felt sad because his voice made me feel better somehow. Harry didn’t know whenever something happened, I imagined the conversation that we were supposed to have if I could tell him about it.

He didn’t know how long it took me to enjoy the life I had, because I might not have him anymore, but I still had so much. Like the week I spent back in Manhattan for the Victoria’s Secret Fashion Show, hanging out with the other models, making friends and going out. Walking out on that catwalk as if the world was my oyster and I wasn’t scared of it. Holding Taylor’s hand as she sang and we walked up and down. Posing at the end of the catwalk picturing every single one of my fears at the other end of those camera lenses, staring at them with the victorious look I had earned. After I felt comfortable enough, I even managed to picture Harry, and I wink, like I had promised I would.

I went out with the girls afterwards, and enjoyed the introductions to the cute male models they knew. And I let one of them take me out for drinks, and I let the media say whatever they wanted, and didn’t care. Not one bit. And as November made its way through us, bringing the cold and the award season, Wild & Free got nominations for the Hollywood Film Awards before it even premiered! And Harry didn’t know how I rejoiced with my cast and team for the awards we took home – including mine, for best actress.

“It’s just the beginning!”, Richard said, smiling, as he hugged me that night.

And it was, because when December came, the smaller award ceremonies came as well. And I was announced as the best actress awarded by the New York Film Critics Circle, and the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures.

Harry didn’t know that when I traveled Europe with the cast of Wild & Free, avoiding to think of the irony that I was in London just when he was in the South Pole, we were actually using all of our energy trying not to get too worried about the award nominations. And when they came out, he didn’t know how we celebrated! Time and time again, crazier each time, whenever we saw our names or the names of our production and writing team in the nomination’s lists… Harry didn’t know the overwhelming feeling of validation and accomplishment that came over me when I saw my name in every list. As the press tour ended, we went home for the holidays, waiting for the time to go to the ceremonies and find out if we would get to take those awards home with us.

Harry didn’t know that was the easiest time to pretend I was over him.

Going home for Christmas, it was harder. It was harder pretending there wasn’t something so big in my mind. It was a mixture of emotions, listening to the same patronizing questions about my career, feeling like everything could be about to change, waiting on the ceremonies and the big Oscar nomination as everyone took turns letting me know how much better I was off without Harry. ‘Is this it?’, the question constantly in my mind. ‘Is this my big break?!’.

Harry didn’t know though, that it felt like putting my war paint on. The moment I set foot back in
Los Angeles and ran to meetings with Richard and Janine to plan my award season strategy, I felt like the old me again. Planning, making appointments, knowing what would happen and when, planning what to say and not to, dreaming about the speeches I could maybe have the chance to do, researching new fashion collections and sending pictures of my favorite dresses to Rachel Zoe so she could get them for me to wear. Harry didn’t he was in my mind less and less as I kept myself busy, as I reached for all the things I wanted, wondering if I could get them.

I flew my parents in from Brazil, this time determined to bring them with me, so if I won at least one of my nominations, maybe they’d know why I’m doing what I’m doing: because I’m good.

Despite the preparation, there were only three things I was absolutely sure of during award season: one, I never knew where I was going when I got into a car, no matter how many times Monica had reminded me beforehand. I always had to ask again. There were too many interviews, too many talk show appearances, too many talk show skits, too much to do and remember and at the end of the day, the itinerary was not a priority. Two, I never unpacked. I flew back and forth from New York to Los Angeles, to Vegas, to Miami, toLos Angeles, and to Europe, and back to New York for a day before Los Angeles. There was always a party I had to be seen at, always an interview live in another state, and I just found it easier to stop pretending I had the time to unpack. Three, I always had a glass in my hands. This is why I had to let my parents know that the daughter they had raised in a perfectly Christian environment was now an avid consumer of alcohol – because I just couldn’t keep doing the ‘it’s just water’ trick through season award. It was stressful, and I was stressed and constantly ready to fight someone, and I needed to not have to lie about what was in my glass the whole time. They didn’t like it, but let it go after a while.

When the first award ceremony came, the Golden Globes, it brought back a world of memories from the past year’s ceremony, when I won my first big award, in a television category. I remembered texting Harry through it, and coming home to Princess Madeleine thinking I was his girlfriend. My speech that time, the one that went viral and turned me into a meme, still hunted me. This year, however, I was sitting closer to the stage, on a table with my cast-mates and directors and producers, and my dates were my parents. There was no breakdown in the bathroom, just alcohol and my very unrest leg, shaking under the table the whole night long. This time, I wasn’t some girl from a teen show who got a special part in Game of Thrones and scored a lucky award. This time, I was one of the most frequent nominees of that award season.

This time, I had the cameras on me almost constantly, cutting from the ceremony to my reaction at any give point – which meant my image brought them more audience. This time I wasn’t wearing a basic, black jumpsuit. This time I was wearing a Paolo Sebastian silver, glittery, ethereal dress. This time – and all the times in every ceremony for those two months - the hosts were making jokes about me or my role or my movie, and whatever personal thing I had going on – often about Victoria’s Secret, Harry or David, which meant I was a popular subject. The jokes were often in the range of:

[Insert highly enunciated host voice] ‘Jenifer Silva is here, of course’, pause for the applause and a close up on my humbled, shy face. ‘Although after her role in Game of Thrones and her latest gig in the Victoria’s Secret Fashion Show, I was expecting her to show up with a lot less clothes…’, cue picture of me in the Victoria’s Secret catwalk, to the whistles of the crowd, and my blushing, smiling face. ‘Talk about a versatile actress, am I right?’

‘Jenifer Silva is, of course, nominated tonight for her role in Wild & Free’, pause for the applause and close up, ‘looking as beautiful as a princess, isn’t she?’, cue wink from the host, energized applause, and another close up.

‘Jenifer Silva is here tonight’, applause and close up, ‘To put it simple, this Jenifer is this year’s
last year’s Jennifer Lawrence, she’s winning everything and looking gorgeous at only 23 years old…’, cue applause. ‘Somewhere in Manhattan David Cobb is probably regretting his life choices’, cue big applause, close up on me, who had to mask my laughter with a drink of champagne flute, which still didn’t mask the smugness on my face. The two pictures together – with the line, and my reaction – went viral, which this time did not bother me one bit.

So the Golden Globes moved along, and things happened way too fast, as one moment I was laughing at a joke, and the next they were announcing my category, and Tom Hanks was reading: “The winner is… Jenifer Silva!”

Cue my surprised face as I felt the air escape me. My shaking leg froze. My father jumped in the air from his chair, screaming and clapping, getting laughs from everyone around and everyone watching. My mother hugged me, as surprised as I was, and I made my way to the stage – much steadier this time around. When I got there, with my jaw hurting from smiling so much with my mouth open, and got my second Golden Globe from Tom Hanks, I stared at the familiar auditorium, just as intimidating as it was the year before.

“I need you to know, and this is very important”, I told them, “A lot has happened this past year, but I still have no idea what I’m doing here”, and I broke into a weird crying laughter, hearing the auditorium laugh with me.

Harry didn’t know I had never felt so free of him and so confident that I would be just fine.

Time after time, week after week, it went on like that, and we fell into a familiar routine: pre-party cocktails, mingling with other nominees, introducing my parents to famous people and watching them freak out. Wake up early, be so nervous I can’t eat, try on the dress, put on makeup and get my hair done, drive to the red carpet doing shots of vodka to calm down. Give interviews, answer the same unimaginative questions about the movie, try and use the exposure to shed some light on the cancer fight and how people could help. Sit down for award ceremony, be happy for my friends winning, tweeting on the breaks with my opinions and congratulations, cracking jokes when possible, try to survive until they announce my category.

‘And the winner is… Jenifer Silva’, cue the air escaping my lungs, and my father jumping up and freaking out making everyone smile, and my mother crying making me cry, and my shaky walk to get my award, thinking ‘I didn’t lose! I didn’t lose!’ after having spent so long trying to prepare psychologically for a loss.

I held the award, went for the microphone, tried not to trip on my dress, and heard my own shaky voice as I said thank you. Then, walk out, take pictures, answer questions in the press room, give interviews backstage and party hard all night long – in a different dress, of course -, and get ready for the next round, about a week from then, while I tried to pretend I could focus on my normal work.

Every single one of these steps was of vital importance, and you couldn’t miss one. And I didn’t.

Four days after the Golden Globes the Oscar nominations were supposed to be announced at a formal press conference at five in the morning. Everyone in the Wild & Free team was excited. My parents were cautiously eager. Richard, Janine, Monica, the Artchet children, Selena, Taylor, Ally, Lucas, Livia, and pretty much everyone else I knew was practically celebrating already.

Meanwhile, Harry didn’t know that Entertainment Weekly published an article called ‘Oscar Bait – this year’s movies that are trying too hard’, naming Wild & Free the type of drama that is ‘too hysterical’, and most likely made exclusively to ‘try and snatch a nomination’, which is why, on the author’s opinion, it ‘most likely wouldn’t’. ‘Jenifer Silva’, he wrote, ‘is a twenty-three year old
overrated child-star whose little knowledge of motherhood or grief translates into her poor performance’. That was the most negative critic Wild & Free had gotten to date and it kept resonating in my head at such a loud volume I couldn’t even sleep that night.

I rolled over in my bed in my Los Angeles house until about four-thirty before giving up and getting up. My parents were in the guest bedroom, as was my brother (who came to see at least one award show before heading back to be with his wife as they got closer to her due date). I took a shower, had coffee, and went to sit by the pool, overlooking the city and waiting for five in the morning to hit so I could learn my fate. Harry didn’t know I spent some huge amount of time staring at my phone considering very seriously if I should call him. ‘He’d understand’, I thought. ‘Harry would know’. But I had told him to lose my number, and it wouldn’t be fair of me to call him.

When it was almost five, someone opened my door, turning the lights up and screaming ‘rise and shine! It’s Oscar nomination day!’ I got up, and walked back inside, only to find Richard, all of his four kids (Hunter had moved back to Los Angeles), Janine, Monica, her son Max, Selena, Taylor and Alli (these last two whom I didn’t even know were in the country), all walking in and making themselves at home after giving me a hug.

“What is happening?!”, I asked, seeing my parents were also up and making everyone coffee.

“It’s Oscar nomination day”, Payton, now an increasingly pretty, almost fifteen year old, said.

“Yeah, you can’t celebrate alone”, Alessa said.

“When did you even get here?”, I asked her.

“Good morning, internet. It’s almost five in the morning, you know what that means”, Asher had his youtuber voice on, speaking to his camera. He put an arm around my shoulder to film us both. “It’s Oscar nomination day”

“Guys, I told you I didn’t want to make a big deal out of it. I’ll probably not even get nominated. Is not a big deal!”

“It’s beginning!”, my brother said, and everyone shhhed at the same time.

I gave up, and sat down. Soon there were two arms around me – Taylor’s and my mother’s – and I felt claustrophobic, so I got up and decide to just stand up near the TV so I could hear what was being said instead of the stats Janine was telling whomever wanted to hear.

“If she wins she will, of course, be the first Brazilian to ever win an Academy Award, the first Latin American actress to win in the leading role category, and fourth youngest actress in history!”

Janine’s words echoed in my mind until they began announcing my category (‘first Brazilian, first Latin American actress, youngest in history’), and I found myself overwhelmed with how much I wanted this.

“The nominees for Best Actress in a Leading Role are…”, our room was filled with shouting of ‘it’s happening!’ and ‘shhh!’ “Amy Adams, American Hustle… Sandra Bullock, Gravity”

“Oh, that was a great movie”, Asher said, and got about ten sshhhs.

“Judi Dench, Philomena”, I closed my eyes. ‘That was such a great movie. She’s so great. I hope she wins…’. My legs felt weak. I wanted to crawl up in a ball and sleep for a week straight. “Meryl Streep,”, the sound of ‘ugh’ in the room was so loud no one even heard for what movie Meryl had
been nominated. It was a mixture of a positive ugh (‘Ugh, she’s amazing!’) with a negative one (‘Ugh, it’ll be hard to beat her!’). How many names had it been? Was it over already? Could I finally go to sleep to pretend I don’t care? “And finally…”

The world was quiet in anticipation.

“Jenifer Silva, Wild & Free”

I breathed as if I had just come up for air after almost drowning. I started crying so fast I almost didn’t feel it. I had Taylor, Selena and Alli’s arms around me and it was like I had gone deaf, because I knew they were all screaming and celebrating, but I could only hear the voice in my head: I did it!

I had never wanted to call Harry so bad.

January 18th brought the SAG awards, and the SAG awards were important. One, because the winners were chosen by fellow actors. Two, because there were big chances – although it wasn’t a certainty - that the same people who won SAG awards, would win Academy awards.

I took my brother and my father to the SAG Awards, my mother choose to watch from home and give my brother a chance, since that was the only one he could go to.

We sat through the same routine, except this time my brother was live tweeting/instagramming/snap-chatting the whole thing, which made him pretty internet-famous. Jokes. Skits. Speeches. Alcohol. Friends winning. Happiness. Twitter. I probably won’t win. It’s okay. It was a good award season. I got the Critics Choice. And The New York Film Critic award. And the Hollywood Film award. And the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures award. And the Golden Globe. That’s good enough. That’s more than enough. That’s amazing. I’m so proud of myself. I’m okay. I’m-

“And the winner is… Jenifer Silva”

My father jumps. My brother is filming himself giving me a kiss in the cheek for a vine. I’m in shock. I can’t cry or laugh, I just have my mouth open in shock as I hug Jonathan, my costar. I walk to the stage, trying not to trip on my trembling legs or my Krikor Jabotian golden dress or my heels. I hug the presenter and get the statue of the dark gray naked man and take a deep breath before the microphone trying not to cry, trying to get through the speech without crying. Finding new ways of expressing my gratitude to the people who gave me this award, who cast me, who acted alongside me, who raised me, who took care of me. Finding new ways of making people realize we need better research for childhood cancer. My voice breaks, I clean my tears, I thank the fans, and say goodnight, overwhelmed, thanking the stars because I still haven’t run out of luck! Pictures. Press room. Interviews. Happiness. After-party. And start the countdown for the next one: BAFTA awards.

The Bafta was awkward. One, it was in England. Two, Harry was from England. Three, his brother was attending. Literally, his brother was going. He was presenting an award for the actress who once portrayed his grandmother, he’d be watching first row. Do I say hello? Do I make a joke about it if I win? Do I dress more modest?

I arrived early. Did some talk shows – the same as I had done the last time around, still avoiding the sneaky mentions of Harry. Then I put on a dress, bright, edgy red that matched my ‘fuck it’ attitude, and headed to the red carpet with my parents ready to do it all again.

So I heard the monologues and the jokes, this time in British accents, a few that I didn’t get,
because I wasn’t British, and I avoided looking at where William was sitting as much as I could. Then, finally, they announced my category, and I tried to breathe the nervousness stomachache away, as someone in a beautiful accent read an envelope that said that the winner was Jenifer Silva.

It was Europe, but my father still jumped in the air, arms up as if he was celebrating a Brazilian football goal. My mother hugged me quick, and I made my way as composed as I could, trying not to trip, or look at William, and failing – he was up on his feet, along with everyone else, giving me a standing ovation, it was hard not to look, and smile.

I smiled in front of the microphone, remembering the last time I was there. I thanked the director, Jonathan, the kids, Mrs. Thompson, I talked about cancer, and then I waited to thank the academy last, remembering the last time they had decided to nominate me for that honor:

“You know… when I was sixteen years old, the amazing people behind tonight decided to nominate me for a Bafta for a supporting role”, pause for applause. “I was young, school was hard, I barely had any friends, acting was impossible, I didn’t understand what I was doing, what was right or wrong, I felt… used, and lost and I had no idea what would become of me…”, I felt the tears accumulating on my eyes. “Then I made a movie, and you nominated me for this. And I got into a plane, and came here with my mother, who’s sitting right there, and we traveled around London, and came here. They read my name along with the names of other incredible actresses that I could not believe were even in the same room as me, let alone the same category!”, I laughed through the tears, nervous. “And I didn’t win then, but I went home feeling like that was the most amazing experience I had ever had. I felt validated, I felt important, I felt talented. I felt as if I could do this, as if I could amount to something”, me voice broke, and I took a deep breath, drying out a tear. “And tonight, tonight you did the same thing. You put me in a category with the amazing Cate Blanchett, the incomparable Amy Adams, the wonderful Sandra Bullock and the incredible Judi Dench, and you made me feel so incredible, that is hard to remember any time in the past where life wasn’t amazing!”, pause, for applause and for breath. “So to the British Academy of Film and Television, from the sixteen year old girl whom you helped not give up, thank you so much!”, I held the tears as much as I could, and smiled at them, before leaving.

Season award was just that: an emotional roller coaster. Amongst the madness, life went on. I went to auditions, and call backs, and as my Sidney Sheldon movie got pushed over to the second semester, I was cast in a low budget, indie film with Jennifer Lawrence. My mother had to go back to Brazil to help Lucas and Livia as their due date approached. Harry was spotted with another blonde in London. There were rumors I was dating Trevor Mock – the male model. I woke up everyday reminding myself of every award I had won – seven, at this point-, smiling at them in my dresser. Trevor came to one of the after parties to see me. We had dinner. People took pictures. Harry took his blonde to see a musical in the West End.

But Harry didn’t know then that when I put on my puffy, big Oscar de La Renta gown on that Oscar Sunday, I realized it didn’t feel right. It was too expected, too princess. I stared at the unclaimed pink roses amongst the sea of flowers I had been sent, and decided I was no princess, and didn’t want to feel like one. I wanted to feel like me – the girl who didn’t fit in that world.

So I went on game mode. I gave orders for Monica to call Rachel Zoe to get me the other dress. I called Oscar de La Renta personally, and explained I’d be honored to wear that dress some other time – the MET ball, maybe. I waited and waited until Rachel herself showed up, with the dress, and new shoes and jewelry. Which she didn’t give me until I had listened to her speech about how that was not an Oscar dress, and it was too edgy for American viewers, and it did have the wow factor, and would stand out, but it could potentially be a disaster.

“Please listen to her, Jenifer”, Janine, who had showed up just in time after checking in with her
other important client – Jennifer Lawrence -, said. “We are this close to scoring an exclusivity contract with Oscar de la Renta, wear his dress!”

“Guys”, I told them. “If I lose tonight, I want to be wearing the right dress”

“Look”, my father said. “Parakeet, I’m not gonna pretend I know what any of this is about… but what dress do you really want?”

“The white one”

“Really?”, he asked, “Cause that one is so revealing…”, I gave him a look. “Fine. That one. Wear that one”

My dress was like a white blazer on the top, with a huge cleavage, that melted into a robe-like skirt around my waist until my mid-thigh, with a golden adornment, and opened up in a long trail, leaving most of my legs visible. Rachel gave me nude Louboutin heels, and a new set of jewels, and we left my hair the same way – balancing out the dress. I left my house feeling like I should: myself. Because I might not have fit in his world, but it was because I was used to mine, where you’re supposed to stand out.

My father squeezed my hand when we arrived, before we left the car. “I’m proud of you, no matter what”, he told me. “And if at any moment you change your mind, just let me know and I can get you out of here in ten minutes”. I smiled, grateful, and nodded, before taking in a deep breath and knocking on the window so Monica knew she could open the door.

I heard the sound of the flashes before I saw any of it, and the shouting from the people who came to see the arrivals behind a security rail across the street. I waved at them, and made sure my skirt was okay, and my boobs were covered, then I walked towards where Monica directed me, ignoring the knot on my stomach, and all the directions from which I could hear my name echoing as people realized I was there.

I answered questions on the red carpet, about how that night was exciting for more than one reason. Livia, whose due date was three days before, was being induced today. The doctors didn’t want to wait any longer, but somewhere in a hospital in Brazil, she was putting it off until the ceremony was over, so they wouldn’t miss it. My little brat of a nephew or niece was trying to steal my thunder and it such a me-move that I actually felt proud.

I posed for pictures on the red carpet staring at the cameras giving them the confident look and smile I knew I would want to see when I looked at those pictures later on. Most importantly, I imagined Adam, or David, seeing those pictures and I smiled at the lenses as if I was telling them to suck it.

I posed with my father, who did the pose I taught him, with a hand in his pocket and the other on my back, and gave the crazy photographers his best smile, often whispering some nonsensical joke to me so I’d ‘smile with my teeth, like you’re supposed to’.

We were sitting in first row, but in the corner left, near the side of the stage, not center. Which was good. Less pressure.

“Welcome to the final ceremony of this year’s award season, or as the kids are calling it these days, Jenifer Season”, Ellen DeGeneres, who was hosting the ceremony that year, said at the beginning of the show, fitting in that role as she fit everywhere: perfectly. “Jennifer Lawrence won everything last year, Jenifer Silva is winning everything this year, and together they’re plotting to take over the industry”, she said, making us laugh. “Yet no one seems to mind, because they’re so sweet”
She mentioned amongst us, we had made a total of 1400 films, warming my heart for being part of an industry that was so huge. “Fourteen hundred films…”, Ellen said. “And you have gone to a total of six years of college”. We laughed. “I’m kidding. Kids, stay in school!”, she joked. “I’m sure these people went to college, I mean”, she looked around, before resting her eyes at me. A camera turned to me and I had my face on the screens. “Jenifer Silva, you went to college, right?”

I made a face, getting into the joke. “Well… One semester”

“One semest-”, she said. “Well, six years and a half. Thank you for your contribution, Jenifer”, more laughter, and she went on to mock Amy Adams’s lack of formal education, before mentioning Meryl Streep who had been nominated for an academy award eighteen times, making it hard for me to forget exactly what I was up against.

Instead of seeing it as a challenge, I decided to see it as a compliment. Someone decided that I was just as good as Meryl fucking Streep. That thought got me through the night. That and the complimentary drinks Monica brought me during breaks.

Wild & Free lost the award for Best Writing Adapted Screenplay for 12 Years a Slave (well deserved), but we won the one for Best Cinematography, and I got to stand up and applaud as our producers accepted it. We lost Best Supporting Actress to Lupita Nyong’o (also well deserved), and Jared Leto won Best Supporting Actor.

Before I knew what was happening, Janine and Monica had come to ask if I was okay during a break. “Yeah, why?”, I asked.

“Your category is next!”, they said. And I felt like all of my organs were dropping inside of me. The break was almost over, and they had to go. I wanted to throw up, but I gulped, forcing myself to sit up straight. I focused on my loser face, and on the fact I was just twenty-three. I had time. It’s Meryl Streep. It’s fine.

And then I entertained a thought, on the secluded quiet of my mind, as the video with the name announcement of the nominees was playing short scenes form their movies. ‘What if I win an Oscar tonight?’. The melodic voice said my name, and my clip started playing, so I shook my head, getting out of my trance.

My clip was a scene in which my character is trying to keep her family’s life together, and she’s walking around the house, in a frenetic pace, moving things around fast, yelling at her husband that things were in the wrong place. He says ‘I know, I know’, and she turns to him livid, angry at so much more than just a messy house. ‘Do not tell me that you know!’, she screams. The clip ends and the image cuts to a close up of me, looking intense as I watched it. I breathe in, trying to relax, and smile. In a millisecond, my father, by my side, leans in so he can be in the frame, making me laugh. He kissed my cheek, before letting me go, and I hugged Jonathan.

“And the Oscar goes to…”, Daniel Day-Lewis, handsome in his silver hair, says as he opened the envelope. In a moment of pure honesty, alone with my thoughts, I knew it: I was fine. “Jenifer Silva, Wild & Free”. Then, I was great.

Loud applause fills the place as my father jumps from his seat, hands in the air, shouting of joy. This time I had no time to prepare or to try and choke back the tears, I broke down crying, covering my mouth in shock with my two hands as the biggest cliché anyone could have come up with.

Everyone around me was standing, but I couldn’t see much else through the tears. The music from our score was playing, and as I forced myself up, my father quickly wrapped his arms around me and pulled me up, spinning me around as if I was a child again, making me laugh. He kissed my cheek, before letting me go, and I hugged Jonathan.
I made my way to the stairs, trying to steady my legs. ‘Don’t trip!’ I thought. There was a staff member to help me climb the stairs, and I was glad for it, and for my dress being short in the front. I walked the stage up to Daniel Day-Lewis and I didn’t know what to focus on. His handsome face, the envelope that I wanted to check – ‘does it really say my name?’ - , or the big, shiny golden statue that he handed over to me. It was heavier that I ever thought. I got the envelope, I guess he said congratulations, and walked to the microphone as I looked at it.

I giggled, before looking up. It read ‘Jenifer Silva – Wild & Free’.

“They spelled my name right”, I said, my crying voice startling me again. I was gonna start to speak when I felt it – like in slow motion – the metal slipping between my fingers as my Oscar – my Oscar! – fell to the ground in a loud noise.

There was a gasp from the audience, before laughter, and all I could do was cover my face with my hands and my envelope in frustration. ‘WHY?!’. I looked up, as people were applauding, still laughing a bit. Daniel had picked the award for me was handing it over again. I held it, tighter this time, with both hands, as if it was a baby. I checked it for scratches.

“I’m sorry! I’m sorry!”, I apologized to the Oscar. “I’m so sorry”, I raised my head again, giggling. “It’s fine, it’s not broken!”, they laughed, and I felt at easy. ‘I’m fine’, I thought. I took a deep breath, trying to get on with my speech, and not to focus too much on the fact that I was making an Oscar speech. I spoke slowly, trying not to cough or have a meltdown, trying to keep my accent away, trying to stay whole as I filled with more joy than I ever thought I could get. “Thank you Charles Leonard for”, I remembered the Entertainment Weekly article, and allowed myself a victorious smile, “for believing this twenty-three year old overrated child-star’s little knowledge of motherhood and grief could translate well into the story you were trying to tell. Thank you, Jonathan Groff, for being the sweetest on screen husband. You have made this intense journey lighter and at times even funnier, and I love you for it. Thank you to our unbeatable crew, and to the talented children we got to act with every day, I don’t know what you’ll choose to do with your lives, but I’m sure you’ll be amazing, because you are amazing!!”. I took a deep breath, and the thought came back to my mind: ‘I have an Oscar!’ . I laughed, nervous, and looked at my father, who was smiling. “I wanna thank my brother, my sister, and my soon to be born nephew or niece, who’s not even alive yet, and already owns my heart. I wanna thank my parents”, my voice broke before I could do anything to help it. “Because I know their only goal has only ever been my happiness, even when it meant to be away from me. I love you. I miss you every day”. I swiped away a tear, looking away from my father to try and control myself. “I wanna thank Richard Artchet, his four ridiculously great kids, Janine Merchant, Monica and Max Williams, for giving me a home away from home, and a family when I was alone”, I coughed, trying to steady my crying voice. “You know I would not have survived this without you. I love you”, I sighed. “And if I could, I would like to acknowledge two educators right now”, I said. I had been thinking about this for a while, about what I would say. And I knew I wanted to let people know about the two people who mostly shaped who I was as a person – the good and the bad – at that moment. “When I was eleven years old, I had just moved to California, and I barely knew the language, and I had no friends, and I was very shy. My English teacher, the wonderful Ms. Fleming, saw how much I was struggling and brought me to the drama club she coordinated. They were putting up a production of Newsies, which was met with some disagreement by the students, who were mostly girls. Ms. Fleming cast girls for the male roles trying to teach us that talent does not see gender”, they applauded. “And so I was cast as an eleven year old girl version of Jack Kelly in the 2001 winter show in an elementary school in Sacramento. I had no idea what I was doing, but I did it, and when I came backstage from singing Santa Fe on opening night, Ms. Fleming put her hand on my shoulder and told me: Jenifer, I don’t know what you’re gonna do with your life. But if you decide you want to keep on doing this, I know that one day”, my voice cracked again, and I was glad the acting awards had more time for speeches because I had to speak slowly so they could
understand me through the tears. “...you’ll be thanking me while you accept some fancy award on TV! So, thank you Ms. Fleming, for seeing a student who needed you”, they applauded again, and I got ready for my big finale, steadying my voice. “The second educator was a college professor, who was the most uncaring, misogynistic, asshole I have ever had the displeasure of meeting. For all the months he was in my life he never wasted one opportunity to diminish my accomplishments, my talent and my ambitions. Expressing time and time again how the things I had achieved were directly due to my looks. And that was all I was bound to get, since I was not, to quote from him, the type of actress people gave awards to”, they interrupted with applause, seeing where I was going with this, and I kept a stern look on my face, with a victorious grin I was not able to hide anymore. I took my time with the ending, enunciating carefully, staring straight ahead. “So tonight, I wanna thank the Academy for proving him wrong and for providing me with the perfect opportunity to tell him, wherever he is, that he can kiss my Oscar-winning ass.”

I held my Oscar with one hand, raising it high in a victory sign, and smiled directly ahead as I saw the entire audience stand to applaud. I smiled smug until I couldn’t handle the sight of all those people standing up to applaud me and laughed widely before spinning around in my white dress and taking the arm Mr. Day-Lewis offered me to escort me backstage, feeling like I had all I could have ever wished for.

That was the last time I truly wished Harry was there.

Afterwards, I was too busy to remember how much I missed him. I took the photos backstage, and at the end of the ceremony with the other winners. I gave interviews about being the first Latin American actress to win in the leading role category. My father rushed to meet me, he interrupted an interview to hug me, making me laugh until I cried. The interviewer asked him how he felt and talked about how in between being a electrician, and having to move to the United States to try and give us a better life, he never thought in a million years that would ever happen. He cried, and I cried, and that was just another face of that award season that we heard about for months to come. We went to the after parties – when I got a call from my brother letting us know Arthur had been born. And only a few hours later, on the next day, I did a Ellen interview and she showed me a montage of all the times in every ceremony my father had jumped in the air after they announced I had won. She showed me the twitter reactions to my speech (#kissmyass was trending for days with people sharing stories of adults who didn’t believe in them), and that was still the beginning.

I took a week off to be with my family in Brazil, bonding with my nephew, but after that, I had to go back to being who I was now: the first Brazilian to ever win an Academy award, the first Latin American actress to ever win on a leading actress category and the fourth youngest woman ever. I started to feel like I was enough for myself, and that maybe I could do this without Harry. So I gave an interview to a Brazilian reporter, did shoots for magazines covers, did more in-depth interviews than ever before in my life, and headed into my new projects as an award-winning actress. I could stand by myself. I could do it. I was strong.

I was fine.

I shot a movie – Leah. I read Harry was in the country for a wedding, but I was in Utah when he was in Memphis. I told Trevor we weren’t even exclusive so I didn’t think it was a good idea for him to come to Brazil for the world cup with me to meet my family. And when we sat on a plane to come to Brazil – me, Monica, Janine and Eddy -, I already felt like I was the person I wanted to be. I was getting informed about the protests against the World Cup and tweeting about it – to the displeasure of Adidas. I was talking to a publisher who wanted me to think about having my memories published, and I thought I could help other girls try and realize when they were being manipulated and used. I had a meeting with a company about designing a fashion line for their label. I was shooting a movie with Chris Pine and George Clooney in a month. I had a hot guy I
was sort of seeing. I made an audition for a Netflix show. Everyone wanted an interview, and a cover, and a quote. Brands wanted me to talk about their products. Things were good. Things were great. I had everything I wanted. Which is why I was fine when Monica informed me that Harry would be in Brazil at the same time as I would.

“He’s only there for a week”, she said. “Then he’ll go to Chile, and he’s going to one of the Brazil games you’re not going to, so that’s lucky. I guess you’ll only be in the same city in São Paulo, but what are the chances you’ll run into each other?”

What were the chances? What were the chances the British ambassador in Brazil would invite me to the dinner in his house in honor of the Queen’s birthday? What were the chances I would be so eager to prove to everyone that I was fine that I would say yes to going? What were the chances I would spend the entire night regretting that decision? What were the chances that when I saw Harry my heart would start beating so fast that I wondered if I could go on cardiac arrest? What were the chances I was melting inside and using all of my energy trying to avoid the realization that I so obviously wanted to kiss him?

I didn’t know what to say anymore. Or what to do. I didn’t think I could keep on pretending I was fine with how different everything was now, but I felt like I had to. Ten months had passed since I last saw him, in those ten months he had walked the South Pole, gotten a new office job, and was planning a huge sports event to help wounded veterans all in his own. And he was seeing a blonde. I was an Oscar-winner whose name everyone knew, and everyone was waiting to see go into a down spiral. I was officially out of reach; too wrong for him, and I owed it to him to not complicate things anymore, so he could keep moving on. And I owed it to myself, so I could do the same. I was fine without him, and I didn’t need anymore of the complicating in my life. So I said goodbye.

“It’s just… I have, you know… things. I have to go to the mall tomorrow”, I immediately regretted the ridiculous excuse. “So I should go…”

He nodded. His tone said goodbye, but his eyes didn’t leave mine. “It was, uh… good seeing you”

“You too”, I said, smiling maybe a bit too much. “Bye”, I looked into his blue eyes, realizing what I had now, what I had always wanted – the career, the awards – was the reason I couldn’t be with him. I’m too known. I’m too big. Harry needs someone like the blonde he was seen with – someone normal, that no one has ever heard of. Someone who could shape her image after his if it ever came to it, without the amount of baggage I had in my name. I remembered Payton’s song, about the two stars who shined too bright on their own and exploded when they wanted to be together, realizing I am shining too much now.

I started to walk away, every fiber of my being complaining, asking for more of him. I turned back, feeling I needed to make something clear – for both of us.

“I’m fine”, I said. He looked at me, happy to see I was still there. His smile almost made me forget what I was gonna say. “I’m fine. I’m really good”, he nodded.

‘And yet…’, I thought. ‘Here I am feeling like nothing is okay because I don’t have this stupid ginger in my life anymore…’

He looked down, smiling, before gulping and looking at me. He opened his mouth, and closed it, a couple of times, and I waited for him to say something.

He didn’t, and I left. ‘I’m fine!’, I thought.

I found my mother, Janine and Monica, and we said goodbye to the hosts before heading to the
garage. Eddy went ahead to tell the driver we were leaving. I told them my conversation with Harry went fine. ‘I’m fine’, I told them. My mother said that was good, that was closure and she was glad I had broken up with him. Monica said from her own experience the long-distance relationship thing was not for me. Janine said Harry was not an appropriate relationship for a movie star on her way to owning Hollywood. “Sure”, she said. “You too are great, but you just don’t match”.

“And you know his team and his family doesn’t approve”, Monica emended. She and my mother went ahead talking about something that I couldn’t care about. Janine was re-reading the itinerary for tomorrow and I started to walk slower than her, absentmindedly.

I stopped, my feet frozen on the concrete as they made a turn to get to the car. I played with the thin bracelets in my wrist - diamonds, not the Hermès he had given me. I was alone in a hallway on the way to the garage. ‘Go back’, I begged myself, even though I had no idea what for. I don’t know what I should tell him, but I know I’d regret it. And I know I can’t seem to move because I want him. I want him. But I shouldn’t because I have everything I need and want and it should be enough. I should be fine. I’m fine.

I heard the door back to the party behind me open, thinking it was a sign. ‘Go back!’, I begged myself. I turned around. He stood there, looking just as distraught as I felt.

“I’m happy for you”, he said. “Sorry, that’s what I was trying to say back there. And I guess I lost my voice, which was weird. And I don’t want it to be weird. I want you to know that I am happy for you. Because I am, I am so happy that you’re getting what you wanted, and you deserve all of it, and all of the recognition. Because you’re amazing, and you deserve it. And you’re getting it and I’m happy for y-“

I walked to him, held the lapel of his suit so I could make him lean down, so I could kiss him. So his lips could find mine, and his hands could find my waist.

Then, it was like nothing had changed.
The day started with me having to pretend I wasn’t exhausted. I had to wake up extra early for a Skype interview with CNN about the World Cup – people seemed to want to know what I had to say, as if I was some sort of half-term between my country and the States. The big topic was now a little less my cameo in Shakira’s World Cup music video, and a little more the pictures of me watching the games. They varied from all ranges of emotions, from nervousness, excitement, anger and, in the latest one, I was seen looking a mix of annoyed and bored as I flipped off someone with both hands. I had to explain to CNN I was actually just teasing Leonardo Dicaprio, who was seating in another section of the Stadium. We ran into each other in the previous game, when I posted a picture of our ‘reunion’ (last I saw him was technically the Oscars, but before that it was when I was sixteen). Of course now that I was twenty-four we went from being seen as the uncle-niece our characters were at the time, to being ‘rumored lovers’. Can you see the headline as clear as I can? ‘Jenifer Silva cheating on supermodel boyfriend with Leonardo Dicaprio?’. Honestly, they were getting so predictable.

After a lunch with my charity EducaUP’s chairwoman, to talk about the progress so far and the schedule, I had another Skype meeting, this time with Richard, who informed me in the weekend I’d be flying to Rio to pose in the beach with the official World Cup ball – produced by Adidas. You might be thinking: a ball? And the answer is: yes. Yes, a ball. A ball who had an official twitter account pretending to be a living ball. Believe it or not, I was being paid some heavy cash for it, but I’d be down even if I wasn’t because the ball’s tweets were pretty funny.

Finally after lunch, I managed to go to the mall – when I had the actual time to stop and realize what I had in my mind. Of course I wish I didn’t have to, my mind was a pretty messy place at that particular time. I was going through shirt after shirt in the rack of clothes in the Adidas store in a mall in São Paulo, and it took me about two minutes of doing it to realize I wasn’t really paying any sort of attention to what I was seeing. I sighed, then took a step back to take a closer look at the ones I didn’t notice. Nothing too good, so it was fine. I looked around, wondering what else I was missing. I checked the time in my watch, still a few minutes to go. I saw some cute sneakers in the shelves by the walls, but I didn’t feel like trying them on. I wanted to buy a new backpack, but I didn’t feel like talking to the eager sales-girl to ask for her to get me the ones in the higher shelves. I started going through the shirts again, seeing some really basic ones I could use to run. I didn’t feel like trying them on. I sighed again, leaning in and crossing my arms on the rail, hiding my head from the world. ‘If I can’t see them, maybe they can’t see me, and maybe I can just go back to the hotel and pretend I don’t have a million things to do and just sleep for two days straight’.

It wasn’t hard to know why I didn’t feel like doing anything. I could be the queen of denial, but even I knew it was about Harry. I closed my eyes, and bit my lip, remembering just a few hours ago – on the night before – Harry’s lips were on it. I heard my own dramatic sigh in frustration and tried to ignore the guilt inside.

“Can’t find anything good?”

I raised my head fast, standing straight to see with my own two eyes if the person who had just spoken was who I thought it was. And of course it was – as if with my luck it could have been anyone else.

Of course Harry was there.

“Why are you here?”, I asked. ‘God, Jenifer’, I thought. ‘Can you chill?!’
“I’m shopping”, he said, with a smirk on his face that didn’t fool me for one second. He was in jeans, sneakers and the black Yankees cap I had gotten him long before.

“Harry”, I said, concerned. “…I’m here!”

He looked around, confused, then back at me. “I think there’s plenty of space for both of us unless…”, he looked serious, “have you claimed the Adidas store as your territory and now I have to avoid it?”

I took a deep breath and looked around. Janine and Monica were still sitting some distance away, looking up from their phones very discreetly from time to time to see what we were doing. Now, Thomas was joining them and sitting by his girlfriend pretending this was just another ordinary day of work. By the doors, outside, Eddy caught up with Nathan and Clark.

I’m not gonna lie: it was reassuring seeing the gang back together – sort of. I walked around the rail of clothes, going for the shelves and staring at the sneakers, signaling for Harry to follow me.

“Listen”, I said, in a low tone, turning to look at him. Or rather at the button of his shirt since I couldn’t bring myself to look into his eyes. “We talked about this last night, Harry, I’m sorry I kissed you-”

“Well”, he sounded sarcastic. “That’s an unexpected turn of events”

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“You always do this. You kiss me, then pretend you regret it because you feel guilty and you’re scared because a relationship with me would be too complicated, then you try to bring things back to normal, whatever that is”

“That’s not true”, I said. “I mean, sure, in the past, yes. But things are different now. I didn’t apologize for the kiss because I’m broken like last year, it’s the other way around! I apologized because I’m fine now. We’re both okay on our own and we don’t need to go down this stupid path again. You agreed!”

“Calm down, Jen”, he said. “I’m just here because I need to buy gifts to take back home”

“I- you- what?”, I asked, suspicious.

“You’re right. I agreed with what you said last night. Us, this… it’s a bad idea. We are better off on our own. I mean, look at you. You’re accomplished and happy. And I’m accomplished and happy. So… I agree. The kiss was a mistake”

“A necessary one”, I said. “We needed to see if we were over each other”

“Yes”, he nodded. “And we are”

“We are”

“We’re fine”

“We’re great, look at us!”, we smiled.

“Let’s pretend it never happened”, he said.

“…it didn’t mean anything”
“Right”
“Okay?”

“Okay”

“Although, why are you here?”
“I told you”, he said. “I need to buy presents”

“But… but why here? Why are you risking being seen with me? You know what will happen, they’ll say we’re back together!”

“I came to talk to you”. He put his hands in his pockets. “Thomas said you’d be here, and you mentioned a mall last night. Thomas asked Monica which one and here we are”, he sighed. “Last night was awkward and weird and I don’t want it to be like that, so I thought we could… talk. I thought we should, well, not should, but I thought we could… be friends”

“Friends?”

“Yes, I mean, as we said, we’re okay the way we are, so there’s no reason to avoid each other, right?”, he asked. “I mean, it’s us. Look how much has changed. You could help me shop and meanwhile we could catch up, learn what the other has been up to… This sort of thing”, he looked at me, seeing the distrust in my eyes. “Jen, I’m not here to get you back or anything… Besides I know how much you love to dress me up”

“Harry, you can’t be here”

“Why not?”

“There’s paparazzi coming”, I said, looking at the windows again, and at my watch.

“I know”, he said.

“You know?”

“Yes, when Monica said where you were, she mentioned it was a photo-op”

“But- you- you do realize we called them here, right? It’s part of my contract, I must be seen wearing and shopping at Adidas”

“Yes, I assumed so”, he looked me up and down. “You are a walking Adidas mannequin”

“And you- you still want to stay here?”

“I do need to buy some stuff, I’m leaving for Chile tomorrow… And we need to fix this”, he pointed at me, and then at him. “It’s too awkward, I can barely sleep at night with embarrassment for us”

I chuckled. “They’ll see you… And they’ll say-“

“Maybe when they get here I’ll leave, maybe I’ll stay”, he shrugged. “Just rumors, right?”

I stared at him quietly for a second, confused at his relaxed approach. That was not the Harry I said goodbye to ten months ago. I looked around. “Okay… but don’t blame me when your girlfriend gets mad…”
I walked towards the male shirts. “Sure”, he said. “That’d be hard, considering, you know… she doesn’t exist”

I looked at him. “Really?”

“She doesn’t exist”, he mumbled. “Uh, where are you going? I didn’t tell you what I needed”

“Shirts”, I pointed at rail after a pause to process that new bit of information. “Everyone needs official Brazilian football shirts”

“I have one”, he said. “They gave me one at the charity I visited yesterday”

“Let me guess”, I started. “The yellow one? Bonus points if it has your name on the back”

“You say it like it’s a bad thing”, he laughed.

“It’s not, it’s sweet of them. It’s a good gesture. But let’s be real, yellow is not your color”

He looked at me, offended. “Says who?”

“Says me”, I said. “Don’t forget with my advice you ended up on People’s most stylish men list last year”

“Yes, highlight of my year, thank you, Jenifer”, he mocked, on a monotone. Then he looked down, and spoke lower. “Actually… that was pretty cool, and an image boost, according to LF… so thank you”

“You’re welcome”. He stayed quiet as I browsed through the shirts. “The one they gave you was probably a large, too. You’re a medium”

“I’m a large”

“No, you think you’re a large, which is your problem. It’s like you remember nothing I taught you… here”, I gave him a blue medium Brazilian football shirt.

“I do remember you told me to avoid blue”

“On suits, because you only had blue suits. And sweaters, same thing. Not this blue. Blue is your friend in this particular situation. Let’s find a black. I’m assuming you need one for William, too”

“Yeah, and something for George”

“How is George?”, I asked, excited.

“Good”, he smiled. “A little devil, thinks he runs the house, takes after his dad with that, but he looks cute”

I chuckled. “So…”, I said after a while. “No girlfriend…”, was the transition too obvious? “I’m supposed to assume the blonde with perfect hair I saw in the pictures with you was a platonic friend?”

“A blonde?”

“Yes, perfectly straight hair, aristocratic face, obvious fake tan… Unlike you I do have social media accounts and I did ran into a lot of articles about your love life… against my will, of course”
“I don’t think that’s true”

“It was!”, I said, letting go of the shirts and turning to face him. “Sometimes they just pop up, it’s ridiculous. Also people kept sending me them for some reason—“

“No, I mean I don’t think she fake tans”

“Oh”, I said, “She does. I mean, she’s pretty. But she’s also a white girl living in England. Unless she’s ethnic, in which case chances are she’d be a brunette. So either she fake tans, or dyes her hair”

“Okay, is that jealousy I hear?”

“No”, I said, getting back to the black shirts. “I’m just saying this because I’m observant. Nothing wrong with fake tanning…”

“Good, because I don’t think you were naturally tanned for Victoria’s Secret”

“You watched it”, I said, smiling. “Yes, I did fake tan for Victoria’s Secret. But in my defense, all the angels are basically contractually obliged to it, it’s part of the deal”

“Angels, huh? I see you got really into it”

“I did”, I said, surprised at myself. “I still think they need better representation of more average body types, but I can’t help it. They really get to you. The entire thing is amazing… Plus the girls are the best! I made so many new friends”

“Yeah, I saw that”

We were quiet for a while, as I picked shirts and gave it to him. We went to find one for Kate. “So…”, I started, finally. “The blonde wasn’t… anything?”

“No, she was something”, he said. “And then she wasn’t”

“Wow, Harry, too many details, calm down”

He chuckled. “Fine, we have friends in common, and we started going out. Nothing official. Then it got official. Then it was over”, he shrugged again. I looked at him, trying to find signals of pain or heartbreak.

“Why?”

“I don’t know. She’s young, just out of college, needed to focus on her career”

“That seems to be your type”, I joked. He closed his eyes, smiling slightly.

“Ouch”, he said.

“Besides, she can’t be that young, I didn’t see any sort of criticism like when it was me”

“She’s a year older than you”

“Oh”, I said. I looked at him for a while longer. “My mom says you look old”

Now he did look offended. “Thank you”
“I mean, you are thirty”, I went on. “It’s hard to grasp that idea. You are a thirty year old man”

“And you’re a twenty four year old girl”, he said. “You’re officially in your mid-twenties now”

“And you only have three months left of your twenties”, I said. “I mean, you’re supposed to be an actual adult now”

“I am already an adult”, he said. “I went to war. Twice. I live alone. I have an office job-”

“Your apartment still sucks? How is that new job going, by the way?”

“It’s fine, I like the action better, though. And I have a charity I started myself-”

“How is that going?”

“Great. My point is I’m an adult”

“Well, yes, but when you’re in your twenties, you know, you have room to grow. It gives you an excuse, so you can make mistakes”, I made an affected voice tone, “Oh, yes, he did get his picture taken butt naked in Vegas… He’s in his twenties, though, he’ll grow out of it”

“That was so not how that played out”

“Now, you’re gonna be thirty, people expect you to know what you’re doing and what you want. Do you, Harry?”, I gave him an intense look and took a step dangerously close. “Do you?”

“Uh, excuse me”, we broke eye contact to look at Thomas, who was holding his phone behind him. “Edward would like to talk to you. He said he tried your phone, but it was off?”

Harry stared at him for a second, serious, before giving him the shirts in his arm and grabbing the phone, walking away a couple of steps to answer.

Thomas looked at me, holding the shirts. “Jenifer”

“Hey, Thom”, I said, smiling. “How do you like Brazil this time around?”

“Your home town is a lot prettier than Sao Paolo”, he said. “Don’t tell anyone I said that”

I chuckled. “Tell me, Thom… How is he?”

Thom and I shared a familiar look. I could see the doubt in his mind, wondering if he should stick to his job’s discretion policy or be honest even though I wasn’t in Harry’s life anymore.

“He’s doing good”, he said, sticking with discretion probably. “Surprisingly good. I mean, there were moments it looked like the old Harry would come back, but you did a number on him. I don’t think he even remembers who he was before New York, so now he can only be who he became”

“And what’s that?”

He seemed calm. “The best version of himself we’ve ever seen”

That was a more positive answer than I was expecting. To be completely honest, I had expected Harry’s positive, relaxed and mature attitude to be a farce covering up for the damage my absence had caused.

“Edward!”, Harry shouted from where he was, quickly taking a deep breath and whispering again.
Ashamed of my egotistical, selfish disappointment at his well-being, I looked at Thomas again.
“What’s that about?”

“The phone call?”, he asked. “Edward didn’t know you’d be here”

“…really?”

“You will recall he wasn’t your biggest fan”, I laughed. “He was extraordinarily optimistic when Harry moved back, completely devoted to burying every trace of you left behind”

“It’s reassuring how consistent he is”, I said, knowing that was exactly the attitude I had expected from Lame-Fucks.

“I mean…”, Thomas said, stepping closer to me and whispering. “About a month after the move back, there was a shady night I almost thought he would get back together with Chelsy”

“Really?!”, now that was the level of gossip I was looking for.

“Yes, no one was too happy about it. I mean, sure, back in 2012 everyone would have loved for them to marry. But after her offense to the family’s honor, let’s just say her name isn’t met with upmost joy around the office”

“I had the feeling his family really missed her when we were in Scotland”

“I think they miss the easiness the idea of her brought. But knowing what she is, they know she would have been more trouble than anything else. No, his friends are the ones who wanted her back”

“Really?”

“Oh, yes”, Thomas leaned in to the wall, seeming to get unusually comfortable with the conversation topic. “You didn’t get to meet them, but they have this very tight group, you know? Not that they see each other a lot, but they grew up together. And there’s a very ancient feeling of comradery and loyalty to the way they were raised”

“You mean they’re judgmental pricks who expect Harry to end up with someone on their level?”

“Well…”, he looked uncomfortable. “Well, yes… You’re not gonna tell anyone I said any of this, will you?”

“Of course not”, I reassured him. “I’m just worried about him”

“Well, yes. So for the first month they took him out, and invited her along, and tried to play cupid, you know how it goes… I really did think they might have gotten back together, which was very disappointing, but then he blew her off so rudely they finally stopped trying to meddle”

‘Nice!’, I thought. “You said a month, right? A month after the move?”

“Yes”, he replied. That was about the time I got the drunk voice messages. “Nathan was on duty that night and, not that we gossip about what Harry does or not, because we might or might not be contractually forbidden to do so…”, he gave me an intense look, and I replied by pretending to seal my lips with an imaginary zipper and throwing away the key. “…Nate said there was a lot of yelling when he told Chelsy to bugger off, his friends tried to defend her, so he started yelling at them, there was some tension and he decided to leave and went straight home”
By when he must have sent me the messages.

Harry came back, returning the phone to Thomas with a stern look that he dissuaded after taking in a deep breath before looking at me. Then he seemed suspicious.

“Why are you looking at me like that?”, he asked.

“How am I looking at you?”

“Like you know all of my secrets”

I smiled. “I know you need this”, I picked a packed official World Cup football and gave it to him.

“A ball?”

“A ball”

“I have a football at home”

“Yes, but this is the official ball for the 2014 World Cup. I thought it could be your gift to George, you could start collecting them for him. A ball for each World Cup in his lifetime”

He nodded. “That’s a good idea”

“Yes, I’m doing it for Arthur”, I said. “It’s fun, it’s a memento of his life, you know? Especially because in his case he was born on a cup year”

“I still have the ball from the 2010 Cup”

“You were there?”

“South Africa”, he said, with a bitter expression. “Saw England booed off the stadium, it was ruthless”

I sent him to the fitting room, a small, secluded hallway at the far end of the store, with a few individual spaces divided by black curtains. It was unisex, so I stayed outside to approve of his choices – also because if the paparazzi arrived they couldn’t see me there.

“Jen”, Janine said as she came to find me, looking very unfriendly. “You need to buy something, you need to be seen leaving with a bag”

“Right”, I said, and went back to the rail of clothes to get a couple of jackets I had seen and going back to the fitting rooms hallway.

“I feel like I am definitely a large”, I overhead Harry from the fitting room in front of mine across the hall, so I left with an arm of each jacket in each of my arms and opened the curtain to where he was.

“You’re not a large”, I told him as I walked in, closing the curtain behind me, wondering if the salespeople could see us. “The people of this store are having a fun day today-Huh, you’re a large”, I said, surprised.

“That’s what she said”

I groaned, making him laugh. I pulled the fabric of the shirt slightly, it was definitely too small for him. “Have you been working out?”
“I’ll take that as a compliment”, he said. “And yes, I had to do some heavy training for Walking With The Wounded, so I just kept going after it was done”

“That’s the South Pole thing, right? How was it?”

“Yes, and good”, he replied. “So can I buy a large or will you stick with your guts here?”

“You can buy the large”, I granted, then turned to him to show my jackets. “What do you think, black or white?”

He stared for a while. “White”

“Really? But it gets dirty easier”

“Yet you wore white for the Oscars”

“Life is not a red carpet event where your personal assistant follows you around with a Kleenex to make sure you don’t spill something on yourself”

“Take a risk”, he said, simply, “You can do it, I believe in you. Go nuts, change the world”, he mocked.

I took the black jacket off while Harry called Thom and asked for him to bring another blue and black shirts in a large. I fixed the white jacket, wearing it on both arms. “Alright”, I said.

“Tell me about the Oscars”, he pulled the blue shirt off, folding it as he waited for Thomas.

“Oh”, I said, staring a bit longingly at his nude torso, visibly more muscly than I remembered, the nude skin making me gulp with the thought that I used to be able to touch it whenever I wanted. “It was uh… it was really amazing, I can’t believe it actually happened”, I nodded, smiling. “I mean, everything happened so fast at one moment I was trying to breathe and on the other I had tears in my eyes and my Oscar statue was slipping right out of my hands to the ground”

He chuckled. “That was so you”, he said. We heard Thomas calling out from outside and Harry opened the curtain to get the new shirts, he started trying out the blue one.

“That’s not the legacy I wanted”, I said. “I wanted the speech to be my legacy”

“The speech is your legacy”, he said, as he put on his shirt. I enjoyed he was distracted to take another pic at his abs. “I mean…”, he giggled. “Kiss my Oscar-winning ass? Genius”

I smiled, proud. “I wanted to thank you”, I said. “On my speech”

He stopped adjusting the shirt, looking at me. “You did?”

I gulped, staring at my own reflection again, checking out my jacket. “Every Sunday, in every speech, and not to brag, but I did a lot of speeches… in every one of them there was always a moment I got stuck when I thought of thanking you. I never did, because I didn’t think I could come up with a cryptic enough way to do it, and I didn’t want to put you in an awkward position of using your real name… so I didn’t. But I wanted to”

“I’m glad you didn’t”, he said, after a pause. I looked back, questioningly.

“Why?”

“Well, why would you?”
“Because I got all of this thanks to you”

“No, Jen, you didn’t. You want to think that, because it’s more humbling than the actual truth which is simply that you are talented”

“I know I’m talented”

“I know you are… but you dreamed of this for too long and when you finally got it, the fact that we coincidentally were pulling a stunt around the same time makes you believe that that’s the reason everything happened, but it isn’t. If we hadn’t done anything, you still would have gotten the part in Wild & Free, if not only for your talent, than because of the whole meme thing that happened just before our relationship did… You always come up with excuses, but it’s all you”. I smiled at him through the mirror, feeling myself blush. “I’m flattered to know you thought of me that much, though”. ‘Shit’. “Okay, verdict?”

I stood behind him, in the tight fitting room, and adjusted the shirt. “Looks good”, I said, pointlessly touching bits of his back pretending I was checking something.

I thought it would be smarter to force myself to sit down in the stool. Harry took the shirt off, and tried the other one. We remained silent for a while.

“Are you gonna tell me about the boyfriend?”, he asked.

I breathed in deep, as I looked at him. Did I really expect him not to know about Trevor? Did I really believe I didn’t care or could I be so honest to myself as to admit I sometimes went out with Trevor with the sole purpose of giving Harry something to see in case he was watching me like I was watching him?

“Trevor?”

“Yeah”, he said. “Or is it Leonardo Dicaprio, because apparently that’s a thing now too” I smiled, “No, no, uh- it’s, it’s Trevor”

“Or is he a platonic friend?”, he asked, taking the shirt off.

“No”, I said, my voice small.

“…oh”, he mumbled. “Is he nice?”. I nodded affirmatively. He was also not my boyfriend, but as much as I wanted to say so, I couldn’t bring myself to. It was like Trevor was a certainty that I wouldn’t do something stupid – as long as Harry thinks I have a boyfriend, I won’t go kissing him again. Of course that hadn’t stop me the night before. “Can you hand me my shirt?”, I picked his button up white shirt, and got up, holding it open so he’d put his arms through. “How long has it been? You and… uh, Trevor”

I felt like I could throw up with the subject. I did the math in my head, realizing right before I had the chance to say ‘not long’, that it had actually already been… “Seven months”

“Wow”, he said. “Good for you”, he sounded honest, as he pointed his left arm at me so I folded his sleeves up. “So, that’s why you said you shouldn’t have kissed me last night”. I looked up, my hands frozen in place touching his arm. He didn’t look at me. “You know, more than five months… it means you’re exclusive”, he said, as I finished a sleeve and went for the other one. “If in five months we feel we could be proud of them, we make it serious and date exclusively for another six”, I recognized my own words as he spoke, with an air of a smile on his lips.
“Plan A”, I said, about the idea of what our lives could have been that I laid down on our last day together.

“Yep”

“Harry…”, I started. “Is that why you and Fake-Tan broke up? Because it was more than five months?”

“No!”, he said, almost convincingly enough that I worried I had sounded stupid. “It was just, you know… life. Sometimes it just doesn’t work”

I finished his sleeve, with a humorless smile. “You’re really not willing to tell me anything, are you?”

“What?”, he asked, avoiding my eyes, starting to close his buttons.

There was a brief moment in which I considered shutting up and ending that conversation on a good note, but then, of course, I said ‘fuck it’. “This entire conversation you have been asking about me, and when I ask about you, all you do is give me monosyllabic answers and avoid saying anything that could tell me about how your last ten months have been”

He raised his head, serious. “Really?”, he said. “I’m not being truthful?”

“Yes, really”

“Jen…”, he said, closing his eyes for one second too long. “You’re the one who’s giving me your interview answers”

“My what?”

“Interview answers, the automatic answers you give when you’re doing an interview”, my jaw dropped with outrage. He did a mocking tone, “Oh, the Oscars were amazing, it was like a dream, everything happened so fast, I’m so happy, everything is fine, which jacket should I buy?!”

“Are you serious?!”, I asked, “That’s me being honest, you jerk. At some point you run out of ways of talking about something”

“Oh, poor me, my life is too good!”

I stepped closer to him, the anger talking louder. “Real mature, Harry. I’m sorry if I’m so happy I ended up sounding too honest!”, I said, sarcastic.

“Oh, please!”, he mocked. “If you’re so happy why did you kissed me last night despite having a boyfriend?”, he took a step forward, in my sneakers he was almost a whole foot taller than me.

I felt the words scape me for a moment. “Why did you break up with her, Harry?”

“Why does it matter?”

“Because why wouldn’t you tell me?!”

“Because I’m trying to be your friend and I don’t think going into details about my ex-girlfriend is the way to do it”

I let out a laugh, mockingly. “I’m sorry, friends?! I guess we’ve established that this isn’t a friend’s conversation, Harry. You can’t be friends if you don’t at least try to talk to people. And we’re not
really talking, are we?"

"Said the girl who thinks she’s in Good Morning America!"

"I’m doing my best!"

"Really?", he mocked again. I groaned, loudly, and we were interrupted by the curtains being dramatically opened.

We both jumped apart. Janine was there, looking annoyed. "They’re here", she said.

I sighed, realizing I managed to actually forget the paparazzi were coming. I took off my jacket and handed it over to her. "Pay for this, I’ll be there in a second"

"White?", she asked.

"Just go!", she left, without closing back the curtain, so Harry and I just remained where we were. He was finishing dressing up, shoving his shirt under his pants, and no one said anything else, so I just crossed the hall back to where I had left my things. I put my other jacket on, grabbed my bag and went back to where he was, not knowing how to say goodbye. Not knowing how to close the book and let it fucking go already.

"I’ll go ahead and leave, maybe it’ll draw them out with me, and no one will see you leaving”, I said. “Just turn left when you leave, it’ll take you the opposite way. Keep your head down, it should work”. He nodded, still now looking at me. “It really was good to see you, Harry… I’m glad you’re doing fine”. I wanted to say the word – ‘goodbye’ – but I just couldn’t say it again. Not after New York, not after the night before. So I just walked out.

I put on my ‘celebrity-smile’, like Alli called it – the smile I use when I know people are watching, so I look nice -, and met the others by the registers. Janine was just finishing to pay for my jacket, so I grabbed the black bag, with the Adidas logo on it, ready to leave.

“We may remind you, of course”, Monica told the salespeople in Portuguese, in her heavy Portuguese from Portugal accent, “that Ms. Silva has a contract with this brand that prevents you from disclosing anything she might have said in the store, or anyone she might have been with”

Just like that, the salespeople couldn’t tell anyone Harry had been there. I sighed, smiled at them, thanked them for the help, and headed out the glass doors to the waiting men with giant cameras, splattered around at a respectful distance, who all came closer at once when I left, starting to ask their questions. Janine passed an arm around my back protectively, and whispered something in my ear, so I followed her commands and made sure the bag could be seen, and my hair was back so they could see I was wearing Adidas clothes. With Eddy on front of us, clearing the way, we managed to get back to the car and go to my next appointment.

The sour taste of Shoyu sauce was fading from my tongue as I still sat by the table in my hotel room more than half an hour after we were done having sushi for a late dinner. My mother had gone to spend a couple of days at her cousin’s house not far from São Paulo. Eddy had gone back to his room to watch a game on TV. Janine was doing a skype call on her room, Monica had a date with Thomas, and I was staring at my phone, distracting myself with weird Buzzfeed quizzes and revolting articles about the protests I was contractually forbidden to talk about.

I heard a knock on the door, happy to have an excuse to finally get up. I left my phone on the table, and walked over to the foyer to open up, hoping it wasn’t just the hotel management with more ‘complimentary’ stuff.
Of course it was Harry.

It made no sense for him to be there, other than just maybe I wished really, really hard?

“Harry?”, I asked, surprised to see his breathless, nervous-looking self at my hotel room door. I had many questions, and none of them were answered when he simply walked in, taking the door from my hand and closing it behind himself. “How did you get past security?”, I asked, quickly realizing Eddy would never tell him he couldn’t come in to see me. “Did the paparazzi saw you come in?”, I went on, as he walked in to the living area of my room, I followed behind, slower, still confused, not just as to why he was there but as to how was that supposed to make me feel. “Or the fans? The entrance of the hotel has been packed for days”

He seemed embarrassed. “I got into a trunk”

“I-“, I stuttered. “I’m sorry?”

“I got into the trunk of the car in the garage of my hotel, so the paparazzi didn’t see me leaving and therefore didn’t follow me, and when we got here we called Eddy who authorized us to drive into the garage of your hotel, and after we made sure the coast was clear I got out and took the service elevator up”, he finished, somewhat out of breath. He didn’t let me respond. “I didn’t break up with her because of Plan A”, he said.

I was almost too caught up imagining him in the trunk of a car to hear the last part. “…Fake-Tan?”, I asked, and he let out a small giggle.

“Yeah”, he said. “I didn’t even break up with her. She broke up with me… on April 12, to be precise”

“That’s my birthday”

He sighed. “Yes… she, uh… she overheard me leaving you a message in your voice mail, and she broke up with me”

“You- you didn’t leave me a message on my birthday”, I contested.

He took a deep breath, distraught. “I deleted it when I noticed she was there, and then I ended up not calling back”. I guess he was waiting for me to say something, but I still barely seemed to accept he was there, let alone process what he was saying. I just knew that now it did feel like we were talking like friends again. “You were right. I didn’t tell you anything important, or consistent, because I just- I don’t know. I don’t…”, he sighed, exasperated, “I don’t feel like I’m doing anything consistent. It feels like the time is passing really slowly, and you’re out there getting your life changed, but I’m somehow in the exact same place I was before. They gave me an office job and the deal is if I do it for a while I get promoted, and then there’s more office job and I’m glad they trust me, and it means I’m doing well, but… I didn’t join the Army so I could spend my days behind a desk in an office. People think I should, because I’m good at it. And I am, I am good at it. I’m planning a four-day long international sports event for armed services veterans in September, and I like it, don’t get me wrong, I do. I like that part. I like the competing, and actively helping soldiers who… who lost something while fighting for us. But people assume I like all of the desk-job thing since as far as they know I spent all my time in New York doing just that, but it’s different. It’s not New York. It’s not the same. I don’t like it. I don’t like my job. And I can’t tell anyone, because they will assume I don’t like planning the games, which I do. And when she broke up with me, honestly… that’s when I noticed. Because I was hanging on to following what you told me to do, get a hold on my career and find someone I like, and everything will be fine. And then I was suddenly very much single again and I realized I didn’t care. And being alone I could
admit to myself I don’t like the office job either.”

I knew he was giving me a real conversation this time, but there was only one thing I really wanted to ask. “What was the message you almost left me?”

He smiled, sad, looking at the ground. I felt like I might have gone too far by asking, so I decided to tell him something in return for the things he was saying.

“Trevor is not my boyfriend”, I said. He looked at me. “Five months came and gone, and I honestly didn’t even notice, so I didn’t ask him to be exclusive. We’re just… not. I’m not his girlfriend, we’re not exclusive. We just… hang out”, Harry knew what hang out was code for. “He asked if he could come to this trip with me, to meet my family, and I said I didn’t think it was a good idea and now I think he’s gonna break up with me”

It felt good to tell Harry this. It felt easy, it felt like breathing.

Harry nodded, still looking at me intensely. “I’m terrified of turning thirty”, he said. I gave him a questioningly look. “Something changed… With my almost-wedding and Halo Day, people trust me now. And I have more responsibility and work, and that’s good. That’s what I wanted. But I’m terrified I’m gonna mess everything up. Especially because everything is supposed to be going well, everything is going so well, but I-I feel messed up inside and I don’t think any of my old friends can understand. Most days I just wish I could talk to you”. The last line came so calmly it took me by surprise. Especially because I could relate so much. “And you were right. I’m supposed to be an adult soon and I- I don’t know what I’m doing. I’m thirty years old and I don’t know what I’m doing. Do I ever-Do I ever get to feel like I have my shit together?”

…I get that”, I said, smiling slightly. “I am so thankful for the award season, and everything I got. I am, I truly am. But I keep giving you, and everyone else who asks, my interview answers because I don’t have any other to give. I mean every single one of those answers, but I’m not sure if I mean that in a good way anymore? Everything happened too fast, everything changed too fast. My life suddenly is not mine anymore and I barely remember when things changed. I’m so done talking about it. It feels like everyone thinks this is it, I got it! My career is set in stone, but is not. Before I had nothing to lose, so I had something to fight for, but now I have an actual career to protect and I can’t mess up… Everyone is watching just to see what I do next, a bad movie? Rehab? It’s like the whole world is waiting to be able to point their fingers at me and I need to be relevant so I don’t give them the satisfaction. I feel like all I do is work and work and I am so exhausted, Harry, I am so tired”, I sighed, surprised at my own words, wondering for how long had I felt like that. “Unicef asked if I wanted to run the New York marathon for charity, and I had to say no. You know why? Because I won’t have time. I don’t have time for charity now. I can’t even help on the political situation here, in case you haven’t noticed, is going to shit. I can’t help, because I can’t make political statements. Instead, I’m supposed to write a book, and renew my contract with Marvel, because what kind of idiot wouldn’t? And there’s a show on Netflix with my name on it and I can’t say yes to doing it, because I’m a film actress now. And if I do shows again, people will forget me and I won’t be able to get back into that horse. I mean, does it ever slow down just a little bit? Do I ever get to stop feeling like I have to hold on to my career for dear life?”

Harry seemed sad. He tried, but didn’t say anything, clearly not having any answers.

“I used to want this for a reason”, I said. “I wanted to be famous because it would be easier, because I wouldn’t have to keep on fighting for it. I wanted to be so famous I could help people, really help people. Send checks to someone whose story I read in the paper who couldn’t pay rent or something. Make people happy in some way. Make a difference. Back when I was filming Wild & Free I had promised I would use the opportunities I got to help the fight for better research for
pediatric cancer, and I’m not doing anything. I don’t have time to do anything, because now I have to use all of my time to keep the career I got. Do I ever get to stop feeling like I might lose everything?”, we were silent for a while. “I got literally every single award an actor could dream of, and it just makes me feel like I peaked. I peaked at twenty-three! It’s all downhill from here, because how could I possibly top that? I don’t. Did you know that only two women have won an Academy Award two years in a row? Two. Only two since 1929!”, I pulled down the sleeves of my NYU hoodie, crossing my arms. “Back in new year’s eve I promised myself I would enjoy my life more, and I would take trips and see the world, not in business trips where I barely have time to breathe, but actually travel. For me. To focus on my mental health, and now I barely have two days off to catch up on my sleep and, of course, I don’t tell anyone any of this, because I feel so ungrateful just thinking about it”

“You’re not ungrateful”, he said, and I let out a sarcastic laugh.

“I’m the first Latin American actress to win an Oscar for a leading role”, I said. “The first. Ever! My name will be written forever in the history of film because of this. I have everything I wanted, Harry”, I said, realizing I didn’t sound any bit happy about it. “I have everything I wanted, so… now what?”

None of us was in any position to offer answers, so we stayed quiet, each dreading their own problems. The silence went on and on, and finally I just walked over to the velvet settee sofa at the far end of the bed and sat down, pulling my legs up and holding my knees. I could feel his eyes on me, until finally he spoke again.

“Oh, he said, hands on his hips, sounding decisive. “Well… we have to do something. Right?”

“Do what?”

“Well, for starters, whatever happened to your bucket list?”

“My-?”, I stopped, and looked at him. I remembered the sunny day in Morgan Bay when I told him about all the things that I wanted.

“You need new goals, life isn’t made of awards. You wanted a bunch of things, now go get them”

“But I already have the rest of my year planned out”

“Is it all set in stone? What about that Netflix show you talked about?”

“Well…”, I started. “I still haven’t signed the Marvel contract for the next couple of years. The one I have now technically ends after Age of Ultron, which I’ll shoot for a couple of weeks next month, before my next movie. Netflix offered me the lead for a badass thirteen episode show that starts filming in October all the way until February, maybe March with the award season”

“And you want it”

“Yes, but Richard says I need to focus on movies to stabilize my movie-career. Besides signing again with Marvel means I go into shooting during the time they’ll shoot the show, and Marvel is more profitable”

“Okay, but do you want the show or Marvel?”

“Well, my management says-“

“Fuck your management, Jen. This is your career. You’re the one who has to live with it”, he said.
“You want new things, right? Then go after the things you left unmarked in your bucket list. The animated character? Directing? The fashion line?”

“I actually have a meeting about that coming up”

“You do?!”, he asked, excited.

“Yes, a label wants me to design something for them”

“That’s amazing”, he smiled. “See, that’s what I’m talking about. If you want change, change shit”

I chuckled. “Funny thing for you to say, since, you know, that is actually the answer to your problem as well”

He sighed, “It’s not the same thing”

“Yes, it is”

“No, it’s not. I’m-“

“A prince?”, I asked. “Come on, you can come up with a better excuse than that”

“I’m serious”, he said. “It involves a lot more than just me. Everything I do reflects on my family.“

“It’s still your life, Harry. Look, I know I didn’t have the funniest of experiences with your family… but I know one thing for sure: they all love you. A lot. They really want you to be happy, and I’m sure if you told them you’re not happy with your job they’d be supportive of you changing it for something that you like”

He seemed to think it through. “Maybe if I agreed to do more royal tours… I mean, I quite like them”

“Yes, I’m sure you can come up with a compromise”, I said. “After all, if you want change, change shit”

He smiled, looking at me. “I missed you”, I felt a warmth inside. “See, we do need to be friends”

“It would appear so”, I said, knowing that just by talking about it I already felt so much better.

“So, what are you gonna do?”, he asked.

“I think…”, I started, “I think I’m gonna do Age of Ultron… and then I’m gonna be the idiot who doesn’t renew her contract and goes back to doing a TV show”

“Nice”

“Richard is not gonna like it”

“It’s your career”, he reminded me.

“What about you?”

He sighed. “I guess I need to think about what I want to do… Of course, first I’m just gonna focus on finishing Invictus, the games. Then I’ll focus on that”

“Just don’t let your age pressure you”, I said, sincere, “I know I was teasing you about it before,
but when it comes to figuring out what makes you happy, and what you want to do with your life, you have to take your time”

“You were right, though. I am thirty, it’s about time I have that figured out”

“As long as it is you who figured it out… It’s important, so just… you know—you have all the time in the world, Mr. Prince”, an alarm went off on my head, remembering there was actually a musical theater number about it.

He smiled wider. “I missed hearing you call me that”, we giggled.

“I’m serious, don’t make me sing you into it”

“I don’t doubt you would”, we laughed.

Another pause, then he spoke again, gentle. “And, Jen… he’s not gonna break up with you over it”, I looked at him. “The Trevor bloke. He’s not gonna break up with you because you told him not to come… If anything, he’s gonna ask if you want to make it serious, then if you say no, and if he’s an idiot, maybe he’ll break with you… but he’s gonna ask first”

“…what should I answer?”

He smiled, but his eyes were sad. “I can’t help you with that… Maybe he’ll wait for you, maybe he’ll let you go”

I scorned. “Would you wait?”

“Yes”, he said, without missing a beat. I looked at him, the blue of his eyes leaving me breathless for a second.

I desperately searched for a new topic. “Did you see the How I Met Your Mother Finale in March?”

He threw his head back in frustration. “God, yes. What was that?!?”

“I don’t know!”, I said, turning to my side to face him. “Can you believe they broke up Barney and Robin?”

“Yes, that was ridiculous”, he said. “I mean, I guess we all knew the mother would die, but how dare they break up Barney and Robin?”

“They spent nine seasons building that relationship up!”

“Exactly!”

We laughed, slightly, remaining in silence for a while.

“We should be friends”, I said, with my eyes at the carpet, but looking inside.

I felt his eyes on me, and finally blinked, and looked at him. I waited for Harry to ask why or something, but maybe he was waiting for me to speak, because we just stared into each other’s eyes for a while trying to pretend that was normal.

“I’ll call you”, he said, finally. “Well, maybe texting is easier, considering the time zones. But we can, you know, skype sometimes… catch up”
“Okay”, I said, smiling. “I mean, you still have to tell me more about your last ten months”

“Right”, he said.

“…for instance, what was the message you were leaving me on my birthday?”

He smiled. “I said happy birthday”

“Right”, I said, containing perhaps badly the sarcastic smile on my lips.

“I should go… I have an early flight to Chile”

“No, sorry!”, I said, guilty. “I won’t mention it again!”

He smiled. “No, it’s fine. I just… It’s really late”

“Oh”, I said. “Right, of course”, I got up, and he followed.

“But I’ll call you”

“Do you still have my number?”

He smiled, walking to the door. “Yes… I do. I’ll send you a picture from the car trunk on the ride back to my hotel to prove it”

I laughed. “Did you really do that? Because I’m having trouble believing it”

“I’d rather you believe I’m lying, to be honest”, we laughed again. He stopped by the door. “I’m glad I came. I didn’t want to leave things… like that”

I nodded. “I’m glad you came”, he reached for the doorknob.

We were silent for a second, without knowing what should come next, so he leaned in, very slowly, and gently kissed my cheek. The whole thing took way longer than necessary, as if in slow motion, his skin like velvet against mine. I felt his breath, telling myself it was just a kiss in the cheek. Between friends.

“I’ll call you”, he repeated, whispery, reaching for the door.

“Have a safe flight”, I said, when I finally found my voice after the kiss, as he was already in the hallway. I saw Nathan and Clark there, starting to walk towards the elevator.

He smiled again, and left, and I closed the door slowly, leaning into it and closing my eyes shut strongly in embarrassment – even though I was not sure about what… Maybe the way my stomach felt funny and warm just by remembering his lips on my cheek.

I shook my head, and walked back in, grabbing my phone on the way to the bed. I laid in the comfy sheets, and thought about calling Trevor. I should, I hadn’t talked to him in two days.

I stared at the phone for a while, wondering if I had something in particular I wanted to tell Trevor, realizing the answer was no. ‘Harry, however…’, I thought, immediately sighing, upset, knowing chances were we wouldn’t actually talk anytime soon. It’s too awkward. How could we possibly still be friends after so much has happened?

My phone lighted up when I got a text.
‘I wonder what will happen if we get stopped by the police’, it was from Harry. Attached, was a picture someone had taken of his smiley self inside the trunk of their car before they closed it. I laughed.

‘PRINCE HARRY GETS KIDNAPPED IN BRAZIL! You could start an actual war, Mr. Prince’, I answered.

As I waited for a reply, not even knowing if one would come, I remembered the countless nights we had texted back and forth before, or the nights when we had to sleep together when we took forever to actually fall sleep despite being exhausted because we kept talking about the most random things.

I hugged my pillow, laying on my side, remembering how his chest had felt on my cheek, and his arms around me, pretending he was there, enjoying the memory way too much to guilt myself into stopping it.

My phone vibrated again. ‘Let’s take a minute to imagine what would happen if the trunk suddenly opened right when we are driving by the paparazzi’.

I took so much between laughing and typing a reply that he sent another text. ‘Are you asleep already? That was fast’

‘No, I’m just too busy laughing my ass off to type a reply. I think I’ll watch some Blacklist before going to bed’

I was typing a second message to explain The Blacklist was a new show I was – trying – to watch, when he replied.

‘YOU WATCH THAT TOO?’

‘I do! I’m just about done, but I still haven’t watched the finale, so no spoilers!’

‘YOU HAVEN’T WATCHED THE FINALE? IT AIRED LIKE TWO MONTHS AGO. SILVA. PRIORITIES!!!’

I laughed, the smile on my face – the one that seemed to be a different kind then my usual ones - feeling like it was coming home after a long, cold, war. ‘I watched the beginning but then had to stop… I told you: I’m BUSY! I’ll watch it now!’

I stood up to grab my notebook, logging into Netflix and opening up the first part of the two hours finale of the first season, Berlin. I adjusted myself on the bed, hitting play from where I had ended the time before. My phone ringed.

“Harry?”, I asked, hearing the traffic noise from his side of the line.

“Ok, tell me what you’re seeing”

“What?”

“The episode, I wanna watch it with you. In which part are you?”

I smiled, “Harry, you’re in the trunk of a moving car”

“Yes, and I’m bored”, he said. “Traffic in this town is terrible, we’ll take forever to get to the hotel. Talk to me, Jenny”
I smiled larger, sighing, “Okay, Liz is telling the bureau about Tom. After telling Ressler first, of course. Ten bucks says they’ll bang in, like, two seasons”

“I’ll take that bet, I think it’ll be one season. Hey, about Red. Do you think he’s her father?”

“I’ve been thinking about that”, I said. “I think is too obvious that he is, which is why I don’t think he is. I think he is in love with her”

“He’s too old for her”

“That means nothing”, I said.

“Well, you would say that”, he teased.

“Ha-ha”, I said, sarcastic, thankful he couldn’t see the smile on my face. “Well, I’ll say that not only is he not her father, they will have feelings for each other at some point, and I’ll even add that she might still go back to Tom”

“He betrayed her!”

“We don’t know all the details about that!”

We argued about The Blacklist until he arrived at his hotel, and by the time I was done with the two episodes, he was talking from his bed as well, by when we began to talk about another new show that had ended recently, and all that was wrong with it.

He asked about the plot of the movie I would be filming next, and I talked excitedly completely forgetting he had an early flight. He didn’t stop me, so perhaps he forgot too.

Or maybe we were both completely aware – of the time, of Trevor, or our careers – but choose to ignore those things and pretend for as long as we could that the last ten months didn’t mean anything, that we were just friends.

I repeated the words on my mind as he spoke, making my insides twirl in warmth: Just friends, Jenifer. Just friends.
Jenifer surprises Harry by going to his 30th birthday party, but his friend isn’t very happy to meet her.

Standing in six-inch heels in the ballroom of a house built in the 1800s I felt slightly out of place. The mid-riff of skin between my Oscar de la Renta fuchsia maxi-skirt and off-shoulder black crop-top didn’t help – especially because no one else was showcasing a lot of skin. I thought of turning around and going straight to the airport to put as much distance as I could between me and the birthday boy, but the thought of having to look Eddy in the eyes and tell him I couldn’t do it was even more unbearable.

“Am I gonna regret this?”, I had asked him, before stepping out of the car a few minutes before.

“I thought you were just friends”, he told me, teasingly.

“We are”, I argued, for the millionth time, sighing at the realization that if I said those words one more time I’d lose my mind. “I should have stopped in France on the way here to get Alli to come with me”, I said as Eddy walked me to the door.

“Then you’d have to tell her you’re talking to Harry again”, he replied. “And we both know you don’t want anyone to know that you and him are…”, I looked at him, annoyed. “…friends”

“We are friends!”, I whispered, angry.

“I believe you”, he repeated. “Do you?”

I rolled my eyes. “You know, for an asexual you seem to think you know a whole lot about relationships, don’t you?”

He shrugged, and I turned away, leaving him behind with the rest of the security detail, and smiling to the hostess at the door. She walked me inside through the hallways to the huge, dark dining room filled with tables in a C formation, with a small space in the middle right before an improvised stage with musical instruments and a DJ booth. She pointed me to my table and I made my way pretending I didn’t feel like throwing up.

Clarence House was a white building that might just as well have been called Clarence Mansion. Inside, it was sharply decorated, following the palace vibe that I remembered from Balmoral Castle, except everything here looked more elegant, with lots of golden and red. The DJ was
playing some intense, slow rock song that I didn’t recognize, but the volume was just enough to fill the inexistent silence. The chatter around the room was the actual soundtrack as people laughed and drank together in their tables and standing in groups all around.

“You’re here!” Ellie said as I approached my table. She stood up to hug me, smiling, and pointed at her boyfriend by her side. “You know Doug”

“Yes, hi!”, I leaned in to hug McFLY’s bass player, my adolescent crush, and current Ellie Goulding’s boyfriend, Dougie Poynter. “God, the two of you always look so stylish, is almost depressing”, I joked.

“Yes, because you look very poorly”, Ellie argued. I smiled, taking my seat by her side. “I wasn’t sure you’d come”

I breathed in sharply. “I wasn’t sure either”, I told her. “It was sort of a... last minute decision, and just because I had some urgent business matters to attend to here... I can’t even stay long, I have to catch an early flight”

“Oh, no, don’t be like that”, she said.

“Nothing I can do!”

“Tell me”, Dougie said, leaning in from his seat. “You guys still together?”, with his head he signaled to the other side of the room. I didn’t look, but it was pretty obvious he meant Harry.

“We’re just friends”, I repeated the words that I had said so many times already they had started to lose all meaning.

It had been nearly three months since I had seen Harry in person for the last time, although considering the phone calls and texts, it felt like a lot less than that. Nonetheless, he had left my hotel room in São Paulo to Chile in June 27th, and it was now September 17th – two days after his official 30th birthday, they were throwing him a party in his father’s house in London. His father himself wasn’t present, as he had gone with his wife to Scotland – something not only was I aware of, but that had been big part of why I had convinced myself to come despite having explicitly told Harry that I wouldn’t.

“I’ll keep your name in the list anyway”, he had said, after the tenth time I said no to his invitation. “Just in case you change your mind”

I was in London for a meeting, and I had told Harry I was going to fly in and out in the same day, but instead, on the last minute, I booked a flight to the next morning. My meeting gave the paparazzi a good excuse for my presence in the country, and Harry’s security was so good all I had to do was duck in the car and press my invitation in the window for them to let us park inside the house so I could leave the car out of the prying eyes of the press. So, with some luck, no one would even know I was there.

In the almost three months since I had last seen him, both me and Harry were busy taking control of our lives. But not one single day in those three months had gone by without a phone call or long text conversation.

Harry had talked me through the days in Brazil as we caught up to how our past few months had been. He called me on the tragic day Brazil lost to Germany by 7x1, mocking the sad look on my face he could see on his television – the pictures of me looking smaller and smaller on the stadium made their way across the internet.
“Cheer up, Silva”, he had said. “At least now your contract is over”

That was the most optimistic look I could have on things, because as Brazil was out of the competition, I was officially out of my contract with Adidas, and therefore was legally allowed to make political statements again – so Harry helped me think of ways I could get involved. And I gave interview after interview about the protests and my opinions. And Harry was still there helping me through the death treats I got from the Brazilian activists who thought I should stay out of it.

“If anything if just means your words are making an impact”, he said.

On his side of the globe, Harry was busy planning the Invictus Games – the four-days long international Paralympic sports competition for armed services veterans. I talked him through the crisis of having to find the perfect locations for each event, hiring the right crew to take of the equipment, designing the logo and merchandising, and even his saga of stalking Dave Grohl into accepting to bring Foo Fighters to play in the closing ceremony concert.

I read all of the thirty-two drafts of his opening ceremony speech and gave him another prep talk before interviews about the games – since he had already forgotten everything I had taught him. Sometimes I would get back home after a full day of work and still read some random speech before going to bed. I read so many speeches I could almost make the speech myself.

I flew back to New York after Brazil, and shot my last-ever scenes with Marvel – for the second Avengers movie. Harry kept calling to ask for spoilers of what would happen.

“Even if I hadn’t signed a scary-threatening contract of confidentiality with Marvel…”, I told him, “…I still couldn’t tell you much, since all I know is what is on my scenes and I hate to break it to you, but my character isn’t in the big plot scenes”

“Pff”, he scorned, “You’re useless to me, then”

The fact my character in Marvel was small was one of my big arguments against signing with them again, and one Richard and Janine couldn’t shake off – which is what I told them in our management meeting right after I was done shooting Age of Ultron.

“I just don’t understand why is it so important to plan these things so far ahead”, Harry said in our phone call the night before the meeting, as I told him of my nerves to tell Richard and Janine about my plans

“Here’s the thing”, I explained, “To be eligible for the award season of 2015, I need to be in a movie released until, at most, January. With pre and post production, plus the actual shooting, the movies released at that point are usually shot in the first semester of the year before”

“So, first semester of 2014”, Harry said.

“Yes, that’s when I was shooting Leah, which we have high hopes for. Not big hopes, just slightly high. It’s an indie movie, but at least a nod it’s expected… So the question is what to do with the second semester of my year”

“It was supposed to be Marvel”

“Yes, but what I will argue with them is that Marvel is mainstream. That means it doesn’t get me awards or the critic recognition that they think is valuable to keep me consistently in the business. So my argument is gonna be that, since the second semester is pointless anyway, I wanna spend it with the Netflix show instead”
“And the whole mainstream media thing isn’t important?”

“It is, but the show could become mainstream. It’s Netflix, and it will be thriller about an international burglar… I mean, I’d watch it. The thing is what I will say next, because next I will tell them that on the first semester of next year, I don’t want to be doing another movie and that’s what’s gonna freak them out, because it will mean that I won’t be eligible for the award season of 2016”

“Again”, he said, “That’s almost two years from now!”

“Welcome to my life”

That was Richard and Janine’s biggest concern. They believed that getting me nominated as often as possible was the fastest way of ensuring the world knew that my recent Oscar-win wasn’t some kind of ‘beginner’s luck’ – that I was here to stay.

“But assuming Leah gets a couple of nods”, I argued in our meeting when they brought up this issue, “do you really expect them to nominate me three years in a row? I mean, come on, how many times has that actually happened?”

“Fourteen”, said Janine, without skipping a beat. We looked at her, surprised. “Yes, I memorized some data. Don’t judge me for having high hopes for you!”

“We’re not expecting you to actually win with Leah, because two wins in a row simply never happen”, Richard said. “So we were planning your second award season win to be in 2016”

“Guys, you know we can’t plan these things”

They still seemed unsure, so I decided to use my last weapon. One particular way of phrasing my new dream that I knew they would bite. One that I had spent some serious amount of talk asking Harry to convince was a bad idea to pursue. Because, the thing is, it was scary. It was bold. So I took a deep breath, and said the four little letters weighing on my mind, teasing my ambition.

“EGOT”, I uttered. They looked at me. “I wanna go for the EGOT”

There was silence. It was amusing watching them slowly realize what I was talking about. They both lost themselves in thought looking at different, random places. Then they both leaned in in their chairs, eyes widened.

“Oh, my God”, Janine said.

“Oh”, Richard went.

“Of course”, Janine said, dubious.

“Could we?”, Rich asked. They both looked at me, for along second, then at each other.

“Dear God”, Monica asked, “what the hell is an EGOT??”

“Ssh!”, the lovebirds went, as if someone could steal the idea away.

Did I mention Janine and Richard, my publicist and my manager, the two people in the world I could have sworn had nothing but hate for one another, had started seeing each other? I mean, in some ways it was very predictable. And in many ways they managed to be even more annoying than before.
“It stands for Emmy, Grammy, Oscar, Tony”, Richard told her.

“Only twelve people in history have won all of them”, Janine added. “Whoopi Goldberg, Audrey Hepburn-“

“The producer of Frozen just became the latest one”, Rich said.

Janine gasped. “How old is he? Isn’t he young? If Jenny won she could be the youngest ever!”

“I’ll check”, Monica said, pulling cellphone from her purse.

“I mean, I guess the Grammy would be the hardest”, Rich pondered.

“But she could get one with a Broadway musical, no?”

“Oh, the Best Musical Theater Album award?”

“Yes!”, she said. “Broadway would get her that, and the Tony! Two birds, one stone”

“But she’d have to be in one from the start”, he told her. “To be in the soundtrack. That means we have to take not only the time she would be doing the show, but at least an extra month beforehand for workshop, tech week and previews-“

“I’m in”, I said, realizing it would really have been easier to bribe them with that from the start. “You guys remember that’s exactly what I just said I wanted, right?”

“Why didn’t you say so before?”, Janine asked. I sighed.

“Assuming the Netflix show gets done by March next year…”, Richard said, and I just assumed they were on board with the show now too. “And we can find a good quality musical as soon as possible, we could have her audition and be in a workshop by April…”

“Assuming the Netflix show premieres next summer, she’d have an Emmy by the end of the year…”, Janine went on.

“Let’s not get our hopes that high up…”, I said, but it was too late. They were already ordering champagne and toasting to my record-breaking EGOT win by 2016.

It was rushed, unrealistic, but it kept them busy and it gave them the same short-term goals as me: Netflix show and Broadway, so, as far as I was concerned, it was a victory. My team and I were once again on the same page.

I called Harry – my friend – to celebrate.

I spent another few weeks in Manhattan as I got into shooting my new movie: based on the Sidney Sheldon book, Bloodline – the story of murder following heiress Elizabeth Roffe as she becomes the head of one of the world’s largest companies after her father’s death.

After New York, where I was staying in Taylor’s apartment since selling my condo, I set out to Zurich to continue shooting, and where I went on for most of that time until September, when I received the invitation for Harry’s birthday on my hotel room.

First I told Harry I’d see if could make it. Than I said the situation wasn’t looking so good as I had to be in Italy for the next stage of shooting right after Zurich. He kept insisting, I kept defensively saying ‘maybe’, but I never once actually considered going. Not even when Harry read somewhere in the news that I’d be in London on the exact day of the party – a Wednesday – for work.
“You’ll be here!”, he exasperated. “We’ll find some way to sneak you in, come on, no one will know!”

“But, Harry-“

“And even if they do, screw them! What does it matter, anyway?!“

What mattered was that I was no longer dating Trevor Mack, so any opportunity the media had of coming up with excuses as to why that was, they’d use it.

The truth was that, much as Harry had predicted, when I saw him after coming back from Brazil, Trevor asked if I wanted to make our relationship serious. As much as I tried to convince myself that I did, I didn’t. Which is what I told him.

In my appointment with Dr. Arrow that week, he asked me why.

“I don’t have a good reason”, I told him.

“Then give me a bad one”, he asked. I thought about it in silence for much longer than I’d like to admit, but finally I just smiled at him, sad, knowing the only thing in my mind was Harry, and knowing I didn’t want to tell him that.

‘He’s my friend’, I reminded myself. My friend.

So on that Wednesday, three days since the Invictus’ closing ceremony, two days since Harry was officially thirty years-old, almost three months since we had last seen each other, and more than a year since our break up, there I was. With my heart in pain, knowing I couldn’t leave the country without saying happy birthday in person.

‘Don’t do anything stupid’, I begged myself. ‘Just focus on being friends’.

“Can I have a vodka shot, please?”, I told the bartender as an Arctic Monkeys song played in the room.

“A girl who knows how to drink…”, I heard. “Always something to admire”

The guy by my side was tall, of soft, dark brown hair framing a big forehead, narrow blue eyes and a strong, large nose. With a mischievous smile, he leaned into the bar as he looked at me.

“Hi”, I said, smiling, his all-knowing eyes catching me off-guard just as much as his accent did. “I’m Jenifer”

“I know”, he said, holding my hand up to place a very light kiss on my fingers. ‘Oh, he’s good’, I thought. “We were hoping to meet you last year when you were here with Harry, but I guess we were too late… took us so long the two of you broke up”, he joked, with a hint of spite that also caught me with my guard down.

“Well, here we are now”, I said. “Who do I have the pleasure of talking to?“

“So sorry”, he said, “It’s Thomas. I’ve known Harry for a while, back when the gap between his teeth was larger and nobody wanted to sleep with him”

I smiled. “So, school then”

“Eton”, he agreed. “Not sure you can call it a school, is more of a breeding academy for the blue blooded and blonde”. I stared at him, the smile frozen in my lips trying to decipher if he meant that
as a joke. “And you’re the actress”, he went on when I didn’t say anything. “Big fan”, he nodded, serious. “Although, I must say… Wild & Free, uh”, he pouted, “bit dramatic, innit?”

My level of patience was quickly going down the drain. “Kids are dying”, I told him. “It’s pretty dramatic”

“Right, of course”, he agreed, enthusiastic. “I meant no offense, of course. You did a wonderful job there”, he added, patronizingly. “I can see why Harry grew so fond of you. Of course, a lot of people can, with the, you know…”, he gave me a weird look.

“I don’t”, I said. “The…?”

“Well, you know, that Vogue cover, Victoria’s Secret, Game of Thrones. It feels like it’s very easy to see the…”, his eyes hovered my body all the way down and up again, “…exact parts of you that were appealing to him”. I didn’t speak. Instead, I allowed myself to stare him down without breaking eye contact, the smile never flickering in my lips. “I mean this platonically, of course”, he explained. “As a compliment, but platonic, as I am a happily married man”, he showed me the ring in his left hand. “Married last year. We wanted Harry to be there, but, of course, he was in New York… busy”, he said the word, and I started to realize he might have been thinking it was someway my fault.

“Yes, I remembered he mentioned being disappointed of missing a wedding in a phone call back then”, I said. “Middle of the year, right? I was away at work”, I said. “But congratulations”

“Thank you”, he said. “Yes, it was a lovely day. What about you, Jenifer? Do you intend on getting married?”

Now I started to think this was quickly becoming an interrogation. “One day”, I said. “Right now I have other, more urgent, concerns”. I reached for the glass the bartender had placed before me in the bar a few minutes ago and downed the entire thing at once. I looked at the bartender again. “Pinot noir, please”

“Perhaps is your age”, he mentioned, striking another nerve. “I used to say the same thing, all of my friends, did, really… then one day, boom! Everyone is getting married. I did, Guy earlier this year… Even Harry”. My head snapped to look at him before I could stop myself. “I mean, yeah, it didn’t happen”, I sighed. He meant the almost-wedding. “But, you know, the mere fact he considered it says a lot… and I have faith, you know”, he took a step closer. “I’m friends with both of them, you know, Chelsy and Harry. Made for each other, those two, I tell you… we all always knew they’d end up together. They’re just one of those couples that keeps breaking up, you know? We got used to it. Harry and Chelsy broke up again, don’t worry, we’d say. They’ll probably be back together in no time!”, he laughed. I stared. “I still think they’ll end up together… Either that, or Harry is just really not the marrying type. I don’t really see him marrying anyone else… They just fit, you know?”, I took a sip of my wine, looking around the room reminding myself murder was a crime. And we were surrounded by witnesses. “I mean, she belongs here. We all grew up together, I don’t know anyone who would fit his life better-“

“Jenifer?!”, a girl called out from behind me. I turned around to find the pretty-faced, light brown haired, thin woman smiling at me. “Oh, my God, it’s you! I had no idea you’d be here”, she leaned in for a kiss on my cheek. I noticed she was American. Did I know this girl?

“So good to see you again!”, I said, smiling trying to mask the confusion inside, taking no chances.

“I had no idea you two knew each other”, Thomas said.
“Oh, yes”, she told him. “Jenifer and I met at my family’s hotel in New York not long ago”, she said, looking straight in my eyes. I looked away, still smiling, trying for the life of me to have any idea of what she was talking about.

“Oh”, he said. “That’s nice. Look at you, Jenifer. You have more friends here than you know”

“Right”, I smiled at him. ‘What the hell is her name?’, I thought. ‘I know her?!’.

“Oh, my God, remember that problem I asked you about?” she asked, in a lower tone, touching my arm confidently.

“Mmm”, I mumbled, nodding, still aware of Thomas’ look over us.

“Well, I asked my gynecologist and turns out you can pull an IUD out by yourself”, she said, very naturally. I felt my eyes widening just a bit. “You just have to stick your fingers inside the vagina real deep and-“

“Oh! I’m gonna let you girls catch up!”, Thomas said, interrupting her, seemingly uncomfortable. The first good thing to come out of that night. “Jenifer, it was lovely to meet you”

“I could say the same!” I thought. I won’t, though. He walked out.

I looked at my problem number two. She laughed. “Men are such babies when it comes to female matters… Anyway, sorry about that. I overheard him as I came to get a drink and thought you could use some help getting rid of him”

“…you mean we don’t know each other?”

She smiled. “No, I just thought you could use some help”

“Oh, my God! I feel so much better!”, I took a deep breath as she laughed. “I was feeling horrible for not remembering you!”. We laughed. I looked at where he was just now. “God, thank you. You’re good, are you an actress?”

“No, I’ve just been where you are right now. Not long ago I was the outsider the others weren’t so sure about”, she said, standing her hand for a shake. “I’m Lizzy”

“Jenifer”

“I know. I mean, sorry. Nice to meet you!”, she laughed. “I just-I’m a fan”

“I can’t help but notice you’re not British”

“I’m from Tennessee”, she said. “My husband is British. Hence, the connection to the…”, she signaled with her head to the group ahead Thomas had made his way back to. “Blue blooded and blonde there”

“Wait, was it for your wedding that Harry went to Memphis earlier this year?”

“It was!”, she smiled.

“Oh”, I nodded. “I get it now… and how are you not like, you know… him?”, I looked at the group again, all suits and pretty dresses, good skin and perfectly straight hair.

“I’ve only just met them a few years ago”, I nodded. “They’re weirdly close friends, but they mean well. I know it doesn’t feel like it, but they do”
I sighed. “Somehow, I know. I have weird friends too… are they all like that?”

“No!”, she said, eagerly. “God, no. When it was me the hardest to get through was Jake, Jake Warren”, she intertwined our arms, turning me to face the group. “The cute one in the front, see?”, I nodded. “He, Harry, Thomas, who was talking to you and Skippy, the one with curly hair talking to the brunette, they all went to Eton together. Jake was one of the godsons of Lady Diana, actually. He is my husband’s business partner, so he was invested in knowing if I had good intentions, you know how it goes… For a while I did think he hated me, but he’s actually very nice. His wife too, Zoe. Your problem was Thomas. Thomas van Starubenzee. He’s a bit of a snob, but that’s as bad as it gets. He’s a softie inside. His wife, Melissa, is probably why he was being a dick. She’s best friend’s with Chelsy Davy, who, as you know-“

“Oh”, I said, “Now it makes sense”

“Yes”, she agreed. “They seem to think they can get them back together by sheer pressure. I’m not gonna lie to you, a lot of them seem to want that to happen, but they’ve let it go. They understand Harry’s over it, and they wouldn’t be that bad if you got to know them”

“I think I’ll pass”, I said. “I have enough dicks to deal with at work”, I joked.

She smiled. “Well, coming from someone who managed to get in, don’t worry. They’re all talk, but once they see you’re not going anywhere, they’ll become fiercely loyal to you”

I sighed, looking at her, concerned. “You do realize it sounds like you’re describing a mafia, right?”

She laughed. “I’m sorry. I promise is not as bad as it sounds”

“Well, I guess I dodged a bullet”

“Oh”, she said, upset. “Here I was hoping you being here meant you and Harry are getting back together… I was looking forward to talking to you some more about my IUD”

We laughed. “No, we’re, uh, just friends”

“Jenny!”

As if magic had something to do with it, I heard Harry’s voice before turning around. Harry was there, in his tuxedo, looking as breath-taking as the last time I had seen him, distraught in a hoodie in my hotel room.

He leaned in for a kiss in my cheek, but instead wrapped his arms around me giving me a tight hug, burying his face on the corner between my neck and shoulder. I couldn’t really breathe anymore, but I didn’t care.

“You’re here!”, he said, smiling, as he let me go. I felt my own lips stretch against my will as I smiled back. He stared at me for one second too long, in disbelief. “You’re here!”

I smiled, not trusting my ability to speak at that particular point. I had the messages in my mind – the texts we had been exchanging over the last few months after a ten-month break. His voice, now close to me, seemed too similar and at the same time, too different from the one on the phone calls – all of the phone calls from the last few months, which had been quite a few. The phone calls in the early morning, when I woke him up way before he needed to wake up because of the time zone, and the ones at the end of the day when we talked about the new ridiculous episode of the reality show about fake-him looking for a bride. It seemed like there were so many Harry’s in front
of me – the one from New York, the one from Brazil, the one from the calls – all in one, and I
didn’t know which I should be expecting to hear from. The one who was once engaged? The one
who loved me? The one who had moved on and was just my friend?

“Anyway…”, Lizzy said, as we stared, silent, at each other. “I’m gonna go find Guy”, she handed
me a piece of paper. “Jenifer, here’s my card… call me if you ever wanna talk IUDs again”

I laughed. “I will. Let me know when you’re in the States, we can have a drink”

“Sure”, she nodded. “And don’t forget, you have a friend in the mafia”, she walked out, leaving me
laughing, and Harry looking confused.

“IUDs and mafia”, he said. “Girl talks surely have grown strange… Tom told me you guys were
talking, I didn’t realized you knew each other”

I smiled, nodding. “Yeah, uh, we met in New York. At her family’s hotel”

He nodded, suspicious. “Look at that”, he said, reaching for my arm, and sliding his hand down
my skin until he reached my hand, that he held gently. The warmth of his hand making me fuzzy.
“You’re wearing my bracelet”

The Hermès bracelet he had given me for last year’s Brazilian Valentine’s day, our own private
joke about the rumor my Hermès watch had been a present from him, was shining in my wrist for
the first time since we had broken up.

“In your honor”, I smiled at him, bending my fingers, holding his hand. “Happy birthday, Mr.
Prince”.

“I’m so glad you came”, he said, with a grin, so sweet it made me wish the desire to kiss him was a
little less obvious so I could keep on pretending we could be just friends. ‘Fake it until you make
it’, I told myself.

“I can’t stay long… I have an early flight, but I thought I should come say happy birthday since I
was in the country anyway…”

“Thank you”, he said. “I really didn’t think you’d-“

“Excuse me, sir”, Harry stopped mid-sentence to look at the middle-aged man with a professional
camera that had approached us. “Should I take a photograph with the two of you?”

“Oh”, I said, raising a hand in protest, looking at Harry, about to ask why the hell would he let
paparazzi in.

“No, it’s okay”, he told me, “Private photographer, no one will see these”

I breathed in, “Oh, okay”, I laughed.

“Come on, Silva, smile”, he said, taking a step closer and resting his hand on the small of my back,
“I’d be happy to sign a confidentially contract if you need me to”

I giggled, “It’s fine”

We smiled to the camera, as I passed a hand behind his arm in his back. The photographer took a
couple of shots before Harry leaned in to whisper in my ear, the proximity sending chills down my
spine in a good way.
He paused, then finally said in a soft tone. “Butthole”

I laughed so suddenly, remembering my little trick to make him smile in New York, when Brandon was trying to take our photo, that I think even the photographer thought it was weird.

“Oh, that looks great”, he said. Maybe not then.

“Come on,”, Harry said after he left, “I’ll give you the tour and you can tell me about your day while we do it”

I smiled, “Okay! I wanna see that gate you were gonna jump from when you wanted to run away”

He laughed. “I forgot I told you about that… you can see it from the second floor windows… tell me, how was the shoot?”

“It was fun, but you know me, I’m always having fun wearing Oscar de la Renta!”

I had come to London that day for a shoot after I had been made an offer to be the new face of Oscar de la Renta.

“When are they gonna announce it?”

“Couple weeks. They wanna have the pictures edited to go with the press-release”

“Another check for your bucket list!”, he said, pointing for us to turn at a hallway. “Way to go Silva!”

He guided me out through a hallway with red carpets and white and gold walls, full of paintings, vases, and shining chandeliers that looked way too expensive and fancy. He pointed at different rooms, telling me about the study room one, the small library, the breakfast room, the dining room, the games room, and other ridiculous rooms that people made up when they had houses with too much space and too little people living in them.

“Did you have a cook growing up?”, I asked as we made our way upstairs.

“Yes”, he said, “Up until I moved out of here to my current apartment in Kensington”

“You mean 2012?”, he nodded. “You had a cook until you were 26 and you tease me for not cooking?!”

“Hey, I had a cook, but now I do it myself”

“So would I if I had the time”, I told him, who laughed.

“I can’t believe we can still have the same bickering”

“We’re very consistent”, I argued. “It’s a good thing”

We walked a hallway on the second floor almost until the end before he opened one of the doors.

“This…”, he said, letting me in, “was my room”

The big room with high ceilings was covered with a white and navy wallpaper. The long rectangular windows had long, ruffled curtains, there was a dresser in one corner, a desk, a bookshelf, a couple of sofas, and a king sized, canopy bed.
“This is your childhood room?”

“Well, sort of. Half the time when my parents separated, and full time after mother died”

“Well, this is disappointing”, I said, looking around.

He chuckled. “Why?”

“I don’t know, I expected more… posters of naked girls in the walls or something… something that would give me a glimpse at teenager Prince Harry”

“Some of these walls are older than your country’s independence”, he said. “I can’t just go about nailing things to it”, I giggled. “However…”

He opened the doors to his wardrobe, revealing two posters glued to the back of it.

“Harley Davidsons”, I noted, of the motorbikes in the posters. “I approve… they are badass. I did a shoot once for a magazine and the theme was motorcycles, so I had to pose in Harley Davidsons and leather lingerie… It was pretty cool.”

He gave me a smirk, with a mischief look. “I wonder if I can find those pictures in google…”

I smiled, blushing, looking inside his wardrobe. “You still have stuff here?”

He walked towards his bed and sat down. “That’s the clothes I brought to change for the party. But, yeah, the room is still pretty much mine for when I need it. It’s why they left my posters”

We were silent as I walked over to sit by his side on the tall bed. “Okay, the mattress is pretty good, I’ll give you points for that”, I joked, jumping slightly when I sat. I put my clutch in his nightstand and laid back, lying down.


“Nothing”, he said, sighing. “I’m just picturing fifteen-year-old me if he could have known he’d have Jenifer Silva lying in his bed one day”

I smiled. My hair was in a low side bun behind my head, so I couldn’t keep my head straight facing up, and looked to my left. When Harry lied down too, I was staring at him, so he looked at me. I watched as his eyes hovered my face, stopping at my lips, before he gulped looking up. As the silence grew longer, another song from downstairs now filled the room.

“So, tell me”, he said, “Why must you fly out of the country so soon?”

“Well, I have to be in Sardegna to resume shooting for Bloodline on Wednesday”

“That’s in a week!”

“Was I done?”, I teased, “Before then, there’s a wedding I need to go during the weekend, that’s also in Italy and so I decided to get there early and work on this book people want me to write”

“You have a wedding in Italy this weekend?!”

“Yes, it’s a three-days thing. A bunch of friends are going. It’s gonna be fun”. He had a weird smile in his face. “What?”

“I have a wedding in Italy this weekend!”
“No way”, I said. “That’s too big a coincidence!”

“I’m not making it up”, he said. “Charlie is getting married. I know him from Eton. Wait, where is your wedding? Are you going to Charlie’s wedding?”

“No”, I laughed. “It’s this… guy from work. He invited everyone from the crew and cast since we’ll be there for the movie anyway”

“Where is your wedding?”

“Venice”

“Oh, mine is in Puglia… Wait”, he said. “Is your friend from work George Clooney?!”

I smiled, guilty. “Maybe”

He laughed. “You’re going to George Clooney’s wedding?!”

“I’ve been working with the guy for the past few months, he invited everyone out of politeness!”, he was staring at me. “Also I’ve known him for a while, his manager is also Richard so we’ve kind of been to the same parties for years”

“You are still the most interesting person I know, Jenifer Silva”, I smiled. “How is he getting married if he’s shooting a movie?”

“He already finished all of his scenes”, I explained. “He worked it up before signing the contract so he’d be done in time”. Harry nodded.

“We should hang out”, he said. “In Italy. We’ll both be there, we should hang out”

I took in a deep breath, thinking of how to get out of that one. Part of me wanted to tell him we should stick to the phone calls. The other part wanted to say that of course we could hang out. Part of me thought we should hang out, friends hang out. The other part knew it was too risky. Then the whole of me realized there was only one reason I could think it was risky to hang out with a friend. Because he wasn’t just a friend.

“Did you receive my package on Monday?”, I changed the subject, compressing the thought deep to the back of my mind.

He smiled. “I did, thank you”, he said, ironic. “Haven’t gotten around to reading any of it yet, though. I find it kind of depressing”

On Monday, his official birthday, I had made the concierge of my hotel promise to have a package delivered on the same day. It contained three books (‘So You’re Having A Mid-Life Crisis!’, ‘29 and Counting : A Chick’s Guide to Turning 30’ and ‘Menopause For Dummies’) and a tee shirt with a print that read ‘Best of 1984’.

“Well, it was a light-hearted joke… but now I sort of regret doing it, because I didn’t actually have the time to get you a proper gift”, I looked guilty.

“Oh, so it was a joke?! Thank God!”, he dramatized, making me laugh. “Don’t worry, you’re here. That’s gift enough”

I smiled, looking away, hoping I wasn’t blushing. “Well, it is your birthday. So, let me know what you want and I’ll give it to you”
“Really?”, he asked. “Anything I want?”

“Anything for the birthday boy!”

“Anything?”

There was something in the way he asked it, the way the word slipped out of his lips as his narrow eyes hovered mine that made want to touch him. Something that I felt was way too telling to ignore.

I sighed, sitting back up. “Sure, anything. I mean, is your thirtieth birthday, is a big deal”

He looked up at the top of his bed. Then shrugged. “I don’t really want anything”

“Really?”, I asked, confused.

“Yeah”

“Come on, the new PlayStation? A trip to Finland?”

He laughed. “Why would I want to go to Finland?”

“I don’t know, I would wanna go… Come on, anything!”

“There’s not really anything I want that you can give me”

“Well, you, my friend, is clearly underestimating the power of this Oscar-winning actress”, he giggled. “I’m serious. People just give me stuff these days… all I have to do is ask. I went to Cannes in March and I was at this restaurant with some friends just staring at this beautiful gazebo outside the restaurant overlooking the sea that was clearly just for decoration. Then the manager came to ask if there was anything he could to make our night better, and I just told him it could only get better if we could have dinner in the gazebo. He gave three looks around to his waiters and next thing you know we’re eating oysters overlooking the most amazing view of Monaco”

He raised his eyebrows. “Impressive”

“Not good enough for you? I got, like, three free cars after the award season”

“Free cars?”

“Yes! Ford, Hyundai and Kia. They called and were all, like, we have a car here for you as a congratulatory gift for all the awards you have!”

He sat up and looked at me. “You are not serious”

“I am. I talked to Jen about it, you know, Lawrence, and she said the same thing happened to her. It’s crazy”

“It is crazy”

“So, go on, there must be something you want. If a genie appeared right here, and told you could wish for anything in the entire world, what would you wish for?”

“For more wishes”, he joked.

“That’s against the rules and you know it”
He laughed. “How would I know that?”

“Oh, everyone knows that! You can’t ask for more wishes, or for someone to fall in love with you, or for immortality.”

“What about world peace?”

“That’s just cliché,” I shrugged. “Come on, Mr. Prince, anything you want. I’m your genie tonight!”

He smiled at his own hands. “There’s some things not even Jenifer Silva can make happen.”

“Not with that attitude”, I joked. “Okay, now I’m curious. You wouldn’t ask a genie for anything?”

He took a deep breath. “I guess, if there was an actual, magical, genie…”, he shrugged, “I would ask for my mother to be alive.”

I nodded. “Yeah, I can’t really help with that.”

He chuckled lightly. “And I guess, since we’re talking genie-wishes, I’d wish for me not to have been born a prince.”

“You know what? I could give an interview speaking against monarchies!”, he laughed. “Maybe it would help! Maybe people would demand a referendum to vote you guys out! People really value my opinion now…”

“It’s okay”, he said, still smiling, “I mean, I’ve come to terms with it. My life would just be so much easier if it was possible.”

“In what ways?”

“Well, for starters, I wouldn’t have to worry about work… All my friends downstairs, they’re about my age and, sure, some of them have their shit figured out… but a lot them just invest their money in stuff and live the life their parent’s money allows. But me, if I don’t have a plan I’m already an embarrassment for my family.” I nodded. “What about you? What would you wish for?”

“I don’t know”, I shrugged. “Maybe a trip to the past so I could tell my fifteen-years-old self to go grab pen and paper to write down the long list of mistakes she should avoid making.”

He laughed. “I second that! My God, that would be a long list.”

“Dear fifteen-year-old Jen, don’t get drunk on set and almost kill a stunt double”, I counted the mistakes on my fingers, “And don’t tell the social worker about the plastic surgery.”

“Don’t invite Cherry Goldman for the winter formal”, he said. “You think she’s into you, but she isn’t. And wait to smoke pot at someone else’s house you should know you’d be caught if you did it in yours.”

I laughed. “Prom is overrated, just stay home with Alli. And please study hard for the Spanish finals, you’ll think you know what you’re doing, but you don’t.”

“Amen”, Harry said. “Geography for me. And don’t fucking wear a that costume for Stevenson’s costume party in 2005. You can do better than that and is not worth the years of people calling you a nazi.”

I laughed. “Wild idea, young Jen, don’t date your college professor. He’s married, he’s an abusive
asshole, and he’s gonna break your heart to wild lengths. Which brings me to: don’t drink and drive. Ever. That’s stupid and you’re not gonna look cute in your mugshot”

“Drink less”, Harry agreed. “And don’t fight with paparazzi no matter how hard you want to, is not worth it”

“Don’t date Brody. He’s fun, he’s hot, he’s got a six pack, but don’t make it serious. You’re smarter than this”

Harry smiled, and paused to think of the next mistake in his list of regrets. “Don’t go to Vegas”, I laughed. “Don’t even go there. Stay away. Go to some obscure club in Russia, or whatever. Just not Vegas”

“Don’t sleep with Tyler”, I said, accidentally making the moment a lot more serious than it should be. “Or, at least, make it clear from the start that it doesn’t mean anything…”

“Don’t propose to Chelsy”, Harry added.

“Don’t stop seeing your therapist”, I went on. “It’s okay to need help and you won’t want to admit it, but you will be clinically depressed”

Harry looked at me. “When the cute actress accuses you from stealing her poker chips, don’t accuse her of having boy troubles”, I giggled. “…it’ll just make her mad”

“Don’t bet things on poker if you don’t know how to play it”, I added, making his smiled grow bigger.

“When a crazy British dude proposes a publicity stunt…”, he said, “say no?”

I thought about it, looking at him. “I don’t regret that”, I said, watching the way his blue eyes hovered about my face when he smiled.

I watched as his eyes went on to my lips. I wondered if he wanted to kiss me. I wondered if, like me, he too was thinking about touching me, about laying us back in his bed and climbing on top of me so we could kiss the night away. With a bite on my lip, I took a deep breath, shaking off the delirium, standing up.

Harry grabbed my hand before I walked away, turning me back to him. He didn’t let go of it and neither did I. Instead, his thumb delicately traced the knuckles of my hand as he stared at the shining ‘H’ in my bracelet.

With a sigh of resolution, I had the tough realization that Harry and I were not friends. I could keep on convincing myself of that with a distance between us, over the phone, but not while he was so close to me. Not when his hand was touching mine. Not when I couldn’t let it go, when he could still fill my mind with one touch. Not when my heart was racing in my chest so loud I feared he’d hear it even a full year after everything between us went to shit.

I realized there was a simple reason I didn’t want to meet him in Italy, which was the same reason I decided to come tonight against all my better judgment: I still have feelings for him. Which is what made me come, because I simply wanted to see him, I wanted him to see me in my best outfit, with my makeup done and his bracelet on my wrist, and maybe catch some spark of in his eyes that would tell me he hadn’t moved on. That there was still some kind of hope.

I liked him. I knew as I knew this was a terrible idea. I liked him. And I knew now why he had kissed me Scotland, even though he knew he had to move back a month afterwards. I knew why he
decided to try even though he knew we had no real chance. Because his heart begged him to and he realized we were running out of time, much like I was now.

“Harry…”, I started. He raised his eyes to mine, getting up.

I took in a deep breath, wondering how I could possibly tell him that after an entire year my own plan for us to move on had failed me. Why should I do it? We have no future together, we live in different continents, and I have a crazy schedule. Also as far as I knew he had moved on. Sure, he looked like he had the world on his eyes as he looked at me in anticipation, but what if I was wrong? What if he didn’t like me? And why, a year later, did I still have the same questions in my head as I did before our first date?

We heard a knock on the door and, with a sigh, I let go of his hand.

“Sir?”, a deep voice reached us. We couldn’t see the door because of the way the room was shaped, with a small hallway between the bed and the way out. “Your brother would like to know if now would be a good time to introduce Ms. Goulding”

“I’ll be right down”, Harry answered, and we heard the door close.

Harry looked at me. “I should, uhm-“

I nodded, interrupting, “You have guests to entertain… And I have an early flight”

We stared at each other in silence in a pause. Then I turned to the door.

“Don’t go”, he said, holding on to my hand again.

I smiled, feeling short of air hanging on to his words for dear life. “I have to…”

He nodded. “Well, then, thank you for coming. Really, Jen, it means a lot”

I smiled, feeling my heart ache. My feet frozen in place still holding his hand. I caught myself staring at the lapel of his jacket, wondering how was I supposed to let him go again.

Harry took a step closer. I looked at him.

“I know what I want for my birthday”, he said, soft in a whisper.

I gulped, trying to smile and answer him even though my voice was shaky. “Name it and it’s yours”

With his other hand on my waist, Harry pulled me close, and very slowly put his forehead in mine.

“Kiss me”, he pleaded.

Without allowing myself any time to realize what a terrible idea that was, I obeyed.

I framed his lips on mine, slowly, as our noses touched and his breath splattered against my skin. He let go of my hand and his fingers traced my skin up my arm until they were on my neck, pulling me closer as his tongue met mine.

I knew that if I had three wishes, I would just wish for him three times.
Chapter Summary

Harry gives Jen an ultimatum and a new crazy rumor comes to light!

Chapter Notes

News and Social Media reactions that follow this chapter:
http://fakeituntilyoumakeitphff.tumblr.com/post/125886130679/more-news-and-social-media-reactions-to

“You would think in a city that’s mostly water the paparazzi would be easier to deal with”

As we settled in a table by the bar in the safety of our hotel’s restaurant, Eddy raised his hand to a waiter.

“They have been crazier than before”, I added. “With Bono, Matt Demon and George Clooney, I thought we would be left a little bit alone, but I guess I was wrong”

“They think you’re dating Chris Pine now”, he said. “You think that’s why?”

“They think we’re here together, but just because we take the boat together doesn’t mean he’s my date…”

“Is that why you didn’t want to go out with him tonight?”

“No”, I said. “And it wasn’t just him, don’t make it sound like he asked me out… it was the film crew. And I didn’t want to go because I’m tired”

“Was it because of Harry?”

I looked at him, hoping he would save me some time and see the ‘no’ on my eyes. “We’re just friends”

“You keep saying that”

“Because it’s the truth!”, as I said it, my phone ringed, and I answered it without seeing who it was, glad to have an excuse to ignore my security guard.

“Is that Harry?”, he asked.

“Shut up, Edgar”, I told him, as I answered the call without looking at the screen.

“This is Jen”, I said.

“Filha!”
“Mom?!”. Our waiter reached us, and Eddy started to order. “Hi, how is everyone?”

“We’re good, we’re fine”, she said. “Honey…”

I waited, but she never finished her sentence. “Yes?”

“Is there anything you need to tell me?”

“What did you read online this time?”, I asked, recognizing the tone she used to confirm rumors she read about me.

“They’re saying you’re pregnant!”

I scorned. “Mom, come on”

“I know what you’re gonna say, but I’m not crazy, Jenifer. All of them are saying you’re pregnant! All of the websites and magazines! Even in the news!”

“Mom…”, I started, trying to breathe in patience, “It’s just a rumor”

“But when it’s just a rumor didn’t you say it usually just stays in one tabloid? All of them, Jenifer! They’re all saying it!”

“Mother. I am not pregnant”. Eddy and the waiter raised their eyes to look at me. I shrugged. “I want the carbonara!”, I whispered to the waiter so mom wouldn’t hear.

“Oh, honey!”, she said, afflict. “Are you sure?”

“Yes, I’m sure, mom. I think I’d know if I was pregnant”

“You’re sure because it’s impossible, right? For you to be pregnant”

I looked at the waiter, still waiting to hear my choice of drinks. “I’m sure”

“You’re sure, because you’re not having sex, right?”

I paused, my eyes widened, thinking of how to get out of that question. “I’m not pregnant”

“Jenifer!”, she shouted, realizing what I meant.

I blocked the microphone on the phone so my mother wouldn’t hear me and looked at the waiter as if he held my life in his hands. “Bring me scotch; I am too sober for this conversation”

It was a Friday night in Venice and I was wearing a pink, off-shoulder gown after attending the Clooney-Alamuddin rehearsal dinner. After bidding goodnight to my friends from the cast of Bloodline, who decided to go have drinks at some bar nearby, I decided I was too hungry and tired and came back to the hotel for actual food and as early a bedtime as I could get myself into.

It had been about forty-eight hours since Harry’s birthday party – and since I had given him his ‘birthday gift’ – and I hadn’t managed to think of much else since. It kept coming back to me, the way his forehead touched mine as he said the words – ‘kiss me’, a request I was all-too happy to attend. The taste of his lips on mine, the touch of his hand on my neck, keeping us close, unbreakable in a kiss so desperate as if it was the last we could ever get. In many ways, maybe that was true.

We both knew he had to go back to his party, and I had to get on a plane to literally fly back to all
the reasons we couldn’t really be together. Maybe that’s why we didn’t let each other go.

We kissed and kissed and kissed for so long at some point I wondered if we were gonna do anything else… if I could pull him to his bed… if we could get away with it. Short answer: we couldn’t. Not long after that thought – and after I had my arm over his back, under his jacket – there was another knock on the door.

“Harry?”, William’s familiar voice reached us. “Are you here still? We need to get Ellie singing, you should be there for it”

We broke apart suddenly, even though he hadn’t opened the door – maybe even William wondered if there was anything else happening inside.

“I’ll be there in a minute”, Harry said, after clearing his throat. I raised my hand to his face, to swipe the red lipstick stain in his lips. He held my hand in place, and looked at me.

Remembering the mistakes I had made in the past, I thought a clarification was needed.

“It was just your birthday wish”, I said, maybe more to myself than to him. “Between friends… It didn’t mean anything”

As his thumb caressed my hand in his face, he gave me a sad smile. “It didn’t mean anything”, he agreed.

The door opened, I retrieved my arm and he finished cleaning the lipstick in his lips.

“People are getting impatient”, William was saying as he walked in. “Oh”, he stopped, abruptly, politely looking at me pretending he didn’t know I was there. I smiled.

“Jenifer, how nice to see you again. I heard you had arrived”

“It’s good to see you too”, I said, walking away from Harry, acting as if the last ten minutes hadn’t happened. “And congratulations on the second baby!”

He smiled. “Thank you, thank you. We’re very happy. Well, Kate is not as happy right now. But she’ll be, as soon as the nausea goes away”

I giggled. “Make sure to tell her I send my best”

“I will!”, he said. “Let’s get downstairs, we need to get Ellie singing”

“And I should go”, I said, as I followed William back to the hallway, leaving the room.

“Already?”, he asked.

“I have an early flight”, I explained. “I really just came to say happy birthday and to, uhm-“, I looked at his brother, “give Harry his birthday gift”. Harry grinned as we made our way downstairs.

“Well, that’s a pity”, William added, at the top of the stairs.

“I’ll walk Jen out”, Harry said, “and meet you back in there”

“Harry, come on”, his brother answered. “We’re late. What about this? I’ll walk Jenifer out, and you go introduce Ellie”
Harry seemed to hate the idea, but I hated the awkwardness more.

“I’m sure I can walk myself out”, I said, smiling, as we reached the first floor. “Really, I think I won’t get lost”, I giggled. Harry scratched the back of his head. “It’s fine, you have guests. Go ahead”

“Well, that’s solved then”, William said. “Jenifer, it was lovely to see you again”

“And you”, I told him, before looking over at his brother who gave me a long look. “Harry”, I said, finally, as Harry didn’t seem to know how to get us another second alone. “Happy birthday”

He smiled. “Have-have a… Have a safe flight”, he stuttered.

I nodded, before going straight to the end of the hallway I had walked in by.

Twelve hours later, I was already in Italy, and a day after that I was sitting in the restaurant getting the talk from my mother… at 24 years old.

“Oh, Jenny”, mom went on, sounding upset, “…are you having sex?”, she asked, in a whisper, as if the mere question was already a sin.

“Mom”, I started, gentle, taking in a deep breath, “I am a grown woman-”

“Oh, Jesus, honey… was it Trevor?”

“Mom, I told you. I broke up with him months ago”

“Then was it this Chris-fellow? Blue eyes? Was it him? We don’t even know him!”

“No, mom, I work with him. That’s it! We’ve been over this, remember? I don’t sleep with every guy I work with”

Although, let’s face it. Chris Pine? I wish.

“Who do they think you’re pregnant of, then?”

“I’m not pregnant!”, I whispered, exasperated.

“Was it Harry?”, she asked, “Was he your first?”

I was definitely too sober for that conversation, but thankfully that’s when the waiter came back with our drinks.

“Mom, although I would love nothing more than to talk to you about my sex life, I think we can both agree none of us is ready for that”, I said. “So why don’t we just state, for the record, that I am being careful and not doing anything I don’t absolutely want to do and leave it at that?”

I heard her sigh. “Honey…”

It was a while before she was satisfied that I understood that ‘my body is a temple’ and ‘I need to respect it so guys will respect me!’ because ‘I don’t want to end up like my cousin!’. When I finally hanged up, my carbonara was cold and Eddy was already repeating having desert.

“That lasted a while”

I sighed, and started eating, trying to bury deep in the pit of my stomach the feeling that I was
failing again. I googled myself on my phone as I ate, realizing mom was right: all the big news
sites had headlines about my pregnancy.

‘Chris Pine and Jenifer Silva expecting first child together!’: ‘Jenifer Silva pregnant! The actress
was spotted with baby-daddy Chris Pine in Venice for the Clooney-Alamuddin wedding’, ‘Sources
close to the couple confirm Jenifer Silva and Chris Pine baby is really happening!’, ‘Get the scoop:
Jenifer Silva wants her baby to be born in Brazil, a friend confirms!’

I blocked the screen, dropping the phone on the table and pressing my temples with my palms
closing my eyes trying to calm down. As I tried to remember what could have given anyone the
impression Chris and I were together – let alone having a child! – I lost my appetite.

The crew from Bloodline had arrived just that morning. Along with my old time friend Emily Blunt
and her husband John, I went for lunch, where we ran into Chris and invited him to sit with us – the
wedding quickly gained the get-together feeling I usually felt in award ceremonies, where I got to
see friends I usually only saw at events like that.

As I got back into my room after dinner with Eddy, I had realized two things: the first, Harry was
already at his wedding, across the country from me, in Puglia. I saw all the pictures as I read about
my baby. He looked nice. The second thing: if you go out with a married couple and another friend
of the opposite sex, chances are people will assume you’re in a double date. And that, I guesses,
was how suddenly I was supposedly dating Chris Pine. Which worked out great for the media,
because they had been looking for a reason why I had broken up with Trevor, and so they just
picked that. Chris broke up Trevor and me – and from that to a surprise pregnancy is really just a
stretch in tabloid-world.

Still in my party dress I laid in my bed staring at the ceiling, and thought about Harry in his dark
gray suit and tie-less white button down shirt in Puglia. He was wearing the wayfarer sunglasses I
had given him last year when I was giving him a makeover and I smiled at the memory.

Sighing, I could feel myself wanting to think about the last words that he had told me in Clarence
House at his birthday two days before, but I wasn’t sure that was a good idea. I knew it would hurt,
and there was already too many things hurting at that point: the senseless fake rumors, my
mother’s disappointment, my fifteen hours of work a day for the movie, the burning desire to see
the world and relax. I just wanted a pause. I just wanted the world to stop for one minute so I could
breathe.

My phone vibrated as I got a text, it was from Tyler. Ever since Phonegate, as I was calling the
leaked information from when my phone was stolen last year, things between us had amazingly
gotten better. We weren’t best friends again, like we had been, but at least we texted eventually
instead of ignoring each other’s existence.

‘You know’, his text read. ‘I always just assumed if you wouldn’t have my babies it would have
been Harry’s… But Christ pine? Talk about plot twist! LOL’

I started laughing out loud, unsure if I was happier about his joke or about the fact that we were
able to laugh about this. About the fact that this proved we were friends again, that we were okay.

I texted him back, thanking him for the only joke able to put a smile on my face on that God-
forsaken night.

‘You want me to tweet it? It’d be a funny way to deny it!’

I thought about it for maybe half a minute before I told him to do it, deciding laughing about my
problems was better than stressing about it. Things turned out better than expected, because Christ replied to Tyler’s tweet in an epic way, and then I just the final blow to make sure everyone knew the rumors were all a lie.

Tyler had written: ‘Always assumed if @JenSilva wouldn’t have my babies it would have at least been Prince Harry, but @ChrisPine? Plot twist! #LOL’

Chris replied: ‘@TylerAAAlvin I’m just as surprised as you are #nottrueyouguys #notgonnabeadad’

And then I added: ‘Guys @TylerAAAlvin @ChrisPine it’s a food baby #notpregnant #justfat’

I enjoyed the fan reactions for a bit before going to take a shower, and as I fell asleep, I focused on how good it was to have friends when things got too crazy. I focused on this so I didn’t think about Harry, but even in my dreams, I could still see it.

Two days before, I had managed to find my way out of Clarence House rather quickly. I gave the hostess at the door a nervous smile as I asked her to call Eddy and our driver.

“I’ll wait by the car”, I said, making my way out, glad the place had big walls surrounding it so the paparazzi couldn’t see me.

I found our town car, amidst all the others, and leaned into it as I waited. I touched my lips delicately, thinking about the kiss, sighing. ‘Just a birthday gift?’, I thought. ‘I’m so dumb!’.

“Jenifer”, I heard.

I opened my eyes, standing tall on my heels as Harry walked towards me, looking like a dream come true in his tuxedo with his ginger hair pushed back. I could hear Ellie’s sweet voice at a distance.

“That was fast”, I said, softly, nervously.

He looked to the ground, gulping, looking like he was having trouble figuring out how to speak, so I figured I should go first.

“The voice message”, I said, “The one you almost left me in my birthday… What did you say in it?”

He looked up, seemingly distressed, not looking like he was ready to talk about that. But he still didn’t say anything.

“I get it, you don’t want me to know. But, like, it was in April. That’s a long time ago. I get that whatever you said, you most likely don’t feel like that anymore, I’m just curious”

He stared at me, serious, then took a deep breath. “I said I missed you…”, he whispered. “I said you were wrong. I said ‘Plan A’ wasn’t working. I wasn’t forgetting you. I said I still had feelings for you…”, I felt like my heart could burst out of my chest at any minute now. “…then I said happy birthday”, he smiled, sad. There was a pause, and he nodded. “I shouldn’t have invited you”, he whispered, more to himself than to me.

“Wow. Okay.”, I was caught off guard by his words, and, feeling outraged, I turned to the car. “Well, is a good thing you deleted the voice message, because clearly you got over that”

I started walking back to the house, to see what was taking Eddy so long, but his hand held onto my elbow. I pulled out, strongly.
“Jen, wait”, he said.

“What?! What, Harry, what?!”, I asked, turning to him suddenly. “How could I have possibly misunderstood the words ‘I shouldn’t have invited you’?!”. His mouth was open, and his eyes hovered the place as no sound came out. “What do you want?! Do you even know?!”, I asked. He sighed, looking at me. “Because you’re the one who came to my hotel room in São Paulo, and you’re the one who made me come here, and you’re the one talking about Italy, but you don’t want me here, so don’t worry. I’m leaving”. I turned again, but his hand found mine, and he turned me back to him as he took a step closer to stand right before me with no space in between.

“I want you here”, he said, breathless. “I want you here, and everywhere, and all the time. I want you all the time”. I blinked, breathing difficultly. He spoke slowly, softly. Intensely looking at me like nothing else really mattered. “When I say I shouldn’t have invited you, what I mean is that this is too hard. With you here, in person, is just too hard to pretend that I am over you”, he broke in a smile. “You told me back in Brazil that now that I’m thirty I am expected to know what I am doing and what I want, and I’ve been trying to. I’ve been trying to be responsible, and to make smart choices. Not just for me, but for my family, and what they expect of me. Get Invictus done, make a decision about my career, find someone I can have a future with. I’m trying to grow up and accept that you don’t want to be with me, because you never really said you did. You never really said you even had feelings for me. So I’m trying to let you go, because I’m tired of being this pathetic creep who keeps telling you about how I feel when all you do is turn me down… but I can’t”

I realized, in a second, that I had never told him I liked him. I never told him how I felt. The one time I did, I had merely said I liked him ‘a little bit’. All I ever said was how we couldn’t be together, so, sadly, I realized it made sense he didn’t know the extent of his effect of me.

“I might not know what I’m doing, but I know what I want”, he took another step closer to me. “I want you”. I felt all the air in the world disappear as I struggled to breathe. “So, here I am, for what feels like the millionth time, telling you that I have feelings for you and I want to be with you, but, Jen… this is the last time. This is the last time I let you know that if you say one word I’ll drop everything in a heartbeat to be with you. After this, I’ll leave you alone. So…”, he took in a deep breath. “If, maybe… you want to be with me”, he smiled, his eyes in a glow as if that possibility was mere wishful thinking. “Then… tell me. Let me know and, I’ll… I’ll find you. Wherever you are, I’ll come find you, and we’ll be together. Without worrying about the future or the plans or what is expected of us. Just… just tell me”. There was a pause. “Because if you don’t… I’ll have to move on. I’ll have to let you go”

He stared at me for another few seconds, before squeezing my hand and letting it go. He gulped, then left.

I stood in place for a while, and that’s still where Eddy found me minutes later, unable to say anything. In automatic pilot mode, I got myself inside the car, and back to the hotel, and into the plane the next morning and into my hotel room in Venice, all while fighting mentally between thinking about Harry and trying not to, knowing that if I did, I’d not be making the responsible choices he talked about.

The wedding was on Saturday – a black tie affair in a hotel nearby. Although it hadn’t been announced yet, the fact I was now the face of Oscar de la Renta meant I didn’t have to worry about what to wear to high profile events like this: I left London two days before already with the dress for the wedding in my bag: a blue, strapless, mermaid gown. Chris and I had denied the rumors over twitter the night before, but we still went to the ceremony together as we had been going everywhere in Venice, so the media was still taking our denial with a grain of salt.
I was sitting by the bar during the reception following the short ceremony so it was easier to get refills on my apple martini; that’s when George decided to come talk to me. I smiled when he approached, his charming self looking as dashing as always in a tuxedo.

“Hello, beautiful”, he said, before placing a gentle kiss on my cheek. “Why aren’t you sitting with the others?”

“I’m sitting with the alcohol”, I joked, making him laugh.

“So I take it by your choice of drink I shouldn’t congratulate you for the bun on the oven?”

I giggled. “Not today”

He faked disappointment. “Damn, that baby would have been gorgeous”

We paused, smiling for a while. He ordered some wine before turning to face the dance floor, when we took a moment to enjoy the sight of our dancing friends enjoying themselves.

I looked at him, ready to ask what was next for him after the honeymoon, when I was taken by surprise by the sweet look of admiration in his eyes.

“Look at you”, I started. “How long have we known each other? Four years? And I can honestly say that I never thought I’d be on your wedding one day”

He laughed. “I can honestly say that I thought the same”

“How did you do it?”, I asked, hanging on to every bit of wisdom he could toss my way. “With the life that we live, with the craziness, the paparazzi, -9the pressure, the gossip, the rumors… how did you manage?”. George looked at me now, somewhat remembrance in his eyes, maybe recognizing himself in my words. “How do you make it work?”

George sighed deeply, looking at his glass, taking time to figure out an answer. I waited patiently, desperate for someone to tell me what was the right thing to do.

He smiled. “You just…”, then he shrugged, “do it”. Perhaps I made it noticeable in my expression I had expected the kind of tip I could actually use, because he quickly went on. “I mean, don’t get me wrong. It takes a long time to start feeling like you’re doing the right thing. But, Jen…”, he held my hand. “When you love someone, when it comes down to either taking a risk and being with them, or hanging on to your security and being without them… At some point you just gotta jump, you know?”

Amazingly, I knew.

George got up from his stool and gently kissed my cheek before walking off to be with his wife. A few seconds went by as I stared at them, longingly smiling at each other as they slow danced in the middle of the way between the windows and the tables without realizing they were in the way, not even knowing it wasn’t a dance floor. Completely lost into each other, they moved as if the world was just the two of them.

I returned my glass to the bar before getting up on my feet and walking out of the room to the back terrace. It had a view of the sky and the canals underneath and the music from the reception filled the Venetian air as I grabbed my phone from my clutch and gulped before finding in my speed dials the name that made my stomach twist with anticipation.

“Jen?”, Harry’s voice found its way to me after a couple of rings. “Jen? Are you there?”. No matter
how much I tried, I could bring myself to talk. “…Jen?”

As I tried to get words out, I realized I didn’t know what to say. “Hi”


I sighed. There was silence. “Are you still in Italy?”

It was only when I asked that I realized his wedding had been in the previous night, and he might have already flown back to London.

“…technically not”, Harry said.

I felt my heart constricted, almost hurting. There was silence again as I didn’t know what to say next.

“Why did you call me, Jen?”

I knew what he meant, he meant why wasn’t I allowing him to let me go.

“I was thinking about you”, I admitted.

“…really?”, his dreamy, soft whisper made my heart ache. I knew the disbelief in his voice, because I recognized it from my own heart whenever he had told me how he felt about me.

I nodded, only later realizing he couldn’t see me. “Yes”, I voiced it. “Honestly, that’s all I’ve been doing lately”

“Really?”

Feeling so exposed, I felt it difficult to breathe.

“There’s an island in the coast of France”, Harry started. I hated myself for taking too long to tell him what I wanted; now he was changing the subject. “Corsica. It’s actually very close to Sardegna, it’s where you’re gonna go next, right?”

“…yeah”

“I had a few days off, I thought I might as well spend them unwinding, relaxing, you know…”

“Yeah”, I wasn’t sure I knew.

“I mean, it’s beautiful. Clear blue water beaches, amazing organic food, and the best part: no paparazzi! They’re all either at the wedding I was attending, and the one you’re attending, and I’m guessing after it’s over they’ll either leave or go to wait to see you in Sardegna, so it’s pretty safe here”

“Sounds amazing”

“I’ve only been here a day and I already love it”

“That’s good”, I said, hoping for the courage to tell him.

“If you’re ever looking for a place to relax and spend a few days, I mean… I’d definitely recommend it”
I stared at the view of Venice almost realizing what he meant.

“You know…”, I started, “I could use clear blue water beaches, amazing food and no paparazzi”

“Really?”

“Yeah…”, I nodded again, the idea taking form. “I do have, you know, three days off until I have to present myself at Sardegna for the movie”

“Mhmm”, he mumbled, interested. “You know… I rented a villa here, there’s a lot of space if you wanna come by…”

He sounded just casual enough for me to know that was an invitation, so I decided that it made no sense to tell him over the phone.

“The wedding is over, I could fly in tomorrow”

“That!- That’d be- That’d be cool…”, his voice regained its usual energy. I couldn’t help but smile.

“You know what?”, I looked back at the party. George and Amal were slow dancing to Fly Me To The Moon, lost in each other’s eyes. I wanted that. “I could probably be there in a few hours. I mean…”, I thought about it, “the movie people got us a private plane, I could use it. The reception is pretty much done, anyway… I could go. More time to relax, right?”

There was silence. I bit my lip, wondering if he’d tell me to let him go again. I realized I hadn’t yet told him. I hadn’t told him he made me feel like my heart had wings and I could fly, or that he made me want to sing and dance around my room like an idiot, that he made me believe love could be easy and simple even though the logic part of my brain knew it’d never be like that with us. He didn’t know, so he’d probably do what he said he had to: make smart choices.

“I’ll text you the address”, he said. I sighed, the smile was nowhere close to leaving me now.

“I’ll be there soon”, I vowed.

“I’ll see you soon, then”. I could hear the smile in his voice, and with one in mine, I said goodbye.

I smiled at Venice like I hadn’t in a long time before turning around fast in my fuchsia heels and walking back into the party in a hurry. I marched into the dance floor with no ceremony and stopped right before the bride and groom, who stopped dancing to look at me..

“I came to say goodbye”, I told them, apologetic.

“Already?”, Amal asked, sweet, letting go of her husband’s hand to hold mine. “It’s too early!”

“Yes, Jenny, act your age and dance the night away with us!”, George asked.

I smiled. “I just… I have something I must do before going back to work, and I thought I should start immediately”

They exchanged a sad look.

“Well, if there’s no convincing you…”, Amal started. “Let me get the photographer. We need one last photo to remember tonight!”

She walked out. George held my hand.
“Are you sure it can’t wait? You’re gonna miss the brunch tomorrow”

I smiled. “You told me just now that sometimes we just gotta jump, do you remember?”, he nodded. “I’m gonna go do that. I’m gonna jump”

“Well, then it can’t wait”, we giggled. “Is it somebody I know?”. I didn’t know how to answer that question. “…I get it”, he nodded, and I smiled, grateful.

“Here”, Amal said, rejoining us.

We held arms, and smiled at the photographer and then I hugged them goodbye.

“It was a beautiful wedding, thank you for having me”

“I’m just sorry to see you go so soon. Thank you for coming!”, she said.

George kissed my forehead. “Go be happy, kid”

With one last smile, I turned around and made my way to the table where my current cast, the one from Bloodline, was sitting. I told them, quickly, that I was leaving, and that I’d see them again in Sardegna. I hugged Chris, who was sitting, from the back, and whispered a request in his ear.

“I know the jet they got us is just supposed to take us around here and to Sardegna…”, I started. “But I need it tonight, it’ll be back for you in the morning. Can you cover for me?”

“Anything for the mother of my child”, he joked. I laughed, then I left.

I found Eddy and we got into a boat. I smiled slightly to the photographers waiting outside, in their own boats, trying to get a glimpse of anyone that could help them sell. I made the call from the boat, asking for the jet to be prepared as fast as possible. They asked for one hour, and so it was set.

“We’re leaving?”, Eddy asked.

I didn’t know how to tell him, so I just smiled. I couldn’t figure out how to stop smiling. It occurred to me, then, just how much I had been missing Harry. The thought of seeing him in just a few hours made me breathless with excitement.

I tried not to focus on it too much, but it was difficult. I kept bursting in a big smile, making Eddy give me weird looks.

“Am I ever gonna know where we’re going?”, he asked again in the elevator. I thought of telling him, but was too suspicious of the other guy in there with us, so I waited until we were in the room, alone.

“We’re going to Corsica”, I said, looking like Vodka as I almost jumped with excitement, running into the walk-in closet to get my bag and to start packing. It’s a good thing I had barely unpacked.

“Corsica?”, he asked, picking up the puppy and gently caressing her as she excitedly danced in his arms, happy to see us again.

“It’s an island. And it’s not far, although it is technically France, not Italy”

“…okay”, he nodded.

I took off my necklace and earrings and put them in the jewelry box. Then I took my shoes off in a
hurry and put them in the travel shoe bag. I paused, taking it all to the bag, finally ready to voice it.

“We’re meeting Harry there”, I said. I had my back to Eddy, so I didn’t see his reaction. I turned very slowly to face him, biting my lip.

He was smiling. “Cool”, I waited for him to process what I might have meant, but after teasing me about my ginger ex-boyfriend for so long he seemed to now have found mercy within himself. “So…?”

I sighed. “He told me in London he still has feelings for me”, I said. “And that if I felt the same I should let him know or else he’d have to let me go. But I didn’t say anything. I was just so… wonderstruck. Then I was scared. But I’ve been thinking about him since we’ve been here, and, if I’m being honest, I haven’t been able to stop thinking about him since…”, I thought about it, the smile taking over my lips again, “God, since he knocked on my door in Manhattan a year and a half ago!”. I sighed, and looked at him, waiting for the judgment.

“So you told him?”, he asked. “That you still have feelings for him too?!”

My smile froze in place. “Well, no”

His smile vanished. “No?!?”

“Well… no”, I said. “I couldn’t. Not over the phone! But I will!”, I stood up. “I will, that’s the plan! I’m gonna do it in person”

“That’s why we’re going to Corsica?!”

“Yes!”

He laughed. “Alrighty! Let’s get going then!”

I don’t think I have ever packed as fast as that night. I put on flats, but didn’t take off my dress, and, after we put Vodka on her carrier bag, we took off for the airport, where the jet was all ready for us.

We crossed Italy and some of the Mediterranean and, finally, we landed in a small airport in the island of Corsica. The company that provided us with the plane made sure there was already a car waiting for us when we arrived, which was good since all the car rental places, and everything else, were closed at that hour – we got there at four in the morning.

Corsica is a mountainous island that the old Greeks used to refer to as ‘prettiest of them all’, and even now it was still known as the Island of Beauty and it was the greenest of the Mediterranean sea. It belonged to France since 1769, but for fourteen years before this, it had been briefly independent. Although short, their independence was significant for it had in its constitution the universal vote and separation of state and church, which later was used as example by many countries.

As we got into the car, Eddy drove us through Corsica’s narrow stone streets, hovered on both sides by small, old, brick buildings as we tried to get to the address Harry had given us. We drove off into a bigger street and soon enough we were driving up a seaside hill. Along the road, we saw a few spots for parking and sightseeing and, since the sun was almost coming up, I told Eddy to stop the car.

“Don’t you want to hurry there and go have some lovin’ with-“
“First of all, never say ‘have some lovin’’ again”, I said. “Second, Harry is probably asleep right now. Third, I need to take minute to breathe and think this through”

“No!”, he dramatized, as I got out of the car. “You always ruin things when you think!”

“Excuse me”, I said, spinning to look at him, still in my evening blue gown, “it’ll do you good to remember I’m the reason you have a job”

Eddy giggled, and we stared off into the horizon for a while, where the dark blue was turning into turquoise, and the turquoise met a slim sign of pink as the sun came up. Looking up you could still see the stars as the dark blue of the night sky vanished and when I breathed it in deep, I smelled a mixture of salt water from the sea and the lavender we could see growing around. The other thing I already loved about Corsica: we were absolutely alone.

In the small private airport, in the streets, and right there, in the highway to Harry, there wasn’t any signs of paparazzi. I looked at the ocean, attentive, trying to spot a photographers in a boat, but there weren’t any boats. I looked up for a minute, at the mountain tops, trying to find photographers trying to get a good angle, but there weren’t any either. I had gotten good at spotting them in every unusual place they usually hid to try and catch me doing something cover-worthy, but today I couldn’t and the reason was beautiful: there weren’t any paparazzi in Corsica. Harry was right: they were all either in Sardegna, Venice or Puglia.

I sighed, happy, allowing myself a smile, knowing I could use this. I could use three days of nothing but beaches, Harry and no paparazzi. It was rare that I had the opportunity to just stop and enjoy the sensation that I was making the right choice, but right there, I knew this would be good for me.

As the thought crossed my mind, we overheard a car at a distance. We passed by us in a hurry, and I almost had no time to wonder if it could be photographers – they usually were reckless drivers. ‘Don’t be paranoid’, I told myself. ‘Not everyone is a paparazzi’.

The car stopped, abruptly, then reversed until it parked right before where we were parked.

I shared a look with Eddy.

“Should we go?”, he mouthed, sharing my suspicions.

I gave the car another look, but before I had made my decision the passenger door opened and we could see Harry’s ginger hair emerging into sight. As we were filled with relief, we smiled at him and at Nathan, who made himself visible by lowering his window.

Harry moved in slow motion. He shut his door and, without taking our eyes from each other, he walked around the car and until where I was until he was two steps from me.

“Anyway, uh”, Eddy said, “I’ll go say hello to Nate”

I didn’t see him walk out, but the next thing I knew was that we were alone before the big rock cliff on one side and the vast Mediterranean on the other - above us only the sunrise. We stared – for maybe way more than socially appropriate because I think I might have heard one of the boys cleaning their throat with a cough that sounded an awful lot like ‘say something!’.

“What are you-uhm- wha-why-“, I took a deep breath, “I thought you’d be asleep by now”

He nodded. “Couldn’t sleep”
His accent caught me off-guard as I realized how much I missed it: the sound of his voice talking to me, soft and tender as I had his eyes on mine. I missed him.

“I thought you’d be making smarter decisions about me”, I teased, regretting it immediately.

“What can I say?”, he asked, with a serious expression, before shrugging. “I’m pathetic”

We giggled, before I remembered what I had come to say. I bit my lip, trying to put it into words.

“And you look…”, we both looked at my outfit: the blue, long evening gown I had worn for the wedding.

“Bit overdressed?”

He took off the dark blue, wool cardigan he was wearing. “I was gonna say cold”

“That too”, I laughed. “I wanted to get on the plane as soon as possible”

He took two steps, coming closer, and wrapping the cardigan around my shoulders. I looked down as my arms found the sleeves and when I looked up, he was looking at me.

“Why?”, he asked, in a whisper, still holding on to the wool lapels in the cardigan with both his hands.

As I felt the proximity, what I felt inside was so intense it felt weird that I had to even say it.

“You know why”

He smiled, short. “…I kind of need you to say it”

I nodded. I knew that. And he was right. He was done being the only one trying to make us work, he needed the reassurance and I needed to let it out. It was my turn to say how I felt.

I opened my mouth, and rehearsed a few ways to say it in my mind before deciding to go straight to the point.

“I like you”, I said. The whispery words stumbled across my lips in such a hurry I feared he might not have understood. I said it fast, afraid I’d change my mind, so utterly exhausted of denying myself the truth in my heart. “I’m not over you. I have feelings for you. I wanna be with you. Frankly, I’ve been so scared you’ll give up on me that I’ve barely slept for the last two nights-“

Harry pulled me close by the cardigan and silenced me with his lips. It was liking coming up for air after struggling to breathe under water. His hands wrapped around my waist under the cardigan and mine found his neck as I brought him even closer.

“I had a, a- a whole speech planned”, I said, breaking the kiss for a second.

“I bet it was really good”, he replied.

“It was very touching, actually”

He smiled. “Why don’t you summarize it?”

“Why don’t I say it?”

He sighed. “Because I have a feeling it’ll be big”, he said. “And I’m done talking. I’m done trying
to reason our way through this. There’s no reason. There’s no logic. Let’s be real, Jen, this makes no sense. Yet here we are”, he raised his hand, caressing my cheek. “I want to be with you. And all that I care about is that you want to be with me too… And maybe that could be enough for now, you know? Maybe, just maybe… for these three days that we have we could forget about all the reasons this is maybe a stupid idea and could focus on the present. And I know life is complicated and all, and we need a plan if we want to do this, but what if for now we just worked on the possibility that this is just for three days? We don’t need a plan for three days. We just need each other”, he paused, looking at me.

“I’m not gonna make my speech”, I said. “Yours was better anyway”

He giggled. “So that sounds good?”

“Usually the lack of a plan terrifies me, but in this particular situation, I think is not only exactly what we need, but all that we can do”, I smiled. “So, that sounds perfect”

He smiled. “I do have one thing that I’m sort of planning, though”, he said, as he tightened the hug around me again.

“What is that?”

He traced my jawline with his lips, bringing shivers down my spine. “To take you home…”

“Sounds good”, I mumbled, with my eyes closed, enjoying his touch, even though I had no idea where ‘home’ was in Corsica.

“…and get you out of this pretty dress”, his lips made found their way to my neck.

“…okay”, I whispered. His lips returned to my ear now.

“…And make you moan my name like you used to.”

Maybe to make sure I knew he meant it, he raised his head again to look at me in the eyes. I couldn’t help but smile.

“Well, then…”, I said, already feeling tingly in anticipation, “Take me home, Mr. Prince”

It felt good to have us both refer to ‘home’ and mean the same place again, even though none of us actually lived there, or in my case, even knew where it was. But it felt better knowing that it was only ‘home’ because we were both there, together.

Even if just for three days.
Mr. and Mrs. Smith

Chapter Summary

Jen and Harry decide to label their relationship: ‘eventual friends with benefits’. Of course the part about seeing other people is not really sitting well with any of them. Jen then has lunch with an old friend of Harry's and ends up getting a lot more than she bargained for.

In the course of the following months, Harry and I went through three different stages. The first was called ‘nothing’.

After saying goodbye in Corsica, we knew it had to be over. So we enjoyed the three days we had there knowing it wouldn’t last. ‘Heaven’ had new meaning there - the Island of Beauty was our paradise and for three days, nothing else on earth mattered. Our universe was now within the island’s limits: our native tongue was Corso – similar to Tuscan - or French, our diet was entirely organic and made by the people of the island. It consisted of bread, a number of cheeses, ham from pigs who eat the native nuts that grew there.

We hiked about the Island, meeting Corse families that made farming their living and produced their own Olive Oil, or healing oils. They taught us their process and let us help and welcomed us into their homes, treating our visit as if we were the Pope and their house was blessed by our touch. When we looked into their eyes, and pleaded that they didn’t tell anyone they had seen us, they vowed not to – and we believed them.

We enjoyed ourselves, vowing not to talk about the future. And when we said goodbye, on Wednesday morning, we meant it. We considered it our detox by heavy exposure. “We’ll get so sick of each other that after three days, we’ll just let it go”

“We’ll always have Corsica,” we dramatized, jokingly and dreamily, and went our separate ways – Harry back home to London, and me to Sardegna – knowing we shouldn’t speak anymore.

I called Harry after the first week. “Just to let you know that I’m okay”, I justified to him and to myself. This time we didn’t talk for hours like before; we talked for maybe fifteen minutes, and quickly told ourselves we should hang up, “smart decisions!” we remembered.

But a week went by, and it happened again.

“I just wanted to know if you watched the season premiere of The Blacklist,” he told me.

“No,” I said. “I’ve barely had time to breathe. What happened?”

So he proceeded to narrate everything that happened in the episode, and we shared theories. That conversation lasted almost half an hour.

Then on the next week, he called again. “I saw a picture of you online,” he said, “a candid. You had a sore lip?! What happened?!”

As confusion took over, I thought about it. “Was I wearing a light blue dress?”
“White and blue, yes,” he said, and I laughed. “What?!”

“It was a set picture. I think it’s from when we filmed the fire scene, it’s gonna be the last scene in the movie. On the climax, there’s a fire in Elizabeth’s summer home in Sardegna when her father’s murderer finds her and tries to kill her. She gets hurt in the fire, so you must have seen a picture from when I was moving to or from that location”

“…so the sore wasn’t real?”

“No, it was makeup,” I smiled. “That’s cute… you were worried about me”

I could hear the embarrassment in his voice. “I just wanted to make sure your perfect lips were unharmed… for when I get to, you know… kiss them again”

I bit my lip – my ‘perfect’ lip – not even trying to contain how happy his words made me. “When?”, I asked. “Or if?”

“Color me an optimistic”, he teased. “When.”

I smiled. “Well, once you figure out the logistics of that, you let me know”

“I’m not the one working fifteen hours a day, Silva”, he said. “But if you let me know when you’re free, I’m sure we can plan another little holiday in some distant place the paparazzi won’t find us”

I took a deep breath, wondering if it would be possible. “What about smart choices?”

I heard his sigh on the phone. “That’s still the plan,” he justified. “But as long as we’re single and haven’t, you know, found the one…” he said in a tone of mockery.

“I mean…” I rationalized. “We’re just friends having fun, right?”

“Yes”, he agreed. “It’s casual. We’re just friends who enjoy traveling together to places paparazzi can’t find to have casual sex while we don’t find anyone who will actually fit our particular lifestyles”

I smiled. “Exactly”

“So…” he started. “When is your next few days off?”

I sighed. “That’s the problem. I don’t know”

“Well, let me know”

When I finally made the call to let him know, it had been another few weeks. We wrapped the movie in Italy, and as production started for the show, Netflix made the announcement and for that whole week it was people could talk about: Jen Silva’s return to the small screen – and also that Robert DeNiro would be playing a supporting character. In the same week Oscar de la Renta announced me as the new face of the brand, revealing a few of the photographs from the shoot in London.

I was in the cover of Vanity Fair talking about all my huge, exciting news, and all I could think about was taking a few days off so I could go bang my ex. I hated just the thought of it, but still I couldn’t pretend that’s not where I was at the moment.

After filming for one week in Chicago, I had to go fly to New York and Los Angeles, so before getting into the plane, I asked the producers if could have a couple of extra days for my traveling
troubles. They said yes.

So I picked up my phone and told Harry about this place I had discovered in Canada.

“What are you doing this weekend?” I asked, first, after the usual ‘what-have-you-been-up-tos’.

“I have to buy some pants”

I smiled, as I hadn’t been expecting such a mundane answer. “Can you maybe put that off a bit?”

“Is there an invitation somewhere in that question?”

“Well…” I started, smiling at my hotel ceiling, cuddling Vodka with one arm as the other held the phone. “Yes”

“I’m listening”

I sat up in the bed. “There’s this place… in Canada”

“Canada?”

“Yes. It’s…” I breathed in, eyes closed, seeing the beautiful picture in my mind, “Perfect. It’s in Alberta, I there’s this gigantic lake that looks like real life Photoshop. I have four days off next weekend and I’m going there to relax… It’s super remote, too, so being careful, chances are there won’t be any paparazzi anywhere near”

“No offense, but how did you even find this place?”

“To be honest, my only filter was somewhere remote enough that the paps wouldn’t find me”

“I like that”

“So…” I started, “If you’re not doing anything, I mean- I know you like nature. There’s some great hiking trails, from what I read… And I have an extra room in my cabin”

I hated having to dance around the fact that I simply wanted to see him. But I thought it would be safer, give him the chance to focus on the smart choices, and all that.

“I’m in”, I heard.

I rushed Eddy throughout the entire way from the airport to the lodge where we were staying. Finally, when he got sick of me, he stopped the rented car by the road and got out to let me drive, ‘since I seemed to think I could do such a better job anyway’. So I ran us through the roads until they became dirt roads and the vegetation became denser than the buildings, all while blasting the same song over and over.

“You took a polaroid of us, then discovered…”

“It doesn’t make much sense to play this song as we go into the woods,” Eddy noted.

“…The rest of the world was black and white…” I ignored him.

“I mean, the very title is Out of The Woods”

“and we were in screeaaaming color!” I shouted. “It’s awesome, it’s all that matters!” I said before going back to shouting the lyrics as loud as I could, enjoying the empty roads and the feeling of
Taylor had started releasing new songs from her upcoming new album, 1989, and I was excited ever since she had played it to me a couple of months before. “I just want the album to come out already, so I can listen to my favorites”

By the time I made a risky curve and parked in front of the shabby, wooden cabin in Alberta for us to check in, Eddy was shouting with me.

He did the check in as we had planned, going inside alone and using our aliases. For the purposes of this, I was his niece. After getting our keys, Mr. Stark – I’m unsure if it was because of Iron Man or Game of Thrones – made his way back to the rented car.

“Here you go, Mrs. Smith,” he told me, giving me my key. My name wasn’t as creative as his.

“If they assume I’m older it’ll be harder to recognize me”

“Well, manager wanted me to let you know that Mr. Smith has already checked in,” he gave me a cheeky grin.

I smiled as I started to drive down the path to our cabins.

I had been the one to make the reservations, and I hadn’t given them Harry’s name – for obvious reasons – merely telling them that the room was for a ‘Mrs. Smith +1’. I suppose it was a matter of logic for them that Harry would have been Mr. Smith.

Eddy carried my bag into the cabin and did a security sweep before going to his place. I stood in the tiny living room/kitchen deciding what to do.

When I walked into the room, slowly closing the door after me, his smell took me by surprise. It had been just a month since Corsica, but it almost physically hurt how much I missed him. I leaned in the door, savoring the moment, staring at his shape under the covers in the tiny double bed.

He moved, raising his head from under the pillow in a sleepy motion.

“Hey, you” he said. “I thought I heard someone”

He brushed his eyes as I walked over, crawling in to lay down beside him. “What time is it?”

“Just about one” I told him. “What time is it for you?”

He smiled with his eyes closed, “Eight in the morning”

He turned over to lay on his side looking at me. I did the same, trying to shut down all the voices in my head cringing with the awkward silence and asking ‘what now?!’.

“You look tired,” he noted.

“I had to shoot the same scene about eighty times today, all while wearing a smile on my face”

“You look beautiful”

I smiled. “You just said I looked tired”

“But you still look beautiful”
We stared at each other, smiling slightly in the dark. I raised a hand absentmindedly and fixed the collar of his shirt, which was backwards. He held onto it before I could retract it and my eyes met his again.

Deciding we were both too tired to pretend there wasn’t a single reason we were both there, we leaned forward together, and kissed.

His arm wrapped around my waist and dragged me closer; I kicked the covers down to pull them over me; Harry turned and laid on top of me, and I wrapped a leg in his, splattering my hands up his back under his shirt, scratching my nail down as his lips made their away around my neck. There was really nothing else I needed in that particular moment in time.

We spent day one in bed, mostly. We got out one time, to let the boys know we wouldn’t be doing anything. Then a second time to get food. Then a third time, at noon, to get more food. But the entire time other than that, the only concern we really had was inside the borders of our bed. The only focus was how could we touch each other in a way that was different than the previous time, or exactly the same; we only really wanted to be able to kiss every inch of each other’s skin because we knew our time was running out.

On the second day, we woke up at ten and put on our most comfortable outfits to set out for the hiking trail. Our cabin was a short distance away from Lake Louise, which was necessary because there a huge deluxe hotel by it where more than certainly there would be, if not a lot because it wasn’t tourist season, than, at least, some more people that where we were staying.

We walked holding hands; I didn’t remember holding Harry’s hands that much before. Maybe in New York, on our secret day out after our first date. And Corsica, definitely Corsica. But other than that, we usually just tried to give nothing for the paparazzi to make money out of. Still, there we were: hand-in-hand walking around Alberta’s charming little houses in empty streets, chatting excitedly, betting on who would be the first of us to ask for mercy as we trailed around the lake. Everyone’s money was on Clark, who wasn’t as athletic as the others. Louis, Harry’s protection officer I had had the least contact with, was, as they told me, a record holder in track from his days in ‘Uni’. Nathan and Harry were in the military, so they were used to training. Eddy was obsessed with crossfit and body-building (a trait that surprises those who are used to only talking to him about his love for R&B and literature). And me, well, I had been training pretty heavily for a while now for the New York Marathon, so as much as we knew Clark was gonna beg for mercy first, we were excited to see who would make it to the top as if it was no big deal.

Spoiler alert: it was me.

We traile up the mountain curves in a pretty consistent rhythm, and when the trail started going down and I spotted the little wooden deck, everyone sort of groaned with relief. We got Vodka out of her seat in those backpacks that are supposed to carry babies (Harry had carried her up) and let her familiarize with the place. I had fun by making Harry worried by trying to stand on the deck’s grail for an Instagram shot. Then we made the way back and ate at the Château’s restaurant, enjoying the fact that it was a lot emptier than we had thought it would be.

After lunch we walked slowly until the canoe rental cabin and sailed until as far as we could reach.

I shot a video of Vodka walking from side to side of the canoe, confused by what exactly was happening, and took a picture of my feet up the boat with the big mountains as background – I was being careful not to take pictures of Harry, when he took the phone from me.

“Let’s take a picture of us,” he said.
“You’ sure?” I asked, knowing he was very distrusting in technology, especially after Phonegate.

“Yes,” he replied. “You won’t post it, right?”

“No.” I told him, so he hugged me by the waist and put the phone up. “Wait!”

I leaned in and picked V from where she was sniffing the water under the canoe and held her in my lap so she would be in the picture too.

“That looks good,” Harry said with a smile.

“You’re arms are long, we can even see the water!” I agreed.

He turned my phone to look at my case (it read ‘mentally somewhere else’). He gave me an inquisitive look as he gave it back to me.

“Here!” I said. “I was constantly mentally here since I saw the picture of this lake and now I’m here! Can you believe it?!” I opened my arms widely, realizing at that moment I was exactly at the place where the picture I had seen had been taken.

I got up and took my crop-hoodie off. Harry looked around, concerned someone would see me in my bra as I was already taking my pants and snickers off.

“Uh, Jen?” he called. “Please, don’t-“

It was too late for, after allowing myself one second to realize how cold it would be, I jumped in headfirst into the turquoise waters of Lake Louise. I was right, the water was freezing as it was fall. I gasped loudly as I came back up for air.

“Oh, my God!” I said, instantly hearing the commotion I had left in the surface.

“Jenifer!” Eddy was yelling as he took his hoodie off, ready to jump after me. “What the hell?!”

“Stay where you are, Edgar, I’m fine!”

Vodka was barking, Harry was laughing.

“Join me, Mr. Prince?”

“Oh, hell, no!” he said. “I respect your life choices, but there is no way I’m jumping in there”

“Lame”, I said, as I swam on my back slowly back to the canoe. “Live a little, Mr. Prince. There’s no paparazzi around”

“It’s not what I’m worried about,” he said. “It’s the fact that your skin is turning blue”

I laughed as I straightened up, holding onto the canoe trying to get back in. Harry held onto one side and pulled me up by my waist.

Vodka barked, concerned, and starter licking the water dripping from my legs.

“Okay, I’ll give you that,” I said, as I quickly put my hoodie back on, “I’m freezing”

“At least now we’ve got answers for an ages old question.” I looked at him.

“Which one?”
“Remember in London, as we sat by the Thames, and you wondered if the lads would jump in after us if we fell?”

A smiled took over me as I remembered the night before our very first real kiss. “Oh, yeah!”

“Eddy was frustratingly ready to jump after you.” We laughed.

“I can hear you!” Eddy shouted from the canoe he shared with Nate at a distance.

On day three, we woke up early and took a hiking trail with a professional guide. We packed water and snacks since the trail up and down was supposed to take most of the day, as it did. He took us up the mountain until we had to be wired to the rock wall to reach a point to observe the view, sitting in a rock formation that resembled a cave as we saw the entire lake Louise downward; we could see the Château, the woods, the mountains around, and part of the town. We stood bestowing the breathtaking view for as long as we could – I sat between his legs as he held my waist -, taking pictures and enjoying ourselves until it was time to hike back down.

Then we had dinner, and Harry and I snuck into bed early, wanting to enjoy ourselves as much as we could knowing I had to leave the next day. Next day was the forth, my last day off, so I had to go to New York as I had to shoot the day next day afterwards.

“You cut your hair,” Harry commented, in the middle of the night as we snuggled - our nude bodies warming one another under the covers.

I smiled. “No, I didn’t”

“Yes, you did,” he insisted. “I first noticed it in Corsica, but I didn’t mention it”

I smiled. I had thought he meant that I had cut my hair since Corsica, which I hadn’t, but I had cut it since last year. It would make sense that he only noticed in Corsica, too, because that’s the first time he saw me with my hair down after the year we spent apart.

“I cut it for the movie. Leah.” I told him.

“I used to do this in New York,” he said, sliding his fingers through my hair from my scalp slowly all the way to the ends, “and before my hand would go all the way down to almost your waist. Now it stops here” he touched my middle-back.

I smiled wider, at how his memory worked, and hugged him tighter as I sighed.

I remembered something else he had said after sex, in Corsica – the first time we slept together after a year.

“You have a new tattoo,” he had said, with a naughty smile on his lips.

“Do you like it?” I asked, impressed he managed to see it in the dark.

“I like where it is.” he mentioned, before leaning on top of me to give me a trail of kisses from my neck until my breasts, stopping under my left boob. I smiled. “What does it say?”

“Unapologetic.” I told him. “Something I’m trying to learn to be… how did you see it in the dark?”

“I know you.” He said, simply. “Over the last few months, I’ve recalled every inch of your body when I missed you… I missed you a lot.”

Now, in Canada, he surprised me again.
“Harry,” I started. “I don’t want to say goodbye”

He leaned away from me, just enough so he could look at me better. “Then don’t!”

“You know is not that easy.”

“Ohay,” he sat up. “Here’s an idea. Pay attention, because I’ve been thinking about this a lot, and I
think it could really work. Ready?” I smiled at his anxiousness. “How about we just… keep
meeting? We ended things last year because we couldn’t see each other. Remember? You had to go
away for work, and we could only see each other for, like, two weeks two months after that. And
you didn’t want a long distance relationship.”

“I still don’t.” I said.

“Okay. But what if we keep on being what we are being right now?”

“What are we right now?” I asked. “Because you know we’re nothing. Right? We’re not in a
relationship”

“I know,” he justified, “we’re… eventual friends with benefits.”

I smiled, trying to hold in a laughter. “Eventual friends with benefits?”

“Yes. We could keep on being that. But, this way, we wouldn’t have to say goodbye and pretend
we don’t want to see each other again. We could just go about our lives and keep texting and
talking, as we do, and when we know when our next day off is, we can plan another trip to some
place like this: remote, with no paparazzi. At the same time we would be spending time together,
and getting you to see the world, which you’re crazy to do anyway.”

“But…” I started. “When we go home… When we’re not together. Then we keep in mind that we
are not in a relationship, right? We’re seeing other people and moving on… right?”

Harry sighed. “Right.”

“And you think you could handle that?” he looked offended. “Harry, you were the one who was
willing to do the long-distance thing. I’m just saying, I need to know that you are aware that if we
do this, we are still seeing other people. We’re just… friends who have fun together from time to
time at different parts of the world… Can you be on board with that?”

He laid down again, climbing on top of me, and traced my eyebrows with his fingers, delicately
drawing my jawline.

“Yes.” He said.

I smiled.

“So what do you say, Silva? Are we eventual friends with benefits?”

I laughed.

And that’s how Harry and I hit stage number two on our relationship: eventual friends with
benefits.

We took our cellphones out and checked out next coinciding days off.

“You have all these free days in just two weeks!”
“No, I’ll be in New York all that week shooting for the show first, then running the marathon, then I’ll join the Victoria’s Secret team and fly to London for the taping of the runway show.”

“Oh.”

“I suppose I could try and sneak out to see you since I’m gonna be there”

“That could work. But you’ll have a bunch of paparazzi on you, won’t you?” I made a sad face. “What about these days here? The week after Victoria’s Secret?”

“Governor’s Awards in L.A.” I hated to burst his bubble like that. But he needed to know the reality of this before we jumped into it. “Harry, are you sure you can handle this?”

“Yes!” he gave me a smile. “Here, how about this?”

“That’s thanksgiving.” I said. “I always go to Richard’s family for thanksgiving. They live in this farm in the middle of nowhere, and it’s just this all-American experience, you know?” he nodded, giving me a sad smile. “You know what? Let’s go somewhere”

“Are you sure? What about Richard?”

“I’ll deal with him”

“Are you gonna tell him you’ll be with me?”

I scorned. “God, no. Harry,” I stared at him, serious, “nobody can know! Do you understand that? If people find out, it’s gonna be a matter of time before everyone finds out, and you know what happens next!”

“They’re gonna say we’re getting married or something”

“Yes. Tabloids don’t understand the term ‘eventual friends with benefits’”

“Okay, okay… But the boys will have to know, the security, I mean. I’ll just make something up for the others.”

“…are you sure you can handle this?”

He looked offended. “Don’t you remember I pretended to be in love with you for months before I was actually in love with you?”

I looked down at my phone, feeling a weight in my chest. “That’s it,” I said as I got on my knees, sitting up so he knew I meant what I said next. “I’m laying down the ground rules. Are you ready for this?” he nodded. “Rule number one, nobody can know!” he nodded, smiling at my ‘plan mode’, as he called it. “Rule number two, this is not a relationship. We will not talk about the future. We are not exclusive. We are seeing other people.”

“I got it! Moving on!” he laughed. “What’s rule number three?”

“We always use fake names, wherever we go. And we always arrive separately”

He nodded, way too serious, so I knew he was mocking me now. “I’m serious, Harry!”

“Me too!” he smiled. “And sssshhh, in here I’m Mr. Smith!” I chuckled. “And you are Mrs. Smith.” He went on. “Should the guys have aliases too?”
Biting my lip to try and be serious again, I slapped him slightly so he’d shut up. “Rule number four…” I sighed. “No ‘L’ word.”

His smile disappeared. I saw him gulp and stare at the ceiling before he said anything.

“Okay.” He said, finally.

“That’s… very important.”

He sat up. “Okay.”

“Are you sure?”

He sighed, before giving me a sad smile. “Yes.”

I took a deep breath, and opened my travel bookmarks. “So, Mr. Smith… Where should we go on thanksgiving?”

My monochromatic outfit for the lunch date was broken only by my small, white leather backpack and light brown jacket, other than that, I was all in pale pink from my Paul Andrew flats, jeans and peplum top and even my cat-eye sunglasses. I’m not ashamed to admit it: I wanted to impress Elizabeth Wilson-Pelly.

This only the second time I’d be seeing her after we had met in Harry’s 30th birthday party in London about a month before. Liz had introduced herself to the man who was bugging me as a friend even though I had no idea who she was. Then she turned to me and said something to scare him away - one mention of the word ‘vagina’ and she had Thomas Van Straubenzee running for the hills cringing.

Straubenzee had been trying to intimidate me and, as someone who had once been the new girl threatening the stability of their tight circle of posh childhood friends, she decided to come into my rescue. Good timing, too, because as he was telling me about their ‘blue blooded and blonde’ upbringing, I was starting to have problems keeping composure as I thought of different ways to tell Straubenzee to shove his aristocracy up his ass.

“Let me know next time you’re in the city so we can grab drinks”, Elizabeth had said as she left that night.

Now there I was. Eddy opened the door of our town car and I stepped out. The fast clicking sound that seemed to be the new soundtrack to my life came up in full speed. The flashes made Tribeca at one in the afternoon look like a dance club.

“Jenifer, over here!”

“Jenifer, how are you?”

“Jenifer, are you having lunch with the princess?”

“Jenifer, smile! Smile, Jenifer!”

“Jenifer, are you really running the New York Marathon?!”

“Jenifer, SMILE!”

I didn’t smile – just out of spite of their annoyance. Eddy cleared a path for me and the valet of the restaurant helped him keep the paparazzi at a safe distance. I made a mental note to give him a
good tip.

I took my sunglasses off as I stepped in, giving the hostess a polite smile that she happily returned.

“Silva?” I asked.

A waiter was passing by right at this moment. “Of course. Oh, Curtis!” she called him. “This is your waiter, ma’am, he’ll take you to your table. Your friends are here already.”

“Thank you” I smiled at her, thinking it was weird she used the plural when the only person joining me was Liz, and at Curtis, who lead me through the linen covered tables.

“I’ll be by the bar.” Eddy told me.

I stopped walking as soon as I saw the table where Liz was waiting for me, quickly turning around so she wouldn’t see me. I started googling something on my phone.

“Ma’am?” Curtis asked. “Is everything okay?”

“What happened?” Eddy wondered.

“Curtis,” I started after my google search revealed I was right about my suspicions. “Can you keep a secret?” I asked, tenderly. Curtis nodded very carefully. “Good. This is how this is gonna go. When we get there, I’m gonna order a glass of Chardonnay. What you are gonna go is serve me a glass of Chardonnay mixed with a shot of vodka. Do you think you can handle that?”

“Ye-yes, ma’am” he stuttered. Something told me Curtis might have been new at this job.

“Good. Now, what are you gonna do when I order Chardonnay?” I asked, didactically.

“Give you the wine mixed with vodka,” He repeated. “Ma’am.”

By my side, Eddy giggled slightly as he continued his way to the bar.

“Good job” I told Curtis. “This is for your troubles. There’s more where it came from”

Discretely pressing a fifty-dollar bill in his hand, I took in a deep breath and smiled, turning around and walking towards the corner table in the back, one of the best, with a lot of privacy.

Sitting by Elizabeth’s both sides there were her husband, Guy, and their friend, none other than Her Royal Highness Princess Eugenie of York.

I tried to pretend the idea of having lunch with all of them didn’t make my stomach hurt.

“Jenifer!” Liz smiled, standing up to greet me.

“Hi!” I smiled, hugging her. “It’s been so long, how have you been?”

“I’m fine, thank you,” she said, before turning to the man beside her. “This is Guy, my husband”

“Hello” As he stood up, I gave Guy my most charming smile. “I’m Jenifer”

He was tall, and had those rosy cheeks that Harry had too – I was beginning to understand it might have been a British thing. His cheeks were also full and round, much like his nose, but his blue eyes made up for it just like his dirty blond hair.
“Of course,” he said, “we didn’t get the chance to meet in Harry’s bash last month, but I have heard quite a bunch about you. It’s nice to meet you”

“And Jenifer, this is Eugenie York”

Eugenie had a good face. I don’t know how else to describe it, but being in this business for so long you start to notice certain things, and she had them all. She had a good bone structure, big green eyes and the kind of perfect nose celebrities paid a lot of money for. Under her makeup it was almost impossible to notice, but I could tell she had some freckles, and her straight, dark brown hair shaped around her face smoothly softening her round cheeks. A mixture of girl-next-door with the kind of newscaster you just know speaks with authority in whatever it is they talk about.

“Nice to meet you” Eugenie didn’t stand up to greet me, although I suppose that’s more of a gentleman’s job where they come from, so I held her hand as I sat down in the comfy, large chair Curtis was still holding out for me.

“You too,” I said, taking off my jacket and placing my backpack down on the floor next to my feet.

“Do you want to order your drinks now, ma’am?” Curtis asked, diligently.

“Some ice water and Chardonnay, please, Curtis.”

He smiled, taking a bow, and left us.

I only had about one second while I thought I should avoid talking about Harry at all costs before my mind said ‘fuck it’.

“Have we met?” I asked Eugenie. “No, right? You weren’t at Balmoral when I was there last year, were you?”

“No” she said. “But I did hear quite a bit of you”

“That’s right” Guy mentioned, “you’ve met Harry’s family”

“A few of them”, I nodded. “In this lovely place in Scotland. They took me hunting, which was, at least, a little bit out of my comfort zone”

They smiled.

“God, I remember my first time hunting!” Liz added, “that’s about the time I decided I was a vegetarian”

We laughed, and for the next half an hour as we ate our food, the conversation went on to better topics. We covered their visit to New York (Liz was here at work, and Guy had come for company), Eugenie’s adaptation to the city (she was working here) and even how much money I made.

“I don’t want to be indiscrete” Guy said, “but I was wondering, isn’t the movie industry more profitable? Or even just TV? And yet you went to Netflix. It doesn’t sound like a financially smart move”

“Well,” I sighed, “in a way, yes. Movies will always be more profitable if you take into consideration that they are made in less time, but there are other factors. For instance, in my last year in my TV show, The Mediator, I was making almost 400k”
“Per year?” he asked.

“No, per episode.”

The effect of that on the table was immediate. Eugenie dropped her arm in the table and looked at me in shock. Guy had his mouth opened, and his wife almost choked on her mojito.

“Tha-that’s almo- how many episodes in a year?” he asked.

“About twenty five”

I could see his eyes drift around as he made the math in his head.

“And how much money do you-“ Liz got interrupted by her husband.

“That’s almost ten million dollars!”

I smiled. “Yes. You were saying?”

“How much money do you make on movies?”

“About the same thing” I told them, “But movies are usually done in three to five months, as shows take a lot longer… And you were right, Netflix, in that case, isn’t worth it. For instance, in this first season of this show I’m shooting now I’m being paid for the whole show, not per episode. I’m making five million, more interest, for five months of work”

“That’s a million dollars a month.” Eugenie added.

“Yes,” I nodded, “but in Netflix we’re shooting two or three episodes a month. In TV we shoot four every month. In a way, I prefer Netflix for the quality. They really worry about the narrative, instead of making filler episodes to extend a season, which gets everyone more money”

“You must be a billionaire by now” Guy said, in disbelief.

I laughed, not feeling like telling him I was. Guy didn’t seem to grasp the concept that someone who hadn’t been born in the same circles as him could be richer than he was. It was like he knew celebrities had money, but had just realized exactly how much.

And then, of course, as I was trying to get into my chocolate cheesecake, came the topic I was almost sure we could end this lunch without.

“So, Jenifer…” Liz started, “have you talked to Harry lately?”

I looked up. “Well… you know… we text sometimes, nothing much, just catching up”

We were also together not even a week ago.

“Why did you guys break up anyway?”

I took in a deep breath. Eugenie and Guy looked at me as if they knew the answer, but Liz seemed to be genuinely curious. “Distance. Timing. Whatever.” I shrugged.

“How come?”

“Oh, you know… He’s there. I’m… everywhere, all the time. It doesn’t work.”
“Timing is a bitch.” She nodded.

“You mean if you lived in the same city you would still be together?” Eugenie asked.

I wasn’t sure how much I wanted to let them know, considering as far as I knew Eugenie had been the one to introduce Harry to his latest girlfriend, that I fondly referred to as Fake Tan.

“I mean… I don’t know. Maybe.” I stared at my cheesecake. “I mean, he’s great. I really care for him, I wanna see him well.”

“But?” Liz wondered.

“No buts.”

Guy said, “Really? All his exes had buts. I’d know, I’ve met quite a few of them.”

I shrugged. “No buts for me.”

“Not even his tittle?” Liz asked. “The pressure? The tabloids? I mean, sorry, Genie, is this an awkward topic?”

Eugenie shook her head. “No, I’m curious too”

“Well, that sort of thing is already in my life.” I told them. “Harry intensified it, yes, but it would have happened anyway, especially with the Oscar… So…” I shrugged again, which seemed to summarize how I felt about the topic.

“This sucks.” Liz said.

Guy still looked at me with a weirdly mysterious grin on his lips.

“Yeah.” I agreed.

“Really?” Eugenie started, “I mean, no offense, but I heard about the weekend you spent in Balmoral. You can’t tell me that wasn’t a deal breaker for you.”

I giggled. “Harry would be the first to tell you my family isn’t exactly perfect either.”

“And you sincerely were attracted to him? I mean, come on, ladies, you have to admit Harry isn’t the shiniest toy in the playground.”

I laughed. “Speak for yourself. I find him very cute.”

“So, you also didn’t break up with him for his looks?” he sounded shocked, making me laugh some more.

“Guys, look at me.” I said, and looked at Eugenie. “Do you really see your family ever letting me in?”

She looked away.

“Oh, that means nothing”, Liz said.

“No, she’s right.” Eugenie told her, and even though that was my point, my heart ached a little.

“You know,” Liz said, “I can introduce you to one of my friends. I know so many bachelors that
would be well worth your time"

“Oh. Don’t worry about-“

“No, it’ll be no problem at all. I mean, none of them are making as much money as you are, but they’re still doing good, considering”

“No, really-“

“Oh, my God!” Genie said, looking at her, excited. “Tod!”

They gasped together, smiling. “Of course, Tod!”

“You know what?” Guy said. “Tod is a lot better looking than Harry! There, I said it.”

“Guys, really, there’s no need”

“No, please, let me!” Liz begged. “I mean, I feel sorry for you.”

“For me?” I asked. “I’m doing great!”

“No, for both of you.” She said. “Still hanging on to each other like that…”

“We’re not- I’m not- wait, is he?” I stuttered. “What do you mean?”

“I’m just saying, don’t you want to find someone new?”

“Well,” I thought about Harry, and our goodbyes in Alberta, and the promise we would start making those smart decisions now. “That’s the deal. I mean, the plan.”

“So… let me introduce you to our friend Tod. He’s making a ton of money with this app he developed about marketing, or something.”

“You know… I’m really fine just enjoying myself. And I’m working a lot, so I don’t really have time for dating right now.”

“But what about Chris Pine?” she asked, making me smile.

“That was just a rumor,” I said, “sadly.”

Liz finally let it go, and then, since she and Eugenie weren’t having dessert, they decided to go reapply their lipstick in the toilet and excused themselves.

I enjoyed the quiet to finally eat my desert and try to numb the awkwardness with the chocolate. Guy was still watching me.

“So, what did Harry say when you told him you were meeting Liz for lunch?” he asked.

“Why would I have told him?” I asked, maybe a bit too defensive. “I mean, is not like we text every day.” That was precisely what we did.

“So, you also weren’t with him on Canada last week?”

I dropped my fork on the plate. I chewed my cheesecake very slowly trying to practice my denial in my head, making a very confused face.

“I don’t know what you mean”
He sighed. “You’re not a very good liar.”

“Tell that to my Oscar.” I said.

“Look, Harry told me. I get it. You’re still seeing each other. That’s why you don’t want to go on a date with Tod.”

I couldn’t believe Harry couldn’t just keep his goddamn mouth shut. “Listen,” I started, in a whisper, looking around to make sure no one could hear us, “it’s nothing. It’s not like we’re exclusive, or anything. We’re not in a relationship, he’s not my boyfriend. I could go on dates if I wanted to, I just don’t-“

I was ready to remind him he couldn’t tell anyone, when I noticed how much wider his smiled had gotten.

“Okay, this is brilliant. I had actually no idea you were actually seeing each other,” he said. “I just told that to see if you’d own up to it. Oh, man, this is great. I knew he was hiding something when Harry didn’t want to tell what he was going to do in Canada in the middle of October!”

I couldn’t believe the words I was hearing. “What?!”

“Don’t worry, I won’t tell anyone.” He reassured. “God, this is great!” he laughed. “So, what- what is it, like- are you two just fuck buddies?”

I tightened the grip on my fork. “It’s none of your business.”

“Wow, okay.” He raised his hands up.

I grabbed my phone and typed a text under the table just to avoid looking at him.

‘SO. NEWSFLASH. GUY PELLY KNOWS.’, I sent it to Harry.

“You know, Jenifer, I’m going to give you some advice now, because I genuinely think you’re a nice girl, and I appreciate the fact you hold no grudges against my mate.” I looked at him, anger in my expression. “Move on.”

I laughed, bitter. “Right. Okay. Thanks. Now all my problems are solved.”

“I mean it,” he added. “If you don’t move on, he’s not going to, and if you are resolved that this can’t go anywhere, then let him go.”

He was only making me angrier.

“I have let go.” I said. “This is… this is nothing! We’re just having fun- we’re, we- we’re single and-“

“Oh, please” he shook his head. “It’s in the way you smile when you talk about him. It’s in the way that he sighs when we ask about you, or suggest that we go see a movie that you’re in, or mention your name in any capacity.” He leaned in the table to look at me. “He wants to be with you and he can’t, so of course he’ll try to be with you in any sort of, casual, fun way”, he quoted me. “But we both know he wants more. And if you can’t give him that, just let him go.”

It was official: I hated snobbish, money hungry, meddling jerk Guy Pelly. I was so mad that I refrained from speaking anything else afraid I might yell at him. Or storm out. I was so mad that when the girls came back to their seats, I decided to show him just how much I had let Harry go.
“I’ve reconsidered.” I told Liz. “I’d love to go on a date with your friend Tod who created an app.”

She smiled. “Really? What made you change your mind?”

“Your husband,” I told her, “he helped me realize there’s no reason I shouldn’t move on.”

So that’s how I ended up having a date for the very next day, which happened to be a Sunday. The Sunday night Taylor’s album was supposed to drop, which is why I was staying at Richard’s apartment instead of hers, that was a little chaotic at the moment – I sold my condo after Harry moved out of the building, too many memories.

The only problem?

Harry was standing right next to me, watching me get ready.
“So… I don’t want you to think otherwise, I’m so happy you’re here,” I said, as I left the shower to find Harry playing catch with an overexcited Vodka over the floor of Richard’s guest bedroom.

“Why would I think otherwise?” he asked.

“Well, is just that I do have a thing tonight, and I should actually start getting ready…” I said, sounding as excited about it as I would be to be going to a promo day for work. Which is not excited at all, promo days are the worst!

“Oh…”

“I mean, I didn’t know you were coming! Otherwise I would have cancelled.”

Sad thing is? I really would. I was pathetic like that. I had talked myself into this date, but if I had known that Harry would have arrived at my door by surprise on Sunday morning I would have made sure that I was free to spend as much time with him as I possibly could. Especially because he had to fly back Monday morning.

“You flew ten hours just to see me for a day?!” I had asked, shocked, after I opened the door for him that morning.

“I missed New York.” He had replied, simply, with a small shrug.

“But Harry…” I said. “That’s insane. And you can’t even actually see New York, because if you go out the paparazzi might see you!”

There wasn’t any paparazzi at the entrance of Richard’s apartment because the paparazzi didn’t know where that was – or that I was staying there. Sure, they knew my old address, the building Harry and I shared when he lived here, but since I sold that one, the paparazzi only ever found me around town, or in Taylor’s place. But Richard’s was in Brooklyn, almost Long Island, so it was private enough. And since Harry flew in in a private jet and came wearing a hat and ducking in the car so no one would see him, he managed to get here without being spotted – which he explained to me when I told him he couldn’t go out to see the city again.

“To be fair,” he said, “when I say I missed New York, I really just mean I missed you.”

I sighed, feeling my insides swirl in warmth.

At this point in the conversation, I just wrapped my arms around his waist and ended the unnecessary amount of distance between my mouth and his and then we spent the entire day inside, keeping ourselves entertained.

Until came the evening and I had to get ready… for my date.
“It’s okay,” Harry said. “I’ll just wait for you here.”

I hadn’t actually told him I was going on a date.

“I might take a while…” I said as I put my leg up on the bed and started moisturizing.

Harry’s eyes followed my moves in lust. “It’s okay… I like to watch you get ready.”

I smiled as he made himself comfortable in the bed, turning to me, and not looking like he intended to stop watching.

About half an hour later, I walked around selecting outfits after putting on my makeup as Harry occupied himself on my computer. He had opened my iTunes library and was currently mocking my music taste, which is always a delightful way of spending time – said no one ever.

“I mean, look at this,” he dramatized, “this song is so old and tacky!”

Bruno Mars’ ‘Just The Way You Are’ started playing.

“How dare you?! I dramatized. “Old, fine - said the classic rock fan!”

“Guilty.” He mumbled.

“…but tacky?!”

“Come on,” he pleaded, “it’s pretty tacky! Also, look at these lyrics; this is the type of over-romantic crap that doesn’t even make sense.”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about, you cold hearted old man, you-“

“He says that every time this girl asks him if she looks okay, he answers with: when I see your face,” he recited, as I put on black tights, “there’s not a thing that I would change. Girl, you’re amazing just the way you are.”

“Beautiful.” I commented.

“Yes, but, Jenny, every time this girl asks if she looks okay he would say that”, he walked after me in the closet, “It’s like he never had a girlfriend. Does he know how many times women ask that? Every time they’re going out. Every. Time.”

“So? He’s a romantic!”

“Sometimes all a person needs it’s an honest opinion, not a reaffirmation of self-love. Does this makes me look fat? No. No need for a speech.”

I laughed, zipping my dress up and picking the boots from my unmade bag in the corner of the closet.

Harry had expressed his confusion over my room when he arrived.

“I mean, it’s a guest bedroom,” he said, “And it is not only huge, it has a huge walk-in closet too.”

“Richard can be very pretentious when it comes to real state,” I told him, “…and everything else, really.”

“Okay, what do you think?” I asked after putting on the boots, when he sat down in the bench on
the makeup table watching me dress.

I was wearing a little black Balmain dress with black pattern tights and ankle black boots. I also had a black clutch, courtesy of Oscar de la Renta, and a black leather jacket, a perfect Manhattan look.

“Jen…” Harry said after a small sigh when he looked me up and down. “…when I see your face,” he cited, serious, “there’s not a thing that I would change.”

I laughed.

“Girl, you’re amazing.” He continued, with the most serious expression I had ever seen in his face, “Just the way you are!”

I stared at him, a contradicted smile on my lips. “Are you done? Seriously, is this okay? Do you think I’ll be cold?”

“When I see your faaaaace!” he sang, at full lungs, not caring how high and out of tune his voice came out. “There’s not a thing that I would change! Because you’re amazing-”

Laughing and rolling my eyes, I went to grab a bracelet and a pair of earrings as he went on.

“Just the way you are!”

We smiled at each other.

Harry stood up, coming to stand right before me as I finished putting on my earrings. His hands found my hips as he brought me closer.

“You look beautiful.” He smiled, before giving the tip of my nose a delicate kiss.

I wrapped my arms around his shoulders and touched his cheek with mine, closing my eyes.

 “…and I wish you could stay”, he went on.

I wished my date was him.

Sighing, I took a step back and gave him my bracelet and my arm, so he could put it on my wrist for me.

“Where are you going, anyway?”

I took in a deep breath, and tried to make it sound as common as I could. “Well, I’m not sure”

“How are you not sure?”

“Well, Liz sort of introduced me to this guy… ‘Introduced’ is the wrong word. She gave him my number just yesterday”

“So…” he started, sounding a lot less upbeat than just ten seconds before. “…it’s a date?”

I was silent, trying to think of a better name for it as I made sure the bracelet was loose enough and started brushing my hair, “It’s more of a get-to-know-each-other kinda thing”

 “… so, a date.”
“Well…” I sighed. Turning to face him, who had his arms crossed on his chest looking upset, I opted for honesty. “That’s the plan, right?” he blinked. “We said we’d try to find other people…”

“Right.”

He definitely sounded upset now, but didn’t say anything about it.

I didn’t want to appear rude, although I didn’t feel good about going on a date as my ‘eventual friend with benefits’ stood there watching me leave. Especially because I so obviously wanted to be with him. Still, and especially after my conversation with Guy on the previous day, I felt it was important to reinforce the exact nature of our relationship.

“I mean, we’re not in a relationship.” I said, brushing my hair more furiously as I got nervous. “We said we were seeing other people-”

“Jen,” he stopped me. “I’m not saying anything.”

He really wasn’t. Although he looked upset and sounded upset, he wasn’t calling me a cheater or accusing me of anything.

I laid my hairbrush on the makeup table, taking the bench out of the way, and stared in the mirror trying to convince myself I wasn’t doing anything wrong.

I sprayed my hair with something my hairstylist had recommended, for shine and frizz control.

As I decided I was ready, I felt his hands slowly touching my waist, rounding it until he was holding me from behind. He rested his forehead on the back of my head, smelling my hair.

He got my hair out of the way, and stroked the skin on my neck with his lips delicately, making a wave of chills go from there to my legs and back. His hands hovered around me, and I turned around slowly so he could kiss me, but he didn’t. He kept on kissing my neck, delicately biting my earlobe. His hand found my breast and a gentle squeeze had me sighing in frustration.

I turned my head to him, going in for a kiss, but he leaned back just slightly.

“Stay.” He asked, in a whisper, his breath stroking my lips.

I sighed. Harry leaned down, so his hands could find the end of my dress and pull it up just above my waist, his hands splattered on my thighs pressing me strongly in the way up to right before my ass, when he picked me up and sat me on the makeup table. His hands slid down my skin to my knees and opened my legs, that I wrapped around him, bringing him closer than before.

He pressed my breast again. I wanted him to kiss me. I wanted him to kiss my breast. I wanted his tongue on mine and I wanted the bulge in his pants, that I could feel pressed against me, to be actually in me.

I got a grip on his hair, and scratched his naked back.

“Stay.” He pleaded, soft, but more desperate now.

I wanted to, I really did. But I couldn’t. So knowing if I didn’t stop then I would not be able to bring myself to do it later, I told the truth.

“I can’t.” Pushing him ever so slightly away, I took in a deep breath. “You know that.”

Harry sighed, running a hand through his hair; he took two steps back and I enjoyed the distance to
get myself together, pulling my dress back down and making sure my hair still looked fine.

I picked a Kleenex to swipe the sweat from the back of my neck.

Harry walked out of the closet, and I followed to go brush my teeth in the bathroom.

I heard him cough to clean his throat, and then speak again in a laid-back voice, trying to sound casual. “All I’m saying is, if you stay, you know you’re gonna have a good time,” he teased. I smiled, glad. “But how do you even know if this is gonna be a good date?”

I didn’t.

“I guess I’m trusting Liz.” I told him, after spilling toothpaste. “And Eugenie.”

“Eugenie wouldn’t know boyfriend material if it bit her in the face.”

I giggled. “And you would?”

“Well, I know Tod certainly isn’t.” he said. “I mean, he’s too eager. Desperate, I don’t know. He-“ he sighed. “Well, okay, he’s quite a decent guy, actually, but you still deserve better.”

I walked back into the room, confused. “How do you know his name?”

Harry raised his head to me. “…what?”

“My date. Tod. I didn’t tell you his name. How do you know?”

I could almost see the engines in his brain working full-steam on an answer, but I already had mine and I didn’t like it.

“Guy told you.”

Harry sighed, closing his eyes.

“Yesterday, after I sent you the text telling you that he knew… did you talk to him?”

“Yeah,” he nodded. “I called later to tell him to keep his mouth shut, I told you-“

“He told you Liz was setting me up with someone.” I realized. “With Tod.”

Harry’s silence was the only answer I needed, but then after a while he said, “kind of.”

“Oh, my God.” I laughed, humorless. “I can’t believe you! You were letting me feel bad about this, when you actually flew ten hours to get here just out of jealousy!”

“Harry, please. You didn’t respect our rules!”

“Your rules!” he said. “Yours! And I did respect them! I’m not telling you that you can’t go! I’m helping you get ready and everything-“

“You came here just because you knew I was going on a date!” I said. “That’s not being accepting of the fact that we are seeing other people!”

“I’m accepting it.” he said, teeth clenched together. “I’m very accepting!”
“Then why did you come?!”

“I’m sorry if I wanted to see you—“

“Bullshit! You only decided to come after you knew I was going out with someone else! You came because you were jealous!”

“What if I were, Jenifer?!” He shouted. “What if I’m a human being with human emotions—“

“Oh, God. I knew you couldn’t deal with this—“

“Yeah.” He said, sarcastic. “I’m the one being unreasonable.”

“How am I being unreasonable?!”

“You’re getting ready for a date in front of me!”

I laughed, nervous. “You literally just told me you were fine with this!”

“Because I’m trying to be mature about this!” I laughed harder. “I’m trying to be an adult and, and—follow your stupid rules—“

“Now they’re stupid?!”

“That’s not what I meant and you know it!”

Somewhere in the corner of my eyes I saw Vodka leaving the bedroom with her chew toy, the tension and yelling being too much for her.


I went back to the closet, picking my salmon lipstick and applying it gently to try and calm down, finishing up my makeup.

I picked my bag and walked back in the room fishing everything I would need, like my wallet and cellphone.

“Jen?” I heard Eddy’s voice from the living room. “Doorman called, your, uh… date is here?”

He sounded unsure the word ‘date’ was appropriate considering who he thought was the love of my life was already standing right in front of me.

Sighing, I made my way out. “I’ll see you later.” I said, stopping quickly in the door.

I was almost in the door when I realized I forgot my jacket.

Harry was walking into the hall when I came back, my jacket in hands.

He raised it for me, and I grabbed it.

We were silent for a while, then I tiptoed up and placed a kiss in his cheek, and, giving him a sad smile, I turned around and left.

“Are we gonna talk about this?”

“Shut up, Eddy.”
The elevator door’s opened, and I walked out of the building and up to the tall, handsome man leaning against a silver Porsche outside.

As it turns out, Tod Richmond isn’t British. He knows Liz from a science summer camp they both attended growing up – I made a mental reminder to tease Liz about nerd camp. His southern accent was a lot stronger than hers, he had a CalTech degree and a masters from MIT. He came up with his app – that he did try to explain to me for a good half an hour before giving up – when he was on MIT and later sold it to Yahoo! for a good amount of money, but he still worked there, though he mostly enjoyed investing in new businesses now, such as clubs. After dinner, he took me to one of the clubs he partially owned.

The perfect date he planned had three problems: one, he took me to an expensive Manhattan restaurant called Nobu. The problem was not only was I an old client there, a lot of celebrities were, which meant there was always a good amount of paparazzi by the door. Tod seemed surprised when I greeted the maister by the name and asked about how his son was doing in little league. But he got points for not even blinking at the paparazzi flashes and holding my hand through it, even though I said we could walk in separately.

Two, Tod ordered for me. Not everything, just the wine. I tried to order a mojito, but he guilt tripped me by saying he had planned to order some old fancy – and expensive – bottle of wine, so he said ‘let’s just go with the wine, and you can get the mojito later’. I said okay, not trying to hide how rude I thought that was with my expression.

When I texted this to the group message I was in with Taylor and the girls, their responses had made me laugh:

‘Girl, BYE. Drop his ass.’

I then texted them a picture of him when he asked who it was I was texting. I told him I was just reassuring my friends I wasn’t out with a murderer, since none of us trusted blind dates. He smiled for a picture so they could know he was nice. Their responses changed immediately:

‘New plan: hit that. THAN drop his ass.’

I laughed, but didn’t tell Tod why. Then I put away my phone and honestly tried to convince myself this man could be the love of my life. I could be married to him in ten years, wondering how did I almost gave up on the date for some guy I was obsessed with. He could father my children. He would make great children.

Finally, three, Tod took me to a club. The Nightingale, to be precise, which was in an upcoming party scene in Brooklyn. The problem with that was that it was also packed with paparazzi (“Jenifer, is that your boyfriend?! Jenifer are you dating?! Shouldn’t you be training for the marathon, Jenifer?!). The other problem with the club was he also assumed I had never been there. I actually knew the manager.

Tod made yet a fourth mistake, when well into the night the DJ started playing Shake It Off, and, all excited, I send an audio message to Tay, telling her, all excited because I knew how much she wanted people to dance to her songs. After sending it, I turned to Tod, and excitedly asked:

“Do you like Taylor Swift?! Her new album is dropping tonight! It’s pretty great!”

“No really.” He shrugged.

Wrong answer.
I downed a couple of shots of vodka and had my mojito and tried to convince myself those were little details I could get over. He could learn. We could get over it. We could still have those cute babies.

I downed one more shot, and dragged Tod to the dance floor; tried to convince myself that I was attracted to him, that there was something there; some spark we could chase.

Tod was fine, I told myself. He’s gentle, he opened doors for me, didn’t mind when some girls wanted to take a picture when we got into the club, and he held my hand in front of the paparazzi even though I told him he could walk in before me, or that we could drive separately.

But then the DJ did some sound mixing, and the song shifted into You Need Me. When Ed Sheeran’s voice buzzed through the place, talking about making a new sound, I knew I just couldn’t do it.

So I went back to the bar to try and breathe better and, when he quickly joined me, I turned suddenly and kissed him. He reciprocated with passion, his hands stayed on the respectful part of my back, and his energy and my stubbornness made the kiss last a lot longer that it probably should have. When it was done, I knew it was time to go.

So I played with my hair, pretending to put it up but letting it down again, and Eddy, who was watching from nearby, immediately got the message – he told me in the way to do that when I “realized what a stupid idea this was”.

Holding his phone, he approached, saying, “It’s Patricia, apparently the costumer report backfired and the revenue tax is gonna have to be altered before midnight, Brazilian time.”

I looked at him, for about two seconds wondering if he had had a stroke with all the gibberish he was saying, but quickly realized he was giving me a way out.

“Oh!” I said, “Are they sure I can’t get back to them in the morning?!?”

“You know they can’t close the deal without you.” He said.

I looked at Tod. “I’m so sorry, it’s a work emergency!”
His face went from the happy-after-kiss to a pretty low-bummer. “Oh! Can I help with anything?”

“No, thank you! But I just need to go see my accountant”

“It’s almost midnight!” he noted.

“He’s used to it.” I told him. “I’m so sorry about this.”

“Oh, no worries, it happens! I’ll take you home”

“Don’t worry, I can drive back with my security car!”

Eddy had been driving after us in a town car all night, to give us some privacy.

“No, I should take you, it’s the least I could do!”

His niceness was making me feel guilty. “Don’t worry, please, stay and enjoy the rest of your night!”

“Well, if you’re sure… Okay, then.” He came to give me another kiss, but I turned quickly so it
would go on my cheek. “We’ll talk,” he said. “Rain check!”

“Maybe!” I nodded, making no promises.

“I thought it was going pretty well,” Eddy commented when we drove out, leaving the paparazzi behind, “when you started eating his face out.”

I started crying.

It was an awkward few moments of silence, the only sound being my muffled hiccups while Eddy drove us home.

“Richard lives that way.” I told him, in a crying voice, when he missed our turn.

‘Yeah…” he said. “But I feel like we need actual food.”

We got Shake Shack on drive through, and ate it quietly in the parking lot, with my Taylor playlist blasting loudly the only three 1989 songs that had been released: Shake it Off, Out of the Woods and Welcome to New York. Eddy didn’t complain, he was actually who turned it on.

I put my burger down, grabbing a few fries.

I sighed deeply, as Taylor sang the words ‘we were built to fall apart, then fall back together’.

“Why can’t I move on from him?” I asked, more to myself – or maybe Taylor’s voice – than to him.

“I don’t know, man.” Eddy said. “Maybe it’s meant to be.”

I smiled, sad. “How?!”

“How do I know? I don’t date.” He shrugged. “Listen, maybe… maybe sometimes you’re just supposed to jump, you know? Maybe sometimes you just need to do what makes you happy and trust that life knows what it’s doing. Love finds a way.”

I liked that.

I looked at Eddy, that bald, almost seven-foot tall, black, asexual, aromatic, body builder who didn’t seem to care about much, humming to Taylor Swift as he tried to comfort my broken heart with junk food. It wasn’t so hard to believe things might be okay when I remembered that man’s job was to protect me.

“Take me home, Eddy.”

The house was silent when I walked in. we heard some noise from another hall, where Eddy’s room – and the other guest bedrooms where Harry’s POs were staying – were. I bid my body guard goodnight with and turned back to go to my room, wondering if Harry would be there, hoping he wouldn’t have gone to stay in some of the other rooms to not have to see me anymore.

“Go get’em, girl.” Eddy said, making me smile one last time in that shitty night.

Vodka was shaking her entire little body on the bed when she heard me come in. I went to pick her up and realized Harry was lying in bed right behind her.

I smiled as I hugged my puppy, and walked over to the closet to change.
When I came back to bed, in my baby doll pajamas, Harry moved.

“What time is it?”

“A little over midnight.” I whispered, as I climbed into bed with V.

“You’re back early.” He said, turning to stare at me.

Vodka walked around the bed, sniffing the sheets and trying to dig a hole in them.

“Yeah.” I agreed.

Harry sighed.

“I’m sorry-“ he started, taking in a deep breath, struggling with his words. “I’m sorry I-”

I laid down, bringing the sheets above me, lying on my side too to look at him, as I waited for him to say something coherent. He held my hand, and intertwined our fingers, looking at them longingly.

“Guy made it sound like-” He stopped himself.

“What?”

“No, I- it would sound like I’m justifying myself and I don’t want that.” He sighed again, pausing. “Truth is, I heard you had a date and I freaked out.” There was another pause, as I realized, not without some self-hate, that I wouldn’t have reacted so differently if the situation had been the other way around. “I’m sorry, Jen. I know we have to move on… I just thought I’d get more time with you.”

I was fighting tears now, because I just hated the weird world we lived in where I could make more than a million dollars a month and still not be able to be with this guy I really liked.

I crawled closer to him, and he raised his arm on the pillow so he could be hugging me. I rested my hair in the small of his neck and his smell made the entire night worth it.

“So what happened?” he asked. “Was he not interesting?”

I sighed, feeling the tips of his fingers massaging gently the top of my head.

“He was not you.”
It had been three weeks since I had said goodbye to Harry in New York. He left town before the sun came up on Monday morning as to avoid the paparazzi as much as he could, and flew right back to England where he had a full month of work.

Taylor’s album, 1989, came out to astonishing critics; she became the only artist ever to sell more than a million albums during the first week three times. And I talked to Harry for hours about how every song was my favorite before I convinced him to at least listen to I Know Places because it seemed to be about us.

On Sunday of the next week, I ran all the 26 miles (42km!) in the New York City Marathon and almost died before the first hour was gone; then I proceeded to spend the rest of the time regretting all of my life decisions.

When I finally reached the finish line, my parents were there. They came from Brazil to spend a couple of days and support me because running a marathon was amongst the list of things they never in a million years imagined they’d see me do.

They spent the rest of that day cooking for me – after going out to buy actual food since I had nothing – and I spent the rest of that day quietly moaning of pain in bed. That being either physical pain, or the emotional one of having to deal with my mother, who was still upset about finding out her daughter was a sinner, something that wasn’t improved by the vine video of me and Tod Richmond kissing on our date that some dickhead had posted online. My parents had the usual questions (who is he? Are we dating? How long have we known each other?) to which, of course, all my answers were wrong.

As for Harry, he was not having the best of times. November itself was always hard considering Britain celebrated in the second Sunday of that month every year the Remembrance Sunday – a day to “commemorate the contribution of British and Commonwealth military and civilian servicemen and women in the two World Wars and later conflicts.” As a military man, Harry always had a busy schedule during that month, participating in ceremonies, making speeches in gala dinners, visiting regiments, and, most interestingly, making a surprise visit to Afghanistan to deliver a Remembrance speech to the British troops.

I didn’t get the military thing. As someone from a country that had a bad history with a military dictatorship, I used to just smile and nod when Harry spoke about the sacrifice and honor that came with it. I tried to get it, because it was clearly important to him, but mostly it just scared me.

The thing was: Harry had finally worked up the courage to tell his family and staff that he wasn’t satisfied with the way his career was going, and doing this during the month of Remembrance Sunday was taking its toll on him. Even though he knew that was the right decision for himself, he kept feeling guilty about what were people thinking of him, and I wasn’t sure how I could help. I couldn’t, of course. Not from an ocean away as I was.

It had been a long process, mostly spent on Skype with me for two hours every time as I tried to come up with gentle, polite ways in which he could let them know he was miserable without making it sound like it was about the military itself. Finally, they came up with a plan of exit that was careful and respectful, to make sure the press couldn’t spin it around as him being ungrateful and that’s how it was announced that he was leaving the military after ten years of service.

Instead of military work, after talking a lot with his brother, Harry had decided he wanted to work
on wild life conservation. I immediately knew that was a good decision, because I knew the
dimension of his love for the African continent and the experiences he had found there, especially
discovering the wild life. So as he decided to make this change, he also decided to take three
months and dive into research next summer, in 2015. Harry was going to Africa.

“There’ll be no paparazzi, no galas, no hand-shaking…” he told me. “Just work. Just pure,
unaltered work!”

He sounded happy, and so I was happy.

But neither of us were happy when I spent five whole days in London for the Victoria’s Secret
Fashion Show and couldn’t go see him. It hurt me thinking he was so close, but so far away at the
same time, but between flying in with the angels, attending photo-ops and red carpet events and
doing countless interviews – not to mention the actual show, which included fittings, rehearsal and
after parties – there was simply no time or opportunity. The twenty paparazzi that followed me
everywhere were so persistent at some point I started to almost remember their names.

So we merely continued Skyping until I went back to Los Angeles, the last location to finish the
filming of If Tomorrow Comes.

In early November, however, I pressed pause on that to attend the Governor’s Awards, on the
request of The Academy, to honor a producer I had worked with a few times before.

“Ladies and gentlemen, tonight, with the help of a friend, I would like to dedicate this song to the
man behind these two beautiful musicals, one of our honorees tonight, my good, dear friend, Carter
Harrison.”

The band started playing the sweet piano melody as I placed myself at center-stage. With a deep
breath, I got into my performing persona and stared off into the back of the room with the dreamy
eyes the song needed.

“Ten minutes ago I saw you…” I started. “I looked up when you came through the door. My head
started reeling, you gave me the feeling the room had no ceiling or floor!”

It was impossible to sing the famous Rodgers and Hammerstein’s Cinderella song without a
dreamy smile. And it was even more impossible not to have someone in mind if you had feelings
for said someone, which might explain why I couldn’t stop thinking about Harry.

“Ten minutes ago I met you, and we murmured our how-do-you-do’s. I wanted to ring out the bells
and fling out my arms and to sing out the news. I have found him, he’s an angel with the dust of the
stars in his eyes. We are dancing, we are flying, and she’s taking me back to the skies…”

We mashed that song with another, from The Last Five Years, another musical the honoree had
helped bring to life. But to do it, I needed help. So, from the corner of the stage, entered my good,
old friend, Tyler Alvin.

“Will you share your life with me? For the next ten minutes? For the next ten minutes, we can
handle that… We could watch the waves; we could watch the sky or just sit and wait as the time
ticks by… And if we make it till then, can I ask you again for another ten?”

The Academy had asked if I could come honor Carter and, although I didn’t particularly mind, it
was only after Richard and Janine told me William Graham would be there that I got actually
excited about it.

Graham owned the studio responsible for some big productions on Broadway and that night my
mission was to impress him. If I did, getting an audition would be next to easy.

Tyler and I sang our duet, smiling at each other in wonder as the characters needed.

“I am not always on time; please don’t expect that from me…” I sang, constricted.

“Ten minutes ago…” Tyler complained, in character, looking at his watch jokingly, making the crowd laugh at the double meaning our mash-up acquired.

A sneaky look told me Mr. Graham was laughing as well.

“I will be late, but if you can just wait I will make it eventually! Not like it’s in my control… Not like I’m proud of the fact… But anything other than being exactly on time I can do…”

“I have found her, she’s an angel With the dust of the stars in her eyes…”

Tyler was killing it. And, as someone who was originally a Broadway actor, I knew he could score a role out of that performance too.

“With the dust of the stars in his eyes!” my voice matched his.

“We are danciiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiing…”

“I fooooound him!”

“And she’s taking me back to the skies!” we sang together, belting our voices up high, preparing for the grand finale, when we sang different parts of the song, almost over one another, the song getting more and more intense.

“Ten minutes ago!”

“For the next ten minutes!”

“I wanted to ring all the bells… knowing I had a long full life in your arms… that I can do, forever with you!”

“Will you share your life with me?” he sang.

“Forever, Jamie!” I replied, elongating the note, my arm up in the air, almost forgetting where I was.

Tyler matched my voice, “Till the world explodes! Till there’s no one left who has ever known us apart….”

“There are so many lives I need to see with you!”

“There are so many years I need to be with you!”

Tyler approached, one slow step at a time, his eyes never leaving mine. “I will never be complete…”

“I will never be alive…”

“I may never come down to earth… again!”

And in unison, we high pitched one last time, “…again…”
As the final notes on the piano were played, the crowd cheered. Tyler closed the distance between us and hugged me tight, with a smile on his face, the loving expression fading for a different one, of excitement, as he left the character behind.

Another guest came to the stage to make his honor speech for Carter, and Tyler and I made a quick exit.

After Tyler left, I was by the bar during the after-party, enjoying my two favorite parts of award ceremonies - alcohol and friends - when something that I never thought possible happened.

It began when Natalie Dormer came to see me when I was grabbing a hold of my vodka soda, and immediately dragged me to sit with her and Kit Harington, who was leaning on the counter as if his life depended on it.

“Kit, look who I found!” she told him as we approached.

“Jenifer!” he smiled, his expression quickly softening. “I have never been this glad to see you!” he hugged me. “I wasn’t sure you’d come”

“Well, here I am.” I said, as Natalie sat on a stool and hugged me by my waist. “What can I do for you?”

“Well…” he started. “I have a friend-”

Natalie scorned in a laughter. Kit gave her an annoyed look.

“…a friend who is a big fan of yours. And I was wondering if I could introduce you?”

I smiled. “Of course!”

A smile took over his otherwise stern face, and I could tell he had been especially worried about the request.

The thing about Kit was that he didn’t smile that much – not as long as he was drunk, or we were having a particularly fun conversation. But other than that, he usually kept to himself and his resting bitch face. Which is why that night, when he smiled so broadly, I looked at Natalie inquisitively.

“What’s going on here?”

She smiled as if she had been waiting for me to ask. Then she put her drink down, crossed her legs like a boss, and started chanting like a fifth grader:

“Kit has a girlfriend, Kit has a girlfriend! Kit has a girlfriend!”

“No!” I shouted, shock taking over me. “What?!”

“I don’t-” Kit tried to explain, as Natalie just kept chanting.

“Kit has a girlfriend! Kit has a girlfriend!”

“She’s not my-“

“Kit has a girlfriend!”

“Damn it, Natalie!”
“Kit has a girlfriend!”
“Explain!” I asked.

Natalie turned to me, excited.

“She’s not my girlfriend!” Kit said first.

“We met her in Australia when we were doing promo for Thrones.” Natalie told me, ignoring him. “Her name is Beezus-“

“I’m sorry.” I interrupted. “Beezus?!”

“Her name is Beatrice,” Kit said, “but her brother could never really pronounce it when he was little, so he called her Beezus. And it stuck…”

The softness in his eyes made me smile; and then he smiled at his own drink, his mind drifting after wherever it was that Beezus was.

Natalie gave me a knowing look, “Isn’t it cute? He doesn’t even notice he’s doing it…”

Kit raised his head to look at her. “Doing what?”

“We were visiting a hospital in Melbourne and she was in the children’s ward, with all the kids sitting around her, hearing her tell a story as if she was a Disney princess and they were forest animals.”

“Natalie…” Kit complained.

“What is she like?” I asked.

“She’s amazing!” she told me. “Smart, witty, cute. Keeps Kit guessing, which we know is important!”

I nodded. “Oh, yeah, he needs some control.”

“I’m right here!”

“They clearly hit it off from the start-“

“We don’t- we are not even-“ Kit stuttered. “We’re just friends!”

“They even went on a date in Australia, but nothing happened-“

“It wasn’t really a date-“

This love story of them was sounding so messy it made me think I had heard it before. Until I realized it probably just reminded me of me and Harry.

“And then she came to London to work in a dance studio-“

Kit interrupted her, pride in his eyes. “She’s an internationally ranked Irish dancer!”

I felt my face twist in confusion. “Irish dancer?!”

“And she’s so good!” Natalie pitched in, “You know Ed Sheeran’s video? Thinking Out Loud?”
“Of course!”
“She is the girl in it!”
“No!”
“Yes!”
“That’s awesome!”
“Kit got all jealous when he saw her dancing with Ed…”
“I didn’t-“
“Aw, Kit,” I interrupted him again, “I never pictured you as a romantic!”
He looked at me, patiently. “She is not my girlfriend.”
“And why is that?” Natalie asked.
“Because she doesn’t want to be!” he told her.
“Bull.” She answered.
“But, wait,” I said, “do you like her?”
“Yes,” said Natalie.
“I…” said Kit, before staring into his glass again and sighing loudly.
Unfortunately for me, I had some experience with that kind of answer to the question ‘do you like her/him?’ It was really all I used to do with my life when Harry and I were getting complicated the year before.
And, if I’m being honest, still today.
“I don’t get it,” I told them. “What’s the deal here? What’s the catch?”
Natalie picked up her phone, as Kit just stared at his drink, and showed me a picture. In it, a smiley Kit appeared hugging an equally as smiley girl. She had wavy hair and big, round eyes.
“She’s cute,” I said. “What’s that?”
She seemed to have a transparent straw in the middle of her face.
“That…” Natalie told me, giving Kit a fast, sad look, “is Beezus’ cannula. It’s connected to an oxygen tank and she can’t breathe without it.”
As I realized what her words meant, I also realized Kit’s depressing glances into his drink.
“She’s sick.” I realized. “Oh, Kit… Did you never watch The Fault in Our Stars? Spoiler alert, it ends badly for you.”
“Cystic Fibrosis.” Kit murmured, ignoring my poor attempt of a joke. “She’s terminal.”
I sighed, immediately regretting the joke. Natalie put her phone away, and gave me a sad look.
“She’s convinced they can’t be together because it would be too complicated… She’s waiting on a lung transplant, but the chances of her getting one are really small.”

In a quick second, my mind made a connection to something I had seen on Instagram more and more often in the last couple of weeks. After the Ice Bucket Challenge, the new upcoming hashtag was #OrganDonorSelfie, and a bunch of my famous friends had been uploading pictures of themselves making a heart with their hands, raising awareness to organ donation. I remembered Ed doing this right after his Thinking Out Loud video was up.

“That organ donor campaign,” I started, “does she have something to do with it?”

“She kind of inspired it…” Natalie told me. “She wanted to dance so bad she went on a heavy load of steroids just so she could be in that music video… then she collapsed and was in the hospital for a month.”

I respected anyone who wanted to do art that much, but almost dying for it? I was already a fan. Which is probably why I decided to try and help in whatever way I could – other than making a mental note to join the campaign as soon as I got to my hotel that night.

“Nat,” I asked, “would you give us a moment?”

“Sure.” She smiled, grabbed her drink, and made a quick exit walking back to her table.

I placed my drink in the counter and jumped on the stool to sit in front of him, trying to channel my best George Clooney to try and help him as George had helped me in Venice.

“Talk to me.” I asked.

Maybe because Kit appreciated how I didn’t dance around the subject; maybe because he saw in my eyes that I could understand; or maybe he was just that desperate. The thing is, he went ahead and told me.

“This girl…” he started, shaking his head in a smile. He put his drink away, turning to face me as if he was about to tell me the world’s biggest secret, “…this girl makes me feel like everything makes sense now.”

I smiled. I definitely knew what he meant.

“And you know what the craziest part is?” he paused. “There’s absolutely no sense in us being together. Deep down I know it. She’s dying,” He said, in a whisper, looking away as if he refused to believe the words. “But still… I can’t help it. I want to be with her.” He shrugged. “Even if just for a little, even if just for a while.” He paused. “Have you ever loved someone so strongly you didn’t even care about how messy your life would get if you tried to be with them?”

“Trust me,” I smiled. “Yes.”

“I don’t know what I’m supposed to do.”

“Well, what’s your plan?”

He shrugged again. “I don’t have a plan.”

I sighed, getting down from my stool. “You truly know nothing, Jon Snow.”

Giving him a kiss in the cheek, I made my way to the bathroom.
“You know… that line is going to get old someday!” he shouted as I left.

“Never!” I told him.

“What should I do with this?” a woman with a staff badge asked another who sat in one of the sofas in the bathroom when I walked in.

“Oh, I’m gonna take it back to the car-“

“I’ll do it.”

“Oh, I can do it! Don’t worry!”

“Don’t worry, it’s my job. Stay and enjoy the party!” the staffer grabbed something that looked like a big metal can and made her way out.

I looked at the other woman more attentively as I grabbed my lipstick from my clutch. I liked that she had tried to tell a staffer she could something herself, a lot of people in this business got way too comfortable depending on others. The girl took another metal can and placed into a white, stylish backpack and I noticed the transparent tube connecting it to her nose. In a fast second, I realized who that could be.

“Beezus?” I said, turning to her.

She raised her head to look at me and I immediately recognized her from the picture Natalie had shown me. Except she wasn’t smiling. She was in complete shock.

“Hi. You’re Beezus, right?” I asked when she didn’t say anything. “I’m Jenifer.”

When she didn’t answer again, I imagined I might have been confused and maybe that wasn’t her.

“I’m sorry, are you Beezus?”

“How-how do you know me?” she stuttered.

I smiled, remembering Kit had said she was a fan. “I’m your fairy godmother.” I joked.

Her shocked expression deepened, which was very entertaining to watch. “I’m kidding. I was just talking to Kit about you!”

She nodded, giggling nervously. “Right. Of course. It’s nice to meet you!”

“I love your dress!” I told her, turning to the mirror and retouching my lipstick.

“Oh-tha-thank you. You- You look beautiful!”

She paused, looking at herself in the mirror, and I remembered Kit’s smile from just a minute before.

“Bee-can I call you Bee?”

She smiled. “You’re my fairy godmother, you can call me whatever you want.”

I laughed, immediately recognizing the girl Natalie had described as witty. “I see it now…”

“See what?”
“Why Kit’s smiling.” I told her. “He doesn’t usually smiles, but he does now, and I think I got it…”

She looked confused. “He always smiles.”

“…with you.”

She looked down, seemingly sad.

As I made a decision about how I could help her, I knew what I had to do. And I also knew how tremendously dangerous that would be. Still, in a leap of faith, I quickly checked to see if the bathroom was empty and, realizing we were alone, I told her.

“Here’s the thing, Bee…” I took in a deep breath. “When I was 17 I had an affair with my older, married college professor… he was abusive and I got scars so deep I spent a good two years overcompensating by becoming the punkiest party girl you can imagine. A number of meaningless relationships and illicit substances and a couple of DUIs later and I managed to get myself together…” I paused, sighing. “But then I dated this guy who cheated on me. Then I slept with my best friend and almost ruined our friendship. And then I dated someone whose life was the opposite of mine in every conceivable way…” I paused.

“Why are you telling me this?” she asked.

“Well, one, because I believe you can keep a secret.” She nodded. “And two, because I need you to believe me when I tell you that I am in no position to give love advice.”

“Okay…”

“However…” I struggled to put it into words. “…something changed in me in the last year or so… and I need you to understand that what I’m gonna do next is no small thing for me. It’s actually a big deal. Because I never imagined I’d ever be able to do this.” She was looking almost scared now. “Bee, I’m gonna give you some advice.”

As she looked more and more confused, I started wording some things that I heard in the previous months, and that had helped me focus on my happiness.

“I won’t ever tell you that I know what you’re going through, because I don’t. But I spent a very long time depriving myself of things that could make me happy because I thought that was the right thing to do.”

She looked down, and I could tell she started to realize where I was going with this.

“So, with time and some help from friends, I started to realize that, it makes no sense to try and do the right thing if it only makes you miserable. Sometimes a decision that sounds insane is the right one if it’ll make you happy. Sometimes…” I sighed, “sometime all we can do is make our happiness a priority, because it should be. It’s not always, but it should.”

I took a couple of steps, and held her hands. She looked up at me. “You deserve to be happy. Don’t throw something amazing away telling yourself it’s what’s best, because if it doesn’t make you happy, than it isn’t.”

I saw, with some amazement, she was getting tear-eyed. Was that working? Was I… good at this?

“Sometimes you just gotta jump and believe that love finds a way.”

A tear strolled down her cheek, and she smiled, removing one hand from mine to dry it out. I
quickly let go of the other to grab a blotting tissue from my bag, that I gently tapped under her eyes.

“There you go,” I said, smiling.

Beezus took a deep breath, fixing her hair, and looked at me after a long pause.

“What is it’s the wrong decision?” she asked me.

“Welcome to my life, kid.” I told her. “I suppose we won’t know until we try… Besides, isn’t happiness worth it?”

She smiled. “You said something changed…” she asked. “What changed?”

I thought about it. “I met someone.”

She smiled bigger, understanding, and I decided this girl was worth a minute of blunt honesty.

“His name is Harry…” I told her, feeling my heart beat faster with the fear of saying those words aloud, and the happiness of the same thing. Being honest.

Beezus was looking at me with a funny surprised look. “Yes, that one.” I told her.

I knew what this meant. This meant this random girl from Australia knew I wasn’t dating the self-made millionaire from Memphis, but the guy in line to the British throne. It made me nervous, but I enjoyed talking about it for a moment.

“I mean, it’s complicated. He’s not my boyfriend. We’re… technically seeing other people… and we only see each other every few weeks… and nobody can know!” I gave her a sharp look. “But… still,” I smiled, “to quote from a friend, he makes me feel like everything makes sense even though nothing does.”

“I know what you mean.” She said, smiling, after a pause.

“Come, on!” I said, more excited now, grabbing her shoulders and turning her to look in the mirror. “Look at yourself! You’re gorgeous and young and you have an amazing guy just outside who’s obviously in love with you.” She gave me a scared smile. “Go be happy, Bee.”

She smiled down, with her cheeks blushing. “I think you might actually be my fairy godmother.”

We laughed together.

“I’ll take that as a compliment.”

On the next week, Harry had to travel to Oman for a three days tour on royal duties. The trip almost went bad because the sultan that was receiving him fell sick and had to go to Germany for treatment. Still, Harry went anyway and was received by the guy’s cousin.

“It’s probably better,” he told me over the phone. “The sultan can be intense.”

That was one way of putting it. Qaboos bin Said Al Said, a Sandhurst-trained soldier and a former intern at Suffolk Country Council, has twinned his palace with the Tower of London and owns the world’s only camel-mounted bagpipe band (the word you’re looking for is ‘what?!’).

Throughout those three days we could barely speak over the phone, because of the time zone differences, so we mostly just texted. I kept googling him to see pictures of what he had been up to and I could not contain my jealousy. Not of him, exactly. Of the country. Of the awesome trip he
had the opportunity to make and the culture he was getting to know (for work!). Meanwhile, I was stuck in a warm studio in Los Angeles filming some of the most intense scenes of my career from seven to ten every day – my character was raped and persecuted in jail for about half the season so you can imagine what fun I was having.

Then Harry went to Abu Dhabi to play in a charity polo match to raise funds for his charity Sentabale and I got even more jealous. Not only of the country this time – Though I’d love to visit Abu Dhabi – but of him.

Harry played his match, raised some money, made some speeches, and then was done. But instead of flying home, he stayed to watch the grand prix and went partying afterwards. And here’s how everyone knew this: there were pictures of him that people in the same parties were posting to twitter and Instagram. There was one of him smoking some kind of shisha pipe and another with his arms around a group of particularly gorgeous women.

I was like ‘we get it, buddy! We’re seeing other people! No need to rub it in my face!’ before I reminded myself I had no right to be jealous. Harry could go to parties. He could meet beautiful women and dance with them. And flirt. He could make out with those women. He could even sleep with them and my heart had no right to feel like it was about to crack.

But when the weekend came – a week after I met Beezus – I decided to take my own advice and do what makes me happy. On that particular Friday, when as a sign from God the director ended our day a lot earlier than normal, what made me happy would be to see Harry.

So I smiled around a bit, quickly wished everyone a good weekend, and ran to my trailer to change. Then on the drive to my house, I went online and booked myself and Eddy a flight to England. I threw some clothes in a bag and rushed Eddy so we could make our flight and, a good fifteen hours later, we were landing in Heathrow airport.

Because of the time zone, when I got there it was nine in the morning for me, but it was five in the afternoon in London. I waited in the VIP lounge as to not be seen while Eddy went to rent us a car and when he got there, I decided there was not big enough sunglasses in the world that would keep people from seeing me drive into Kensington Palace. So, remembering Harry’s strategy in Brazil, I go into the trunk of the car when no one was looking. I just decided it was crazy enough to work, after all, if I wanted to get into a palace without being seen, I needed to get creative. So I did.

When Eddy opened the trunk a while later, although uncomfortable, I was alive. Alive and happy to jump out.

“Sorry it took so long,” Eddy said when he helped me out in the privacy of Kensington Palace. “We had a bit of an issue explaining to the guards at the gate we had Jenifer Silva in the trunk, as you might understand… Good thing we had someone to vouch for us.”

“Nathan!” I shouted, excited, going in for a hug that surprised him.

Harry’s protection officer smiled at me. “Nice to see you again, Ms. Silva.” He laughed.

“Oh, come on, it’s just Jen, we’ve been over this”, I smiled. “Is Harry home?”

“He should be arriving any minute, you’re welcome to wait inside.”

“Thanks!” he didn’t really have to say it twice.

Looking around to make sure no one could see me, I was surprised that place was as private as it was.
Kensington Palace was located right beside Hyde Park, in the central area of London, and it amazed me to see the civic buildings nearby as I looked around and know that just over to the side thousands of people were going about their day or jogging in the park. Despite being easily seen by sightseers, some ivy walls made sure that enough parts of the palace were out of view for the public, and that’s where I was.

So after Nathan pointed out to me the door to Harry’s apartment – which I couldn’t remember considering they all looked the same and I had only been there once before – I ran inside.

It had been a long time since the palace stopped being a single residence; it was now divided into separate apartments. Mostly, those had different levels and a cryptic amount of rooms (Harry told me Will and Kate’s had fifteen!), but Harry lived in a staff apartment. That meant that it was smaller, and simpler, with only one bedroom, bathroom, living room and kitchen. So after I climbed the stairs, passing through the doors to other staff apartments – where actual staffers lived – I found his door. A simple raise of his ‘welcome’ mat showed his spare key, and I opened the door to wait for him inside.

Harry’s place had a simplistic decoration, something that a bachelor who didn’t care enough to shop would do, but after flying for fifteen hours at the end of a busy week, I didn’t care.

I took off my black Giuseppe Zanotti ankle boots and my purple Rag and Bone tweed and wool-blend overcoat – the same color of my velvet hat – and put my black and white stripped Dolce & Gabbana bag in the coffee table near me. Only then I realized that for someone trying to blend in I was wearing a lot of colors.

With my loose boyfriend jeans, and white button up shirt I snuggled in his couch, starting to answer emails on my phone to pass the time. The shine in my wrist made me smile. It had been a long time since I had worn the bracelet Harry gave me, with the golden shiny ‘H’, but I had fished it from my closet in the hopes it would put a smile on his face.

With a sigh, I realized how pathetically into this guy I was. So I had a daring idea.

It was a bit later that I heard the steps in the stairs outside as someone approached. I quickly put my phone away. At this point, I was in Harry’s bedroom wearing only my shirt. I tried to strike a sexy pose to surprise him when he entered, but I was so nervous I just laid there, on my side, trying not to make any noise.

“Okay, so that about covers it for the weekly meeting. Have you confirmed the guest list?” he was saying.

I missed his voice. I also wondered if he was on the phone.

“I did,” I heard Edward LF’s voice, making me freeze in place, “and it’s just about what we had planned for, so we’re good on that department. But we should talk about the gala’s speech.”

I heard steps as someone approached the bedroom and, finally, the door opened.

Harry was shocked at first, then confused. Then he smiled at me, still speechless. Then he looked scared again, as he remembered he wasn’t alone. He quickly closed the door.

“Alright. Well…” he said, “why don’t you email me your notes and I’ll go over the speech and send you a revised version so you can take a look at it?”

“Wha- but you hate emailing…”
“Bye, Edward.”

I heard the door open and close as Harry threw the guy out. Then more steps as he made his way back, opening the door, and leaning on the doorframe looking at me with a cute grin on his lips.

He was wearing his green military uniform and for a moment there it was really easy for me to get the whole military thing.

“I really need to have a talk with my security.” He joked.

“What you need is a better place for your spare key.” I told him, sitting up, and getting on my knees to crawl over to the edge of the bed. Harry walked over too, smiling at me without breaking eye contact.

“Am I dreaming?” he asked. “Did I wish really, really hard?!”

I smiled as I ran my hands through his muscly arms while they gripped my hips strongly. “I have to fly back in… T-minus-eighteen hours.”

His smile broadened. “I can’t believe this! You flew fifteen hours to spend less than a day with me.”

His excitement was making me blush now, especially because I knew what he meant: I was doing the same thing he did when we saw each other last time.

As his hands circled my butt cheeks, I told him. “…I missed you.”

He touched his forehead in mine and brushed out noses together. His hands rounded around my body, bringing us closer, until he was lifting my shirt to touch my skin. I felt his hand reaching my upper back and how much eager he got when he realized I wasn’t wearing a bra. Harry picked me up, and I wrapped my legs around him as he threw himself on top of me in the bed.

I started unbuttoning his camouflage shirt, slowly kissing his neck until I found the sensitive skin right under his ear. His hand got a grip of my hair, as the other slid down my thigh.

“God! I love…” he said, breathless. I froze in place, leaning away slightly to look at him. “…that you’re here. I just love that you came!”

I smiled, relieved, and he smiled back, knowing that was close. His phone vibrated in his pocket, and he picked it up to read a message.

“I just need to answer this, and then I’m all yours for the next T-minus-eighteen hours.”

“Okay!” I smiled, excited as he sat up to be able to type properly, walking back into the living room. “Just don’t take that uniform off, I wanna do that myself!” I teased.

“I’m just so happy that you’re here!” he said, as he texted. “I had the worst few weeks. I’m so glad to be able to see you.” He walked over and kissed me quick, before turning again to finish his text.

I felt relieve and joy as I saw he was as excited about seeing me as I was about seeing him. I got up and followed him out, waving around my arm, waiting for him to notice my bracelet.

“So, who are you texting?” I asked.

“I had this… thing, but it’s not important. I’m cancelling.”
“What thing?” he wasn’t looking, focusing too much on typing.

He stopped, before looking at me. “A date.”

“You…” I sighed. “You have a date.”

“Had!” He corrected. “I’m cancelling it.”

“Huh…”

“I mean… it’s not…” he put the phone down. “It’s nothing. It was a… Skippy has this friend… is not important.”

“Wow.” I said, before I turned around to walk back into the room.

“What?” he asked, following me.

“No, it’s just…” I sat on the bed, grabbing my jeans and starting to get dressed. “You seemed to be pretty not okay when I had a date, but now you’re doing the same thing. That’s all.”

“Wait.” He said. “Why are you getting dressed?”

I picked my boots. “And then I fly all the way here because I missed you like an idiot and you have a date.”

“Jen,” he started. “You had a date three weeks ago.”

“Yeah,” I picked my overcoat, “which is something you were pretty worked up about…”

“So, what? You can go on dates but I can’t?” he asked, following me as I grabbed my bag and made my way out of the room. “Aren’t we seeing other people?”

“Yes, Harry,” I said, angry. “Yes, we are. We definitely are. And you know what? Why don’t you spend the next T-minus-eighteen hours with her, as you were, you know, ALREADY GOING TO!”

I stormed out of his apartment.

“Ok, Jen, wait. This is ridiculous!” he shouted, following me down the stairs. “I said I was canceling!”

“OH!” I yelled. “That’s so thoughtful of you!”

I opened the door, walking out into the rock backyard of Kensington Palace and over to the car that was still where I had left it.

Eddy and Nathan were still there, talking excitedly about something.

“Uh-oh” I heard Eddy say when he saw me come over.

“Jenifer, stop!” Harry walked around me, stopping in front of me so I’d stop walking. “Let’s talk about this. Specifically about how insane this is!”

“Oh, I’m sorry, I’m so rude. Did I forget to apologize for almost crashing your date?!”

I walked pass him and Eddy opened the trunk of the car, I threw my bag in as I spoke. “I’m sorry I
didn’t call earlier to give you time to reschedule. I’m sorry I wanted to do something nice for you after the hard month you had. I’m sorry-“

“Do I need to remind you this is your stupid rule?!” he asked, raising his voice. “That we see other people?!”

“No!” I shouted. “You don’t need to fucking remind me I’m the one who came up with this. I already hate myself enough at this point. I’m so stupid!”

“Jenifer, why are you getting into a trunk?!” He asked as I climbed up.

“Because I don’t wanna be seen, you idiot!” I hissed, standing in the trunk. “That’s right. I flew fifteen hours to surprise you because you had a hard few weeks and drove here from the airport in the fucking trunk of a car just so the paparazzi wouldn’t see me because I know how much privacy fucking means to you! And guess what?!”

“What?!” he yelled back.

“YOU HAVE A DATE!” I sat down. “So have a good fucking date, Harry. I hope you get lucky. Eddy, close the trunk.” I laid down.

“Eddy, stay back.” Harry asked, raising a hand. “Jen, I didn’t even want to go on the stupid date to begin w-“

“Eddy, close the trunk.” I ignored him.

Eddy approached again.

“Don’t touch that!” Harry told him.

“You’re not his boss, I’m his boss! Close the trunk, Edgar.” Eddy knew I meant business when I used his name, so he approached again, and closed the trunk carefully.

“Sorry, Harry.” I heard him say.

I was lying in the couch of Richard’s apartment in London – that thankfully I had a key to - about an hour later. Shoes off, hair up, watching some bizarre British show on the TV with Eddy sighing and occasionally complaining in the couch next to me either about how I was unfair to Harry or the fact we had to sleep over since I couldn’t get us another flight until the next morning.

I was too busy being upset to listen to him, though, so when he got a text and left, instead of asking where he was going, I was almost glad. I stayed there, in the couch, staring gloomily at the shiny ‘H’ on my bracelet.

“Jenifer?” he called me when he walked in again a few minutes later.

“What?” I asked, turning to look at him.

He had Harry with him, and Clark passed by us making his security sweep.

“Ugh! What are you doing here?!” I complained.

“I’m here to talk.”

I got up from the couch, turning the TV off and walking to the hallway on the way to the guest bedroom I was using.
“Don’t you have a date?” I asked, a little more childish than I had intended.

“Ok, first of all, how can you be so judgmental about this when you were literally getting ready for a date in front of me last time I saw you?!”

“I didn’t even like him! And I came back early to see you!”

“Oh,” he said, ironic, “that’s so thoughtful of you!”

“Ugh, shut up!”

“No! You shut up and listen to me!” he said, firm. “You don’t get to do this. You don’t get to be jealous. You laid down the ground rules, so you don’t get to blame me because I’m following them. You were the one who wanted this! Not me!”

“Go to your date, Harry!” I yelled, walking fast pass the hallway and into the bedroom.

“I called and canceled!” he shouted back. “And I told her I-!” I slammed the door on him. “Jen, open the door.”

“No.”

Okay. Listen. Before you go judging me, let me tell you this: I know I was being childish. And immature. And unreasonable. I know that now as I knew it then. That was partially why I locked myself in the room. Not out of anger at him, but out of shame at myself. I could not believe I was being so ridiculous, but as I kept yelling at him, I didn’t know how to fix it. I had let my anger and jealousy speak for me and now it was way past the point of no return. I couldn’t just say ‘okay, you’re right, I’m sorry’ – although I should – because that’s just not in my DNA. Deep down I knew I was mad at my own stupid rules, because, somehow, it didn’t occur to me that if the rules applied to me, they’d apply to Harry just as well. And I hated myself for being that stupid and selfish at the same time. So, instead of dealing with it, I decided to avoid the issue altogether.

Okay, maybe you should judge me. I sound ridiculous.

I heard Harry sigh on the other side of the door. “Open the door, Jenny, come on.”

“Go away, Harry.”

“Jesus Christ, Jenifer! I didn’t even want the stupid date! I don’t want to be with her, I want to be with you!”

“Leave!” I shouted. “Go home…”

“Jen,” Eddy intervened, “should I kick him out?”

“What the hell, man?” Harry asked him. “What team are you on?”

“She literally signs my paycheck.”

“Jenifer?! Talk to me.” Harry pleaded. “Why are you-” he sighed. “Do you not want us to see other people? Is that it? Cause all you have to do is say so, and we’ll do it.”

There was a long pause. I closed my eyes as I felt the air getting heavier and my chest hurt. Why was this so difficult? Why was life so difficult?!

I remembered, with bitterness, my advice to Beezus. I was so stupid. How could I possibly believe
life knew what it was doing?! Look at us. We’re a mess.

“Eddy,” I said, “escort him out, please.”

“Jenifer, are you serious?!” Harry sounded incredulous.

“Ok, Harry, time to go.” I heard Eddy tell him, coming closer to the door.

“Eddy, come on, man, you know she doesn’t mean it, she’s just mad…”

“Come on, man.” I heard Eddy use his security voice, the harsh tone he used to tell paparazzi to back off.

“Eddy, what are you doing?!” Harry asked, sounding upset.

“You have to leave now, dude, sorry.”

“Jenifer?!” Harry called again.

“Come on, Harry, don’t make this harder-“

“Jenifer, open the door!”

I heard another door open and I guess Harry’s POs came in, because next thing I know, Nathan and Clark’s voices were there too. And they didn’t sound happy.

“Edgar, don’t touch him!”

“What is happening?!” Clark asked. “Edgar, you need to step back now!”

I heard the voices getting more upset as confusion took over.

“I’m just doing my job, man, you know how it is!”

“Jenifer, our security details are about to fight, can you please come out here?!”

Finally, biting my lip, I opened the door.

Harry was in the middle of the hallway looking at me, seemingly annoyed. Eddy was on one side of him, trying to push him out, and Nathan was in the other, trying to move Eddy’s arm away. Clark was closer to Eddy, trying to get him to step away. Louis was at the end of the hallway, looking as if that was not something they covered in his training.

Harry’s guys stepped back when I opened the door, but Eddy still looked at me for a second longer. I nodded, and he joined the others, giving us some space too.

There was an unbarring silence as I leaned in the doorframe with my back, staring at the other side of the frame. Harry walked over and leaned into it, standing in front of me.

“I told her I couldn’t go and that I don’t think I can go out with her. Ever.”

“Why?”

“Because,” he laughed a little, looking astonished that I even had to ask, “Because I’m in love with you.”

I felt my heart race, and my lungs complain as I forgot to breathe. There was an intense moment of
Harry closed his eyes, realizing he broke another rule. “Sorry,” he sighed. “Can I take that back?”

“I like you a lot, Jen. I don’t wanna see other people.”

“I don’t care.” Harry told me. “I want you. Just you.”

“…should we leave? Or-?” Eddy asked.

“But, Harry, you won’t get to see me. I –“

“I don’t care!” he said, walking closer to me. “If you can’t say it, I will. Jenifer, I don’t want us to see other people.”

“…”

“Then let’s keep on being just friends…” he argued, with a smile. “…who only sleep with each other.”

The proposition was so silly – and so perfect – I just couldn’t help but smile.

There was a long pause, as Harry and I stared into each other’s eyes, smiling, before I spoke again.

“Leave us.” I told the guys, who looked like they couldn’t get out of there fast enough.

I made the drama, so I felt like I should take the first step. And I did.

I stopped right in front of him. Suddenly, one of his arms was quickly around my back, as the other held a grip of my hair while Harry kissed me eagerly.

I held him, kissing him back enthusiastically when his tongue met mine, and soon enough we were glued together.

In a while, we broke apart; Harry grinned staring at me and I mimicked.

“So…” he started. “Friends who only sleep with each other?”

I nodded, making official the third stage of our relationship.

“I prefer the term ‘exclusive friends with benefits’.” I joked.

“Sounds good.” He laughed, shaking his head in disbelief. “God, Jenny, you are still the most interesting person I know.”

I smiled. I really liked it when he said that.

“Oh, look,” he said, smiling, touching the bracelet in my wrist. “I remember this… Looks good on you.”

I smiled. “And you look really sexy in this uniform.”
He laughed. “You know, I’m not actually allowed to wear this for civic duties.”

“That’s hot.” We laughed again.

He let go of the hug just enough so he could hug me again, lower this time, and picked me up, hugging me tighter.

He was going in for another kiss when I pulled away.

“Hey, how did you get in here? Did they see you?”

Harry sighed, in a pause.

“I got into the trunk of the car.” He smiled.

I laughed. “You didn’t.”

“I did.”

I laughed, thinking of his military dressed-self, hugging his long legs in the tiny trunk of a car.

Everything made sense then.
Mary, Vincent and Sofia

Chapter Summary

Jen and Harry spend New Years Eve in an unsuspected location, and are invited to a secret bar by unusual people.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Do you want to explain to me why, in the middle of winter, instead of enjoying our whole week together in some sunny and warm place where it’s summer, you decided to drag me to Bulgaria?!”

As we walked with some difficulty over the snow covered square in Sofia, I could almost hear his mind going ‘WHY?!’. It had been clear he wasn’t happy from the very moment he arrived; his eyes hovered the tackily decorated hotel room and I saw his brows curl in confusion. I had immediately dragged him out of the hotel again, excitedly telling him we should go ‘explore!’. He had proceeded to spend the rest of the day trying to understand what was it about Sofia that I was so excited about and failing until he finally decided to ask.

“What do you mean?!” I asked, opening my arms and gesturing around, “Look at this, Harry! We’re in Bulgaria!”

He looked around, confused, and then back at me.

“I don’t get it. I mean, I don’t understand… What am I missing? What is it about this place that when you got a rare one week off of work in the middle of the holydays you thought, well, yes, I want to go to Bulgaria!” he ironized. “Why?!”

I knew what he meant, of course. Sofia didn’t have skyscrapers or a buzzing business life; it wasn’t a polyglot capital and it didn’t even look particularly pretty in the most conventional sense; in many ways, it looked and felt like a small town. Yet, it was the capital and largest city of Bulgaria with more than a million habitants and was the second oldest European city, built seven thousand years ago.

On that December 31st of 2014 it looked like a winter wonderland. The snow was glowing atop the leafless trees and the melting ice gave the pavement a humid shine. There was barely anyone in the streets – most people hiding in the warmth of their homes from the 2°C weather and the gloomy, cloudy sky.

“Don’t you see?” I asked him, smiling. “It’s a town! It’s a real place with real people in southeastern Europe and now we get to say that we’ve been here!” he seemed unconvinced. “Someday someone is gonna ask you what is the craziest place you’ve been and you can tell them, well, I’ve been to Bulgaria once!”

Harry stared at me for a long while, with a confused grin in his lips, before he sighed, looking around gain.

“I mean, okay, look over there,”
I intertwined my arm in his, turning him to a woman walking towards us staring at her phone, “It’s a woman. A real woman with pretty, black boots that look a lot like a pair that I own, and she’s wearing a brown coat and probably messaging a friend of something… She’s like us.” The woman passed us by without taking notice. “From the comfort of our homes we have this idea that any country we don’t hear often about is exotic and weird, but look,” I pointed at the colorful playground covered in snow right beside us, “it’s a normal place. With people that have jobs, and kids that play, and technology and stuff… It’s just like us, except they speak Bulgarian and have a lot of catholic churches…” I paused. “Even that isn’t that big of a deal considering Brazil is also very catholic. Not orthodox, but still…”

He looked at me.

“You’re serious, aren’t you? You genuinely didn’t see anything else that made you wanna come? You just pointed at a random place in a map and decided you wanted to go see it?”

“Yep!” I smiled. “That’s the dream! Literally, that’s what I always wanted to do. To just up and leave and go see somewhere I hadn’t before!”

He smiled at me in a funny way before sighing slightly.

“Alright.” He said, walking over and enlacing our fingers together. “Where should we go, then?”

We made our way by foot around town; Sofia wasn’t big, so walking was a great way to explore the city. We went to a Cathedral called Saint Alexandar Nevski, a huge white construction in central Sofia with a big golden dome in the roof.

As we walked in, we realized the cathedral didn’t have multiple levels, just really high ceilings, and the interior was very dark due mostly to the background of the walls, that were as black as some of the old tiles in the floor. The walls were also covered in classical religious paintings, narrating bible stories and portraying its characters. A huge chandelier hang from the big dome, which sported a painting of God in the sky with baby Jesus – both white, of course. Near the altar stood huge marble thrones, elevated through some steps and covered by a small roof with its own mini dome.

“Bulgarians really know how to do their shit.” I commented, mesmerized, spinning around in my black H&M ankle boots trying to look at everything at the same time.

“Remind me to take you to Saint Paul’s one day…” Harry said.

“What’s that?”

He turned back to look at me. “A cathedral. In London.” He seemed pretty upset I didn’t know. “A lot bigger than this one and… clearer.”

“Okay, Mr. England-is-the-best,” I teased.

“Yeah, is all white and golden.” He gestured to the walls. “My parents got married there.”

“Is it where you’ll get married?” I asked, in a casual, conversational tone.

Harry seemed to pick on it. “Maybe.” He mentioned.

I pulled my black and white, leopard print Saint Lorant scarf, feeling nervous. “Maybe?”

Harry took in a deep breath. “I’m not entirely sure I want to get married anymore.”
I stopped walking, and he continued to go on. “I’m sorry, what?!”

He shrugged. “I don’t know.”

I questioned, a bit too hysterical, “You always wanted to get married.”

“I’ll think about it, I guess.” He said, casually. “I’ve got time.”

Wondering when or why he had changed his mind, I decided not to dwell on the subject, especially considering how close I was to it. So I just followed him as he made his way around in the cathedral.

We went inside a smaller room, observing the paintings, trying to decipher them; I took off my black Alexander McQueen overcoat now, sporting only my lilac sweater, as it was warmer inside. Don’t be fooled: I had other three long sleeved shirts underneath, and two more leggings under my black skinny jeans. Not to mention the leather gloves and the black wool beanie, with black spikes around the edge.

I looked at Harry as he talked about how that was probably Mary in one wall, and how that room was more likely about the resurrection passage. He had a beard now – not a big, hipster beard. Just a very respectful, ginger beard. As I had made sure to mention, it flattered him, making it harder to notice how close he was getting at baldness (I hadn’t mention the baldness part, as Harry was very sensitive about that). But more than that, the beard made him look hot. He was wearing a long button up coat as well, a black one, and boots. he seemed a lot less bothered by the cold than me, which was ironic considering he was the one complaining so much about it.

The last time Harry and I had been together had been on the week before thanksgiving, when I flew to London in the spur of the moment to see him and we decided to become exclusive. We had plans to see each other three days later, for thanksgiving break, but as I had tried to explain to Richard I wouldn’t be coming to Utah to be with his family as I usually did around that time of the year, he wouldn’t have it.

I thought it was weird, as he hadn’t been so bothered on the year before when I had to miss it for work, but this time he was adamant that I didn’t miss it, so, because I had seen Harry three days before, I thought it would be a good idea to indulge my manager.

It was a good thing that I went because as I got there, it quickly became clear why Richard was so obstinate that the whole family was together, including Janine’s: with her by his side, they announced they were having a baby. Not only that, they were getting married. Then and there.

The whole thing was ridiculous. They made some calls, and soon the house was filled with a catering team and Janine was opening a bag with dresses for me and Payton to serve as her bridesmaids. Rich’s sons were his groomsmen and the officiant was Richard’s brother. They got married on the backyard less than two hours after the announcement and we partied for four days.

I tried to talk them out of it, of course. Don’t give me that look, I’m not some love-Grinch. I’m just realistic about the fact that Richard has three ex-wives already and he got out of every single one of those marriages with the guards of all of his kids, his fortune intact and his head held high. Granted, two out of three of his exes were terrible mothers and wives. And the other had very maturely decided to give the guard of the boys. But still, the statics are astounding and it shocked me that Janine wasn’t even a bit worried about it.

“Sweetheart, Richard and I have talked about this a couple of times before. And we have reached a certain level of understanding of where we are and what we want and, even before the baby, we
knew we wanted to get married.” She told me.

“But, Janine… Three ex-wives!”, I told her. “And you’ve only been together for a year. And… what about your independence?!”

“Honey, I have many pages in my diary from when I was a kid that would tell you I didn’t want to get married. Yet here I am.” She smiled. “People change, love. We change our minds and our intentions and our dreams, all the time. And that’s beautiful. We’re always evolving as human beings. The trick is to just keep on making choices based on what makes you happy!”

That thought terrified me, of course. Knowing something so surely one day and being a completely different person in a couple of years… I couldn’t stop thinking about which of my firm beliefs would shatter in the next year. Or two years. Or three.

Which may explain why Harry’s sudden change of heart about marriage had hit so close to home.

“I know you’re not happy about this.” Richard said as I came to see him before the ceremony.

I looked at him. “I’m happy about the baby.” I said. “God knows you’re a good father, and this baby will have the best mother and siblings anyone could ask for. But, Rich… “ I sighed. “I love you. And I love Janine. And I love your kids. And you know very well I wouldn’t have survived this longs without you. Literally. You’re family to me-“

“And you’re family to us!” He interrupted, holding my hand. “It’s why you’re Jan’s bridesmaid. You’re like a daughter to us, Jen. Like Pay. Except, you know, you have great parents, so we don’t want to overstep. So maybe we’re, like, your godparents.” He joked.

I smiled, before looking at him seriously again. “Then don’t ruin this.” I begged. “If you break her heart, it’ll never be the same. We’ll never be a family again, and we’ll never be a team again, and I can’t do this without you.”

He smiled, before wrapping his arms around me.

“We’ll always be family.”

“So…” Harry started, “when are you gonna actually tell me how you’ve been these last few weeks?”

“I told you how I’ve been.” I shrugged. “Crazy surprise wedding that gave me a number of existential questions… then promo tour for the new movie, Leah. And it was fun, because Jen Lawrence was there, but mostly just crazy busy all the time. Especially with all the interviews we had to do after the nominations-“

“That’s right!” He turned to me, smiling. “I wrote it down to congratulate you…” he picked his phone in his pocket and opened a note. “Congratulations,” he looked up, smiling after reading something, “…Mrs. Smith, on your Spirit Award nomination,”

I enjoyed the feeling that he had not only been reading about my nominations, but writing them down to congratulate me in person.

“Thank you, Mr. Smith.” I took a curtsey.

“…and for your SAG nomination,”

“Thank you, Mr. Smith.” I took another.
“…and the Golden Globe nomination.”

“Why, thank you, Mr. Smith.” I smiled. “The Spirit one is especially good, I have never been nominated for that one before!”

“This year you’re nominated for best actress in a supporting role, right?”

“Yes, JLaw is in the lead. Funny considering the movie is named after my character…”

“Okay, so now that this is out of the way.” He continued, putting the phone back in his pocket. “Tell me, how was your holidays?”

“Well, I had to convince Richard to let me chose which musical I wanted to do on Broadway, which was reasonably easier considering I managed to guilt trip him about his surprise wedding.”

It had happened in the Governors Awards in November, when I sang with Tyler to honor a producer we had both worked with before, who was receiving an award that night.

Richard wanted me to try and impress another man who was also there, whom he thought could get me into the Sound of Music reboot. Tyler and I were chatting excitedly after we exited the stage, away from the crowds, when a man approached us.

“My name is Eric Wellington,” he told us, handing out two of his business cards, “and I must say, that was quite a show you two put up in there!”

We smiled. “Thank you!” Tyler told him.

“I’ve heard your name before, haven’t I?” I asked. “I can’t remember where from…”

“Well, I work on musical theater, so it’s possible…”

For a moment, I realized I might have heard his name in the list on people to look out for that Janine had given me in an attempt to make me memorize all the people who worked with Mr. Graham that I might try to chat up that night. If Eric Wellington was one of those, than I knew I was closer than ever to mission accomplished.

“You know…” Eric said. “I’m part of a team that’s bringing a new musical to Broadway next year that we are very excited about. I would love to talk to both of you about maybe auditioning for us? What do you think?”

“Well,” Ty looked at me, “What musical is it?”

“It’s called Heathers, The Musical.” I had never heard of it. “It is based on the movie from 1989 with Winona Ryder. We were off-Broadway a couple of years ago and have been working since to get to Broadway. It’s a….” he sighed, dreamily. “…an exciting story!”

I for one had lost all of my excitement. I knew for a fact he couldn’t be from Mr. Graham’s team, since he didn’t work off-Broadway. Richard had told me we wouldn’t accept anything less than Mr. Graham’s guaranteed quality, so I knew it was a bust.

“It’s the story of a popular girl in high school who, with the help of her pseudo-homicidal boyfriend, accidentally starts to kill off their colleagues.”

I immediately changed my mind.

“That sounds amazing.” I told him.
Looking at Richard and Janine at a distance, sitting in their table in the other side of the room, I knew they wouldn’t like the idea of getting me in a show that just a couple of years before was off-Broadway. Since I had given them the idea of getting me a Tony, they were in it to win it, and getting me in a musical they knew would get me a nomination was a key part of the process.

My priorities, however, were different.

“I’d love to schedule an audition.” I told Eric Wellington, who looked like he couldn’t believe his ears.

So I gave him my personal phone number, and scheduled an audition myself, giving Monica, Janine and Richard some excuse to fly to New York and go to the studio they were temporarily using to sing them a song.

They had asked I prepared a solo from the show, which they had previously sent me, and another song, of my choice, that I felt reflected something of the character.

After studying the book they sent me – with the script of the show and all of the songs and lyrics – and watching a few videos online from when they were off-Broadway, I decided to sing them With You, a song from the musical of Ghost. It was about loving and losing someone and I felt, despite hating it, the main character would have felt that heartbroken after the story was all over.

It was a risky move, imagining how a character would feel after the story ended. But it paid up, because Eric and the other producers and directors liked it, and, a few weeks later, they called to offer me the part.

Out of respect for Richard, I told them I needed time to think about it, which they gladly gave, and so it was fight time.

I met Richard in his office instead of having him meet me somewhere as usual, so he’d know it meant that much to me, and I told him all about how I had met the musical producers, and listened to the music and lyrics, and how I honestly believed in the story and how successful it could be.

When Richard gave me the speech about how safer it would be to do Sound of Music, I mentioned the wedding, and how I had managed to keep an open mind. So he agreed to have our musical consultant analyze the Heathers The Musical book and, after getting a very cautious green sign from her, Rich agreed. And so my year 2015 was fully booked professionally with finishing the shooting of If Tomorrow Comes, then Heathers on Broadway until the end of summer and, hopefully, if we were picked, a second season for Netflix on the second semester.

Harry was in disbelief that I could schedule things so far in advance, and even more when I told him Rich already had me auditioning for things for 2016.

“Ok.” Harry said, an arm around me as we walked from the cathedral to another church in Sofia. “But how are you?” he asked. “How was your Christmas? And, maybe, who hurt you so much that you would purposely want to spend extra time in winter when you could have a Brazilian summer?”

“Ugh.” I complained, as we walked into the Saint Sofia Church, dating from the 6th Century. “Not this again…”

“I’m just curious as to why would you leave Christmas with your family in sunny, hot Brazil to this!”

He gestured around, to the old walls preserved so well inside the construction. The visible old
bricks were in pieces, and the walls had fallen apart before being wrapped inside the new construction that now worked as a sort of museum so people could see how the original was. The ceiling was low and the halls were narrow, as we walked around. Our little group was alone inside.

“I hate Christmas, Harry!” I said, a bit too bitter.

Harry gasped, looking at me so incredulous I rolled my eyes.

“I don’t like to say it, because I sound like a Grinch, but it’s true. Christmas sucks.”

“What?!”

“My Christmas is in summer, Mr. England. And… I don’t know…” I sighed, walking around the walls of the church blindly, as in a maze, as he and the guys tried to keep up. “After I moved to America we didn’t go back to Brazil for a couple of years to save money, and it sucked. It was just me and Lucas and our parents, trying to pretend it was a magical day like the movies try to make you believe Christmas has to be, but it wasn’t. And when we did go to Brazil later on, well… I barely remembered anyone anymore. My uncles and aunts, my cousins… they had these jokes and intimacy that I didn’t anymore. I felt left out.”

I turned around to look at him.

“Then there was a year in which my grandparents got all the grandkids gifts, and they forgot us.” He gave me a sad smile. “I mean, I don’t care about the damn gift, but they literally forgot we were coming, you know? And…” I sighed. “Then there’s all the judgmental comments about my career and how I’m handling my life-“

“I think everybody goes through that.” He offered.

“Maybe. But it sucks.” I told him. “This year was about goddamn Tod.”

“Still?!” He asked, his jaw clenching slightly in a jealous way.

“Yeah, well, it’s hard explaining to my grandma I only kissed the guy once. So don’t blame me, they just want me to settle down already. And you know what’s worst? I never even said I don’t want to settle down. I just don’t want to do it at twenty four, I don’t think that’s too unreasonable.”

“It isn’t.”

“And now that I have an Oscar, they all think they know what I should be doing next, you know?” I mimicked my family’s words as I spoke. “You should do this type of movie! Sandra Bullock did this once, why don’t you? Oh, but what about the company? Oh, you should probably get someone else to do all the charity stuff to give you more time to do this and that!” I sighed. “It’s like everyone is my manager now and they forget I know what I’m doing! So, yeah, Harry, Christmas sucks, because that’s what it means to me. So forgive me for wanting the complete opposite of that for New Year’s, which happens to be a snowy random place with you.”

Harry was silently following me around after that, as we looked at the church ruins and read the information on the banners around.
“Ok,” he said, finally, “I get that.”

“I mean, I just want to forget all the pressure that I’m under and all the work that’s coming in the next year and just have some goddamn fun!” I sighed, turning to him. “Is not too much to want to actually have some fun, is it?”

“Vie iskate da se zabavlyavate?”

Harry and I turned to look at the person talking Bulgarian to us. Our confused expressions must have been enough, because the young, smiley man in his late twenties quickly tried to speak English.

“You want fun?”

Harry and I exchanged a look. Nearby, Eddy, Nathan and Clark were on alert. No one seemed to know where the man had come from, but he was dressed like a hipster and smelled of cigarettes and weed.

“…I’m sorry, sir,” I said, going against Harry’s very visible gesturing for us to just leave. “What?”

“You, American. You want fun?” he asked again, his strong accent being a tad confusing.

I looked at Harry and the guys again. Did this man recognized us?


Everyone’s eyes sort of widened automatically.

“Okay…” Nate commented in a low tone. “There’s no way all those words relate to each other…”

“Secret! You go, yas?”

We were speechless, me and Harry, awkwardly looking at each other and at the guys without being able to tell what was happening. The man approached and handed me a ragged piece of paper with something Bulgarian doodled on it.

Harry held my arm protectively, trying to pull me back with him.

“You come, yas? Bar. Secret, ssshh! You come, just you, you, nice Americans! Communism bar!”

“A secret communist bar?” I heard Clark ask Eddy, sounding freaked out.

“Jakov?” a man approached – or tried to, before Nathan and Clark tried to block his way.

“ryk!” our communist friend called out to him. Nate and Clark exchanged a look before allowing him to approach.

They talked in Bulgarian some more before the new guy smiled at us.

“Oh, hello!” he seemed to have a better accent. “I’m Rudolf. This, Jakov.”

Jakov spoke some more in Bulgarian, and had me considering taking Harry’s idea for us to get the hell out.

“Ooh” Rudolf said, before staring at us from head to toe judgmentally. “Ok.” He shrugged. “You
tourists? There’s bar, here.” He pointed at the paper in my hand. “Secret bar, was communism, uh… uhm… No, no!” he giggled. “No communism! Communism bad, yas? So, they change to bar. Like, club!”

“Oh!” I said, starting to understand. “It’s a club! You’re inviting us to a club!”

“Yas, club!”

“Toonts toonts!” Jakov chipped in, smiley.

“…uh, okay.”

“You come.” Rudolf said once more, then answered in Bulgarian to something Jakov had said, and they raised their hands waving goodbye before leaving.

“Okay, weirdos.” Harry laughed with the guys, as I stared at the piece of paper in my hand.

That night, after we had dinner in a restaurant we found downtown, I guided them through the Bulgarian streets as the townspeople marched in the opposite direction, in the direction of a New Year’s concert in the main town square.

“Jenifer,” Harry sighed, tired. “Where are we going? It’s gonna be midnight soon!”

“I’m not sure…” I told him, looking around the dark, narrow street alley, “It should be here…”

“What should?” Eddy asked. “That is the question.”

“It’s, uh… a party.”

“A New Year’s eve party?” Harry asked.

“Uh… well, yes. Sure.”

Harry stopped walking.

“Jen,” he started, patiently, “are we going to the party the crazy communists from the church invited us to?”

I turned around slowly to look at him.

“Maybe?”

There was a general sound of complaining as Harry and the guys expressed what a bad idea that was.

“Guys, come on! It’ll be fun!”

“It sounds highly unsafe.” Louis said.

“You sound highly unsafe.” I complained.

“Jen.” Harry started. “Why? Just, why? Why are we doing this? Is the last night of the year, we’re in freaking Bulgaria, and you wanna spend tonight at some party with some crazy people we don’t even know?!”

“Because it’ll be fun!” I told him. “Be adventurous, Harry!”
“We could be in the Bahamas right now!” he shouted.

“Harry! Look around you.” I asked. “We’re out in the open, in a public space, and I can do this…” I walked over to him and got on my tiptoes to place a quick, gentle peck on his lips.

His expression softened. “Without worrying about paparazzi or someone around snapping a picture for twitter. You know why?” he raised an eyebrow at me, smiling. “Because there’s no one around! This place is empty because the whole town is either at home or at that concert in the town square! There’s no one here!”

“Yes,” he granted, “which is why this party will probably be lame!”

“No, which is why we’re free to do and be what we want! Without worrying about someone seeing us. Without having to stay indoors at all times, which is what we would be doing if we were in the Bahamas. Instead, we get to go to a secret club that, let’s face it, sounds awesome.” He looked at Eddy, Nathan, Clark and Louis, before looking at me again. “Here we can just be us. We’re just Mr. and Mrs. Smith, just two crazy kids living it up, exploring the world together!”

“Two kids? Aren’t we married?”

“Yes, well…” I considered that. “Mrs. Smith is a runaway from… Utah! She’s a young girl running away from her problems. Problematic family, controlling boyfriend… She wants to live her life and see the world, so Mrs. Smith-I need a name.” I decided, knowing I couldn’t just keep calling her that.

“Mary!” Harry offered, eager.

“Mary?” I gave him a look.

“Mary?” I gave him a look.

“Yeah. Just… you know…” he blushed, making me smile, confused. “I was watching It’s a Wonderful Life at Christmas, it’s the girl’s name…” he saw the weird look on my face. “It’s Christmas, I saw a Christmas movie. Stop judging me.”

“Ok.” I said. “Mary. Mary runs away with all her savings after graduation and after road tripping across the country she gets a job as a waitress in a cruise ship across the Atlantic to Europe-”

“Those still exist?”

“Yes, actually. It’s a week trip, I’ve always wanted to do it. In the ship, Mary meets handsome former pilot Smith… Vincent Smith!” I jumped, excited. “After our good friend Van Gogh!”

“Oh!”

“He fought on the Vietnam war-“

“Wait, how old is he?” he asked.

“Not old, we’re in the fifties!” I justified.

“Of course.” He ironized, smiling.

“He flew until he lost his best friend in an enemy attack. He held that man’s hand as he died and vowed to make his last wish come true,“ I said, serious, intense, “and that was to spread his ashes across the world. Including in international waters. He loved the sea. His name was… Antony. Antony…”
“Bramovich!” Nathan suggested.

“Bramov-! Bramovich?” I shrugged. “Yes, Antony Bramovich. So Vincent retired after losing his best friend, because on that night he also lost faith in fighting. And everything else… Until he met Mary in the cruise as he dumped a portion of Antony’s ashes in the sea in the middle of the night.” Harry smiled. “That night, Vincent knew he could have faith in something. So they fell in love at first sight,” he smiled broader as I hugged him, looking up at him as I spoke, “they asked the captain to marry them in international waters, and landed on Europe as Mr. and Mrs. Smith!”

“She took his name?”

“Shut up, Edgar. It’s the fifties, she’s still learning.” I said. “So Mr. and Mrs. Smith get down from the ship in Europe and travel around by train, meeting strangers, living stories, working their way around. And one day, in New Year’s Eve, they arrive at Bulgaria.”

“Because, clearly, they didn’t know better-“

“Sh. And they meet these two strangers who invite them to a secret, mysterious underground party-“

“A communism party.”

“We don’t know that! And Vince and Mary are daring and adventurous and instead of asking ‘why?’ they ask ‘why not!’” I shook him a bit, making him smile. “And they go and it’s the best night of their lives and now they have this amazing story to tell their kids one day!”

Harry looked at me, with a playful grin on his lips, in silence.

“So?” I asked. “Let’s go, my Mr. Smith! Let’s be adventurous!”

Harry looked at the shady alley ahead.

“Promise I get to choose where we go next time?” He asked.

“Sure!”

“When we die, remember we could have been in the Bahamas.”

“I will.” I promised, jumping in excitement before grabbing his hand. “Let’s GO!”

“Let’s go where, though?” he asked.

Honestly, I had no idea. According to Google Translator, we were supposed to be there already, but everything ahead of us was a dark alleyway and a decomposing shed – a barely thrown-together few planks of wood resting uncertainly against a larger building.

“It was supposed to be here…“

“Oh, well, by all means, Mary,” Harry ironized, walking over to the shed, “let’s go to this great party.” He knocked on the wooden door.

“Maybe I translated it wrong, is totally possible. We should go back until we find a local to ask-“

Suddenly, the door opened with a shrieking noise and a bearded man holding a candle stared us, talking in Bulgarian.
Harry jumped at the sudden move, and Clark and Nathan jumped in front of him, protectively.

The man just stared boringly. “Идваш ли или не?”

“What?!” I asked.

“Oh, tourists.” He said. “Welcome to Candlebar.”

The man who opened the door for us was Andrej, he was one of the people who ran Candlebar – a secret establishment with no marketing, no brand. To know where it was – or that it existed – you had to hear from someone who had been there. Not even many of the locals knew.

As Andrej explained to us, the shed they use – a two stores barn - used to house an anti-communism press resistance headquarters during World War II.

“That’s badass.” I said.

“That’s amazing.” Harry agreed, trying to look around. I tried not to be too smug about being right about the place.

It was hard seeing much on Candlebar because the only lights there were from candles spaced in the bar counter and a few tables around.

“It’s so it can’t be seen from outside.” Andrej explained. “That was very important during war.”

And we knew it worked, seeing as we almost left since we couldn’t see anything inside from the alleyway. I barely could see anything inside. I could tell there was no major, fancy decorations. Just plain wooden tables with chairs, and a wooden counter with wooden stools. The walls were gray and old, with fading paint, and the only actual electric devices around were in the sound booth – a simple table with a man playing some simple, upbeat Bulgarian jazz music.

The loud sound of chatter and the smell of cigarettes and weed filled the room as Andrej walked us to the bar, where a few shelves inside two big voids in the wall held a number of transparent bottles and a woman took our request for ‘whatever’.

She served us absinthe.

“I still can’t believe this is how you wanna spend New Year’s Eve.”

“Well, I’m sorry it isn’t some posh beach party, Harry, but is fun. Get down from your high horse and live it up!”

“It’s not about that,” he justified, as we found a table under the stairs. “Isn’t it tradition that what you do when the clock hits twelve is what you’ll do for the rest of the year?”

“In America, yes, something like that. But…I don’t know, it’s not about the place.” I threw a leg over the communal bench to sit facing him, and wrapped my arms around him, who hugged me back, “When that clock hits twelve, I just want to be with you.”

He smiled, leaning forward to kiss me. I felt his hand slid up from my leg to under my sweater and jumped at the coldness of his palm.

“No!” I said, slapping him jokingly and pulling his arm down. He laughed at me. “Your hands are too cold!”

“You can warm them up for me!” he pleaded, teasingly.
“Use your gloves!” I joked, giggling.

“Oh, my God,” the person in the table behind turned in his bench to talk to us, “You look so much like that actress chick, doesn’t she?” he turned again to ask his friends. “The one who won the Oscar!”

As my blood ran cold on my veins, I froze in place, feeling Harry and the boys start eyeing the exit.

“Jenifer Lawrence?”

“No, that’s the Hunger Games one. The other one!”

“Yeah, and she’s blonde.” His friend agreed smoking a joint.

“The other one. The one with the cancer movie and the badass speech-“

“Jenifer Silva?” someone suggested.

“Jenifer Silva!”

“Oh, my Gosh!” I said, loudly, in an affected voice tone, making a valley accent, “I get that, like, totes all the time!” they nodded, smiling, “And doesn’t my husband looks like Prince Harry too?”

Harry looked at me, wide-eyed, before I had the chance to hold his face with my too hands and turn it to our table-neighbors.

They looked at him attentively.

“Nah, man.” The man said. “Prince Harry doesn’t have a beard… and he is ginger.” His friends agreed, laughing. We laughed too, half awkwardly, half entertained at their conclusions.

Harry was wearing a beanie, and with the dim lights of Candlebar, they couldn’t quite see the shade of his beard.

“But it’s cool, man,” another man said, across the table, “you’re a lot better looking than Prince Harry!”

“Tha-thank you.” Harry smiled. I bit my lip trying to hold my laughter.

“I’m Chace,” the guy said, “these are Summer and Ned, we’re from New Mexico.”

We waved at them. “These are Eddy, Nate, Clark, Louis,” I pointed at the guys around the table, “I’m Mary, and this is Vince.”

We talked to them a bit more, sharing stories (made up or otherwise) and joints and commenting about other places we’d been, or the music choices of the house DJ - which sometimes involved something in English – and found our new friends were walking Europe on foot (!).

Then, as a Weeknd song started playing, I jumped in my bench, excitedly (this was after the absinthe). I pulled Harry by his hand to the small space free of tables where a few people had been dancing throughout the night, and went spinning around a couple of times holding his hand, before wrapping my arms around his waist.

Harry, who usually needed some incentive before indulging me in my dancing, was smiling. I started moving to the rhythm of the song, grinding myself to him; we enjoyed the secretive feeling the darkness provided, and Harry’s hands – now warm - danced around my body under my sweater.
He glued his cheek to mine as we danced, and slowly slid down to kiss my neck, the friction of his beard in my skin sending chills all over me.

Harry walked us across the room so slowly I barely noticed, until my back was against the wall and his body was pressing on mine. I felt the tips of his fingers grip my hips strongly as he thrust his crotch on me. His warm breath stroked against my neck in the cold, warming me from the inside as I felt my body tingle in all the right ways.

His kisses trailed my neck and jawline until his lips found mine again. He nibbled my lower lip for a long time as his hand made its way up and down my back before I pulled away myself so I could kiss him. Our tongues met, eagerly, as he pressed me harder against the cold wall, which started feeling warmer as my insides boiled in lust.

My hand grabbed a strong grip of his hair; the other slipped down his torso; I touched his skin under his shirt, scratching my hands down his abs until the edge of his jeans, enjoying the privacy of the darkness and his overcoat shielding us away.

He pulled away from the kiss suddenly, taking a hand from me to support himself on the wall as I had quickly slid my hand lower down his pants.

He was hard.

“Hi.” I smiled. He moaned.

He bit his lip, smiling. I slid my hand up and down, watching him drop his head against mine, trying to keep himself standing.

His hand in my back moved up, over my sweater, until my neck, and grabbed a handful of my hair. He pulled my hair, making my head slide back, and kissed the front of my neck, the sharp touch of his beard making me feel exposed, vulnerable to his touch.

I liked it.

He kissed my neck, his warm, soft lips sucking the sensitive part of my overexposed skin, trailing down my chin. The sharp touch of his beard sent chills over all of me and I gripped him stronger. I couldn’t tell our low, whispy moans apart anymore, but I felt the increasing tingly sensation between my legs grow harder.

He stroke his beard over my neck to whisper in my ear, “I want to fuck you one last time before this year is over.”

I smiled at his words, biting my lip. I looked around; no one was paying much attention to us other than our own security detail, who were kind enough to pretend they weren’t.

“Do it.” I asked, nipping his earlobe.

I was aware we were in public, but at that point, I would be glad if he took me against that wall, no matter who was watching.

Harry pulled away slightly, and looked around. Then he took my hand off his pants and held it tight, pulling me after him as he made his way through the room. Everyone was dancing, or chatting happily, looking at their clocks as midnight approached.

Harry guided me into a darker hallway; it had fewer candles and a couple of doors in the back. We walked right into one of them, Harry quickly pulling me in and locking it behind us.
The tiny bathroom was even darker, since it only had a dim candle light, but we didn’t care - we liked it.

Harry held me from behind, running his hands around my body as I raised a hand to grip his hair when he kissed my neck. I felt his fingers as they slid under my sweater, cupping my breast, gently pressing my nipples; I unzipped my jeans, feeling his hard self against my ass as he grinded me against a wall. I could barely feel the air anymore; I felt his lips as he kissed the small of my neck, and his hands slipped down, excruciatingly slowly until they were sliding down my underwear.

He opened me up with his fingers and slid them in; he took his time, moving them around in circles, and up and down, making me moan again.

He whispered in my ear, his warm breath striking my skin, “You’re so wet.”

“Fuck me.” I moaned, harder.

His hands slid my pants down, and I undressed one leg so I could open them as Harry grabbed a condom from his pocket and put it on.

He picked me up, grabbing my butt cheeks, and sat me in the bathroom sink, bringing his hard member out; I barely minded the cold marble against my skin when he slid inside of me with a daring look in his eyes. He leaned in, biting my lower lip again, as he pounded inside of me, holding me up with his hands on my ass.

“Fuck-“ I heard him mumble, his forehead against mine as he moaned.

“Grab my hair again,” I asked.

I wrapped my legs around him tighter as he did, pulling my head back again, striking my neck with his lips, his beard giving me chills as he stroked in and out of me.

“Faster!” I begged, whispery; he obeyed. “There! Don’t stop, don’t-”

I stopped making much sense as I moaned, hearing his voice as he followed close behind.

He let go of my hair as we felt the spasms of pleasure, and I held him tight against me as he thrust his hips on me eagerly as we reached peak together, breathing sharply on each other.

We paused, breathing heavily, still holding one another.

His hand caressed my back, and he left a trail of pecks on my neck, slowly, as I slid my legs down.

He pulled out, with a long sigh.

I dressed up when he stepped away to throw out the condom and do the same. I was still breathing heavily when he came close, holding my hips again, making me look up to the playful grin on his lips. I smiled back, in silence, and we brushed our noses together slowly as we sighed.

He closed the grip on me, hugging my tightly and leaning down to kiss my lips, our tongues dancing together making me smile.

Suddenly, the song outside dimmed down as the fireworks exploded nearby. There was an excited shouting outside as the clocks around Sofia hit twelve in the morning of the first day of 2015.

Harry leaned back as we smiled. Then he looked me lovingly and gave me the first words of that year.
“I love you.”

Chapter End Notes

Marry Christmas and Happy New Year! Kidding. That was 9 months ago! Anyway, hope you liked it! Next chapter: Someone else finds out about Jen and Harry, and Jen gets a Psychology lesson that tells her what is it that Harry is doing exactly. Thanks for reading!
It was in Canada that I explained it to Harry, when we were still laying down the ground rules for our ‘thing’, which then was still merely at a ‘casual friends with benefits’ level. I decided to do so because it occurred to me that back when he had said he loved me for the first time, in Scotland, I didn’t explain it. I just said ‘don’t’ and walked away. And then, later, when we went on a date he decided to hold himself back because he understood what he assumed was my ‘fear of commitment’. The hole was a bit deeper than that.

“Every time I have heard the word in the past,” I told him, “every single time, it always ended in heartbreak. So, with time, I started to try and understand why.”

“And why was it?”

“Because it was said prematurely.” I sighed. “’I love you’ shouldn’t be something you say because you assume it’s what people do in relationships, or just because someone said it first. It’s a big deal, it’s a responsibility. It says…” I paused. “It says ‘you’re it’! You look at someone and decide they’re what you want, the search is over, you want to be with them for the rest of your life… So it shouldn’t be said just because.”

Harry nodded, and I was glad he understood. “So you shouldn’t tell someone the dimension of what you feel for them just because you can’t tell if the future is certain?”

I sighed. “Well, personally, I think so.”

“Okay, so…” he started. “If you do, you can?”

“If a decent amount of time has passed, so this understanding makes sense, then sure-“

“How much is the decent amount of time?”

“I don’t know, I suppose it’s different for everyone…”

“Alright, well…” he sighed. “Okay, then.”

I smiled, and got up to go find the menu so we could order room service, glad to have a change of subject.

“So, dinner,” I started, “what’re you thinking, love?”

I eyed the menu, enjoying the pastas options, and thought I could go for penne Bolognese. So I raised my eyes to ask if he wanted to share it when I realized he was looking at me with a mischievous smug on his face.

“What?” I asked.
“…you called me ‘love’.”
I smiled, contradicted, at his childish attempt at catching me in a bending of my own rule.

“Well, it’s not the same… I used it as a ‘nickname’, so it doesn’t count.”

“Mm-hm.” He mumbled. “Whatever you say, love.”

“You never call me love,” I said, “you call me ‘babe’. I know, because you started it as a joke. You said it sounded so Californian.”


“What?”


“Again, what?”

He smiled, and got up, walking up to me, he picked the menu, trying to look casual and failing, due to the intense look in his eyes.

“I. Love, you.”

“You’re ridiculous.” I said, biting my lip to try and mask the smile on my lips.

I knew I couldn’t tell him to take it back, because he technically wasn’t telling me he loved me, he was just stating a nickname – in a nonsense way – but I should have known with that first signal he wouldn’t abide to the rule.

So, when he said it again in London, in the middle of our discussion about being exclusive, I don’t know why I was so surprised. But, then, he took it back so I let it go.

In Bulgaria, in the first few minutes of 2015 when he said it again, I felt my heart pound heavier in my chest when I prepared to tell him once more that I didn’t want to hear the ‘L’ word.

“Harry…” I started, sighing heavily, laying my head in his chest using his familiar smell to take comfort in the difficult topic.

“What?” he asked. “I do.”

“Harry…. ”

“Okay, fine. I get it. Sorry. I’m-I’m sorry… I just can’t help it sometimes. Especially when you make me feel so…” he tightened the hug on me, and sighed. “Can I take it back again?” I nodded. “I take it back. What I mean is… I like you a lot?” he asked, uncertain.

I smiled, “…you like me a lot?”

“You said no ‘L’ word.” He teased.

I raised my head again; he was smiling, playful.

“Like starts with ‘L’.” I reminded him.
He chuckled. “Well, what do you want me to say then? I adore you?” he asked, sarcastic.

“That does sound a lot better.” I teased, making him laugh.

He kissed me again, for a long time, before looking at me.

“I adore you, Mary Smith.”

I saw it in his eyes then, that he didn’t really mean that. That his take back was void; that what he really meant when he said he adored me was what he first said, that he loved me. But I didn’t want to acknowledge the anxiety it brought me to hear that, so I chose to fool myself and believe him.

We said our goodbyes like we usually did: with a lot of kisses until the very moment one of us had to walk out the door.

Harry pressed me against the door, kissing me until we heard Edgar’s gentle knock letting me know it was time to go.

“Good luck on the award season.” He breathed in-between kisses.

“I’ll see you in February when I’m in London for the Bafta awards!” I reminded him. “We’ll meet somewhere!”

He smiled. I left.

The next few times I saw Harry, that’s always how it happened. Usually shorter periods of time – we were lucky if we could get four days off, two of which were spend with relocation to some remote location where we’d meet. Usually we didn’t meet unless we could get three days, at least. This way, counting on travel time, we still had a full day together.

At first, as it happens with most relationships (though I use the term here loosely), it was exciting and new, which gave us the energy to keep going. However, as time progressed, the distance and the time zone differences made their weight known.

As London was eight hours ahead of Los Angeles, I usually got a call from him around four in the afternoon, right before he went to bed. If I was shooting, he’d leave a goodnight message, with a sweet summary of how his day went, which usually ended with him saying he missed me. I woke up every day at five or six-ish with a good morning text, which usually had a description of whatever nonsense he had dreamt that night, which I answered with a phone call. As it was two in the afternoon for him, he’d be heading back to work after lunch, and we’d talk until I had to hung up to get ready for my day.

Right before I went to bed every day, I’d take my laptop with me, and place it in the mattress next to me to call Harry on Skype. I never went to bed sooner than midnight, as shooting usually went until eleven - some days longer -, this would be the time he is waking up, at eight. This process repeated itself for a long time before I finally realized I was talking to him no less than three times a day.

When I called to talk about how crazy that was, and ask if he had noticed, all he did was laugh about it and ask what I was doing.

“Having lunch.” I told him.

“I’m having dinner!” he said.
“Some of that weird British food?” I teased.

“For your information, is veggies and chicken and it is delicious.”

“Whatever. I’m having sushi.”

“That’s not dinner food.”

“It’s lunch!” I laughed. “And it’s L.A., this is our tradition.”

“Whatever you say. I’m watching the new Blacklist, by the way… I’m telling you, he is her father!”

“Is not!”

And so we started talking around meal time as well – lunch for me, dinner for him. Not always, of course. Only when we hadn’t lunch/dinner dates with friends or for work. Still, the weirdness came and went and I didn’t bother focusing on it.

Texting him around my day became just as big a part of my routine as hair and makeup was. I’d text him a picture of my location for the day, he’d text a picture of a drawing some sweet child made for him at a charity visit. I’d text a picture of the Santa Monica pier sunset as I went jogging, and he’d text me the sunrise in central London when he woke up. Somehow, we managed to keep in each other’s lives despite the distance.

In a way, it kept us close; in so many others, it just made us miss each other more.

On January, I attended pre and after parties, as well as the ceremonies for the National Board of Review Awards Gala, Golden Globe and SAG Awards, as well as their respective pre and after parties, as usual, and all the rounds of interviews and talk show attendances required, but this year I onle won the Golden Globe, for best actress in a supporting role. Like the year before, I noticed the differences in treatment now.

My red carpet arrival time was later, which they reserved for the big celebrities; I had a number of reporters yelling as I walked by, asking to speak to me, but Janine rushed me to the ones that had been agreed beforehand instead of pushing me to give interviews to whomever would listen, as it was before.

When I stepped in front of the pictures panel, the wall of photographers in front of my grew louder and eager, and their flashes so fast that it was as if I had one giant beam of light that I had to stare right into. It was tough seeing much, but I could hear their voices as they asked me to turn right or left, or to give them a over-the-shoulder look. I didn’t do any of that, a privilege my newfound rank afforded me.

This year, I had Alessa, Livia and Lucas as my dates to most of the awards, since in the year before my parents went to all of it, I figured I should bring those who hadn’t. Livia was having fun asking her favorite celebrities for selfies, Lucas was on a mission to get one with his favorite artist, Bono, and Alli was weirdly calm about the whole experience.

She stayed with me the whole time, making jokes and talking about how things were going in France, ignoring the very obvious flirtations of a number of cute guys that approached her in every one of those events.

“I’m not interested.” She said, shrugging, when I told her she could go speak with them if she wanted to.
In that month, Harry went into preparation for his summer in Africa, planning his activities, and researching and choosing which group he would be taking part at, which apparently involved a lot of meetings with his team and Skype meetings with these African organizations. He also delivered a speech at a graduation ceremony and had to continue to attend his weekly meetings to maintain his royal duties in check.

At the very beginning of February, he met with people who were running the London Marathon this year to raise funds for charities supported by him, his brother and sister-in-law.

On the very next day, I attended the Oscars Nominee Luncheon for the second time in my career. It was amazing how much less intimidating the whole thing was on the second time around. I knew more people, and socialized easier, exchanged numbers and emails and made plans to ‘go golfing’ with an amount of people I never thought I’d even speak to in my life.

On the day after that, he went to something called the Nottingham Youth project to watch a movie made as part of a community initiative aimed at tackling problems including youth violence and gangs, as well as improving opportunities for the young people involved. He was very excited about that, as he liked working with kids and helping projects that inspired them to go great things with themselves.

Five days later, I flew to London with my bodyguard, my brother and sister-in-law, my assistant, publicist, and Alli, who would already stay in Europe to go back home to France.

I went through the usual dress up routine, wearing Oscar de la Renta as I had done that entire season as part of my contract, and having my hair and makeup done by the same artists and friends I’d known for years.

When I stepped into the red carpet then, the setting might have been different, and the accent from the rude reports too, but the essence was the same, and so I was in my element. The only difference was that I had asked Rachel, my stylist, to make sure my personal bracelet was a part of that look.

“It’s a good luck charm. It has sentimental value.” I told her, sending a picture of the Hermès bracelet Harry had given me, the gray and golden one with a shiny golden ‘H’ in the center.

It went well with my black trumpet, off-shoulder dress and I knew Harry would be watching and looking through red carpet pictures of me, because he did it all the times until then. I had wanted him to see that even though we were apart and living a secret, he was still in my mind through all that I did.

As soon as I sat down before the ceremony, I read a text from him.

‘Unsurprisingly, you look beautiful. Nice bracelet, love.’

I smiled at my phone, typing a quick response (‘I thought you’d like that touch :) I’ll see you later tonight!’).

I heard Alli sigh heavily at my side. “Who’s that?”

I looked at her, hiding the phone away in my purse. “Taylor.”

She gave me a long look, squinting her eyes ever so slightly, but didn’t say anything.

A handsome blonde man two rolls behind us was throwing us some meaningful looks, so I used it to change the subject.
“You have another fan.” I told her, who used the reflection on her phone to see who it was. She shrugged.

“He’s cute!” I told her. “You’ve been studying so hard, you deserve to have some fun, you know?”

“Whatever,” she said, as the lights dimmed, “I’m fine.”

The show started, I lost my category, and the entertaining night passed by quickly as we had fun.

Since we had arrived that day, Alli and Livia were too jet legged to go to the after party with me, so Lucas was courteous enough to follow them back to the hotel.

I still had to stay, for professional reasons, but as soon as those were done, I relieved Monica from hers and she went to see Thomas. Janine was staying, at work – unfathomed her now five months baby bump – but I gave her some excuse, grabbed Eddy and made a run for it.

We managed to ditch the paparazzi in the way, and they probably headed back to the hotel where I was staying to get a good picture. Of course, they didn’t know that was not where I was going.

When he opened the door to me, Harry’s eyes quickly hovered my after party outfit, a short black and yellow dress with pink and purple jewelry. Then he sighed, looking at me.

“Could it be? Is it Oscar winner Jenifer Silva at my door?”

I smiled. “I asked around about where did a girl had to go in this town to have some fun and I heard Prince Harry was the person to ask.” I joked.

“Well,” he smiled, reaching a hand to hold mine, touching his bracelet in my wrist, “if it’s fun that you want, you’ve come to the right place.”

With a quick move, he pulled my close and wrapped his arms around me, kissing me so strongly I wondered how was it that I managed to stay away from him for more than a month.

We got hungry, so we got in the car to go find a drive through Nando’s, something he swore I had to try. We drove to a faraway one so it would be safer and ate with guys on the parking lot.

We were in the car in the way back, and I had my head on his shoulders trying to brace myself for the upcoming moment I’d have to step out and join Eddy in the other car to go back to the hotel and catch my flight the next morning. Harry held my hand, caressing my fingers with his when he leaned forward.

“Stop the car!” he asked Nathan, who was driving.

We pulled over suddenly at the side of the street. The night was dark and there wasn’t much traffic as I looked around. Holding me by the hand, Harry pulled me out onto the street.

We crossed as he put on a hat, popping his coat’s collar up so no one would see him. I wrapped myself tighter in my big, black overcoat – it was a chilly, snowless winter night in London as I followed him, I realized we were by the riverside, in Thames. The parliament was just ahead, as was the bridge and, across it, the aquarium and the London Eye.

Harry turned at me, smiling when he reached the wall by the riverside.

“What’s that?”

As the lights shone on the waters down below, I had a flashback to a night in 2013. I went to meet
him at a club, found him suffering through a conversation with his ex, and then stood right where he did now speaking about the Doctor Who episode when Christopher Eccleston and Billie Piper ran across the bridge smiling as they tried to save the world.

“Yes.” I smiled, stepping closer. “You were freaking out because I was sitting here.”

“In a short, yellow skirt that kept flying up with the wind…” he said, dreamily, with a grin in his lips.

“I kissed you that night.” I said. “In front of Chelsy.”

“I think you mean Chelsteen.” He joked, about my attempt to make his ex uncomfortable. “And, uh… yeah, I remember the kiss.” He looked at the river, smiling. “I couldn’t handle that night anymore and then suddenly I look up and there you are. Walking over, looking so gorgeous as if you had just stepped out of a movie…” he sighed, then turned to look at me. “And you sat on my lap and kissed me and I swear to God it was like nothing else mattered.”

I smiled, blushing. “I almost forgot to stop.” I admitted. “I almost forgot I had to make up a story about being there to help get you out of that one… I sort of just wanted to keep on kissing you.”

He stepped closer, wrapping me up in his arms. “You should have.” I smiled. “And you know what else? Later on, I sat right here, looking at you, the lights illuminating your face, your hair flowing with the wind… And I almost said it. I was gonna ask you to go out with me, but then you said we should break up.”

“You were not!” I said, in disbelief.

“I was. You asked if I was still in love with Chelsy, and I looked at you… feeling my heart almost burst at the mere thought of your lips on mine and I realized I didn’t love her, because…” he smiled. “I loved you.”

I felt it harder to breathe again.

“So I almost told you. I almost said, Jen, I don’t love her anymore. I love someone else now… I would wait until you asked who, because you would, you know you would,” I knew I would, “and I was gonna look you in the eyes and say…” He cupped my face in his hands, making me look at him, “I love you.”

I felt the air escape me. I told myself that was fine. He’s telling a story. He’s not technically telling me that he loves me-

“I love you.” He repeated.

“Harry…” I sighed.

“I take it back.” He said, quickly, kissing my forehead, before hugging me. “It’s ok, Jenny, I take it back.”

His arms tightened around me, and I let his words ring in my mind to relax: I take it back. He took it back. It’s okay, because he took it back.

When I walked into our hotel suite later on, with my heels on my hands, I was as quiet as I could, and quickly walked over to my room’s door, doing what I could not to wake everybody up. I quickly closed the doors and relaxed, walking over to my nightstand to lay down the purple necklace that had been weighing down on me all night, when the lights came up, making me jump.
“Well, well, well.” Said Alli, sitting in a chair near the lamp by the windows.

“I was just sitting here, Jesus Christ, Alli!” I said, as my heart pounded in my chest at the scare. “What is wrong with you?! You could have killed me-“

“Where were you?”

I wondered how long she had been sitting there. “After party.”

“Right. After party. Because Janine seems to be under the impression you left about…” she checked her watch. “Four hours ago.”

I gulped. “Did you tell her I wasn’t here?”

“No, because I’m not a snitch. I made up some story.”

“Oh. Ok. Well- I ran into some friends at the party and we decided to go have drinks somewhere else. So, technically, still an after party, which is what I meant-“

“Spare me, Rosangela.” She interrupted. “I know you too well. Come on, tell me. What are you hiding?!”

“No thing.” I said, defensive.

“I’m your best friend, Jenny, there’s nothing you don’t tell me. You’ve been giving your phone heart eyes the whole award season, so, fess up.”

“Alli, come, on. I’m tired. Let’s just-“

“How long have you been seeing Harry?”

“Whaa-What?!” I said, my voice an eight higher. “That’s- I don’t- What Harry?!”

“Don’t lie to me, Jenifer. I’m supposed to be your best friend!”

I scorned. “Right! Then- then, tell me why you don’t want to sleep with the hot dudes hitting on you for the last month!”

“Don’t change the subject.”

“You don’t change the subject! What is that about, Alli?”

She looked around the room, frustrated, before sighing.

“I’m going through some shit. Okay? Dating won’t actually help, so I’m just focusing on me at the moment.”

“What a beautiful way to avoid the question.”

“Fine.” She stood up. “Fine, you want to know? Here you go. I hate Sorbonne. I hate France. Everybody is pretentious and egotistical and they live for their academic careers and make me feel super guilty for wanting to go out and have fun from time to time. It’s as if it is a crime to take a break from research! I mean, excuse me if I don’t want my career to be the only thing in my life!”

She took a deep breath, pausing. “I can’t remember why I even chose this subject to research. I mean… what is it helping? Whose life is it changing? A bunch of academics who live for nothing but literature? I see the importance of it, but honestly…” she shrugged. “I miss teaching. I miss my
kids and teaching and seeing what I tell them make an actual, real life difference in their lives.”

She walked over, and sat on the bed.

“I want to go back to New York.” She paused, “…also I miss Josh.”

I sighed. Biting my lower lip, I took off my overcoat and sat by her side.

“How did you know?”

“I’ve just been feeling really shitty about the whole thing. I mean, I have no motivation whatsoever about any of it anymore.”

“I mean about Harry.”

She looked at me, a smile growing in her lips.

“You have this very telling smile that I’ve only seen a few times before.” She said. “When Aiden Carlton invited you to our senior prom, when Tristan Evans said he hoped to see you on Spring Break, then later when you slept with him, then again when-“

“Okay, I get it.” I stopped her. “I smile when I like someone. But how did you know it was him?”

She shrugged. “A hunch. Maybe wishful thinking.” She smiled. “Tell me!”

I giggled. “I… I don’t know what to say. I saw him in Brazil. We agreed to be friends. Then I came to his birthday party when I was here last September and he told me he still had feelings for me, but I was too shocked to do anything, so a week later we were both in Italy and I decided to stop kidding myself. So I went to meet him and-“ I shrugged, sighing. “We’ve been meeting every now and then since. It’s nothing serious, he’s not my boyfriend or anything. We just… see each other from time to time, sort of.”

“But you’re texting constantly.”

“Well, yeah-“

“Are you seeing other people?”

“Well, no. We’re sort of exclusive.”

“Sweetheart, he’s your boyfriend.”

“He’s not.” I justified. “It’s not like that.”

“Right.” She nodded, sceptic.

I sighed. “He keeps saying he loves me.”

Raising a leg up, she sat on her side looking at me. “How is that not a good thing?!“

“It is!” I laid down in the bed, with a bang. “I guess. I guess it is? I mean, I don’t know. It won’t work. We have no prospects for the future, so why bother saying it if we know it’s supposed to end-“

“Oh, God! I thought we went over this. You were start living your life in the now instead of worrying about the future, remember?”
“Yes, but-“

“No buts. Why do you really don’t want him to say it?”

“Because…” I sighed. “When has a guy ever said that and it ended well?”

Alli laid next to me, and we were silent for a while.

“I told him I don’t want to hear it, but he keeps saying it. Then he takes it back.”

She looked at me. “He takes it back?”

“Yes. He goes… I love you. And when I start to protest he says, it’s okay, Jenny, I take it back.”

“Huh.” She said, sitting back up.

“I mean, I like it. Not that he keeps trying to say it, that he understands that I need him to take it back.”

Alli sighed. “You know… when I was in Columbia I took this Psychology of Choice class… And it talked about the process of training yourself to make better decisions. Like, slapping a rubber band in your wrist every time you feel an urge to smoke, for example. And then you start to associate smoking to something bad, and it helps addicts to quit.”

“Like training a puppy.” I offered.

“Yes. And the opposite it’s also true, you know?” I nodded. Alli turned to look at me again. “It kind of sounds like what Harry is doing.”

I looked at her in confusion.

“Think about it. He understands you have been broken before. So he tell you how he feels, but then takes it back when he sees you getting nervous, to make you feel safe.”

“Mm-hmm?”

“He’s getting you used to hearing the ‘love’ part by making you anticipate that he’ll take it back. So, with time, when you hear it, you won’t feel nervous anymore, because you’ll know he’ll take it back. Do you know what I mean?”

“I guess…”

I thought about the moment in Thames. The ‘L’ word hadn’t come out of his mouth by accident. It had deliberately said it with the intention of taking it back afterwards.

“This way he gets to say what he feels and keep you calm. One day you might discover hearing the words doesn’t scare you anymore.”

She saw the look of wonder on my face as I started to understand what she meant.

“Jen, he’s training you to be loved.”
When I walked into the room, its emptiness was the first thing that really got to me.

Press junkets consisted of a corridor of small rooms filled with two chairs in front of the movie poster and a interviewing team, who, by the time I arrived with Eddy, Monica and Janine, were all set up to interview me about the movie. I said hi, they mic-ed me, and after greeting the interviewer who sat in front of me, we began a quick exchange about the movie. I repeated the process until all the interviews had been done.

There wasn’t a camera crew or the professional filming lights in the room I walked into now, just a normal, dark room with two white chairs in front of the Bloodline poster – my over-photoshopped face splattered on it. In one of the chairs, absentmindedly typing something away in a table, sat Edward Lane-Fox.

“What?” Janine, her big baby bump in front of her, stared at the room, than checked the number on the door, than turned to Monica, who looked just as puzzled. “Monica?”

Monica checked the schedule on her phone. “This is it, it’s the next interview. It’s scheduled.”

Edward raised his eyes to look at me.

“Oh, good. You’re here.” He said, locking the screen and crossing his legs. “Do sit, Ms. Silva.”

“This is ridiculous, there must be a mistake.” Janine mumbled.

“I did everything right, it’s what was on your schedule.” Monica justified.

“Good heavens, there’s no mistake. I asked for an interview.” Edward complained. “And I do believe I only have five minutes, so will you please sit down now?”

“I’m gonna call management.” Janine stated.

“How long have you been sleeping with Harry?” Edward asked.

I raised my eyes to meet his, as my publicist scoffed.

“What?”

“Give us the room.” I asked.

The smile disappeared from Janine’s face. “What?!”

“Oh,” Monica mumbled, “that explains everything!”

Janine ignored her. “Is it true?”
“Out.” I repeated. “Please.”

She exchanged some looks with Monica before pointing at her watch and throwing LF another bitter stare.

“Five minutes!”

Eddy closed the door after him, and so we were alone.

That day was not one of the good ones.

I was in Cannes, France, and this was right after the premiere of my new movie, Bloodline. That May was warm and busy as I had one of the only breaks I’d get for the next three months, when I’d go into Heathers The Musical.

On the three weeks until then, however, as was previously scheduled, I got away to tend to these other work appointments. I had attended the Met Gala and gone on my promo tour around the US and Europe, and then headed to the Cannes, to which I brought Alli this time, enjoying the fact she lived in France.

But Alli didn’t go with me to my press junkets; instead I had told her to enjoy the sun by our hotel’s pool, and now I was left to face Lame-Fox all by myself.

I walked slowly, making my way around the chair, and sat down in front of him, crossing my legs.

“They didn’t know, I see.” Edward mumbled. “Nice picture.”

He gestured to the movie poster behind me. I remained quiet, waiting for his time to be up.

“I see we find ourselves in the same situation as when we met, Ms. Silva.” He told me. “You and Harry are dating and I must act like the villain, because I’m the only one still reasonable enough—“

“We’re not dating.”

“Well, yes.” He nodded. “That’s the problem.”

“…I’m sorry, that’s the problem?”

“Oh, don’t get me wrong. You being in his life is a problem. But you know what makes it worst?” he waited for an answer from me, that never came. “You’re fooling him about your intentions.”

“Excuse me?”

“How long have you been together?”

I did the math in my head, but he didn’t wait.

“Eight months.” He told me. “You’ve been together for eight months.”

I felt my brows curl in confusion as I checked that in my head. He wasn’t wrong, but why did it feel like such little time? It felt like a lot longer had passed.

It felt weird especially because the last time I had seen Harry had been in March, almost two months before. We talked everyday, of course, but only then had I managed to escape work to be with him.
It had been right after I finished shooting the first season of If Tomorrow Comes. We had a round of applause, a wrap party in the director’s house, and then I was off to Broadway. Or, more specifically, to the Bahamas – the place Harry had picked for us.

We were staying in a little village-type hotel, a little house away from everything.

I had gone straight to the airport after the wrap party after barely sleeping for two nights to finish out night scenes. So, with the jet leg, when I finally got to Harry, I was absolutely exhausted.

I ran to him after slamming the door and jumped. He picked me in his arms, tightly, and held us in place for the longest time. We had our noses in each other’s necks, breathing in our sent, trying to believe we were together again – finally.

This was a month after I had seen him in London for one night only when I was there for the Bafta Awards.

Harry raised his head to look at me.

“Congratulations on the Spirit Award.”

I smiled. “Thank you!”

Award season 2015 had ended leaving me with two awards: my third Golden Globe in a row (“Well, I guess I know what I’m doing here since this keeps happening!”) and my first Independent Film Spirit award. For a non favorite indie movie with little chance of victory, it was a positive result.

“…and on being Maxim’s hottest woman of the year?” Harry went on.

I laughed. “Don’t you feel lucky?”

“Yeah!” he chuckled. “I’m dating the hottest woman of the year!”

The word echoed in my head. ‘Dating.’

Harry noticed my look of concern.

“You know what I mean…” he justified.

I remembered Alli’s words, about the Psychology of Choice, and Harry’s attempt to train me to accept being loved. I couldn’t help but nib on my lower lip, wondering if she could be right.

I leaned in, keeping my eyes on his ridiculously blue ones, and joined our lips in a kiss. His mouth opened to let me in and our tongues met, making me forget whatever I had been worrying about before.

I felt my skin warm up as Harry stumbled against the bed in our hotel room and sat down. I opened my legs, sitting in his lap, and felt his hand grip my hair as the other laid strongly on my hip.

I tried, but my own grip didn’t have any strength, and I sighed more than I should have. Finally, Harry leaned back.

“What’s wrong?”

I sighed, wanting to shut him up with another kiss, but knowing the sad truth:
“I’m so tired.” I told him, guilty. “I’m sorry, but I’ve barely slept for the last fifty-five hours, we had to hurry to finish shooting on schedule.”

“It’s okay.” He stopped me, smiling. He still gave me another peck, before signaling for me to get down. “You’ve been working too hard, you need to sleep.”

“We didn’t fly all the way here just to sleep.”

“Well, yes, but the beach will still be there when-”

“You know what I mean.”

Sex. I meant sex.

He gave me a cheeky grin, “I don’t know about you, but I came to see you. And I’m seeing you. And you need to sleep. Go on. I’ll nap with you.”

So I took off my jeans, and my earrings, and laid under the sheets with his arms around me.

“All this traveling to see each other would take its toll eventually.” He murmured.

His fingers intertwined in mine, our breaths synched, and I drifted off.

It was the best sleep I had had in weeks.

I woke up a few times – to go pee, and when Harry was on the phone with someone talking about work. Then he offered me food, which I refused before turning to the other side, hugging my pillow and falling asleep again. When I woke up after that, he was dressed.

“Good morning.” I smiled at him. “Where are we going?”

He sighed, giving me a guilty smile. “I’m going to the airport.”

I sat up. “What?!?”

“I’m sorry!” he asked, coming to sit next to me.

“How long did I sleep for?” I searched for my phone. “I was so sure I had an alarm set-“

“About twenty-eight hours, on and off. I turned your alarm off.” He said, seeing my shocked expression. “You needed to sleep!”

“I needed to be with you!” I cried.

He smiled. “You were. I cuddled you most of the time.” He chuckled when I gave him an annoyed look. “I’m sorry, I have a mass to attend in London tomorrow, with Will and Kate. I can’t miss it.”

“You can’t miss a mass?”

“It’s to mark the end of combat operations in Afghanistan.”

I sighed, knowing that was his thing. I laid down again and stared at the ceiling in distress.

“I can’t believe I haven’t seen you for a month and when I finally do I sleep all the time!”

He pulled me close, and kissed me. Long and hard, his lips pressed against mine intensely.
“It’s okay.” He said, smiling slightly. “I’ll see you again soon.”

Except he wouldn’t.

For the next two months, I was all about work. The first reason for that was Heathers was beginning full-on pre-production.

I only had a few days to get settled in my new Manhattan townhouse, near Bryant Park, before my schedule got insane again – not that it had ever stopped. I was online shopping for couches as I attended the follow up meeting about the ready-to-wear dress line I was developing for H&M.

After we signed the contract, the process had been fairly quick considering I had not only the designs ready, but all the fabric picked out as well. It had merely been a matter of picking the best models and making it happen and then, check. Another item off my bucket list!

Going into Heathers rehearsal was diving back into one of my favorite worlds: theatre life. The Palace Theatre, where we settled in after pre-production was out of the way, was right in the middle of all the buzz in Times Square. An old building from 1913 that had too fancy decorations for a musical about teenagers killing each other.

After I was cast, over the last few months, they had me do chemistry auditions with a number of people to fill the other roles. Most of them were good, a lot weren’t, a few were old friends and had me completely biased. For instance: the second person they cast was the romantic lead, shady, handsome, homicidal Jason Dean, whom my character, Veronica Sawyer, falls for. The first two guys I read with were good, but when Tyler walked into the room I just knew he had to be the one. The rest resolved itself a lot better than I had expected: the bulimic, pushover Heather Duke, who always dressed in green, was going to be played by the ever-wonderful Carrie Hope Fletcher. She had just come from a three years run on Les Miserables in the West End, in London, where she played Eponine. The sweet and naively ruthless, pill addict Heather McNamara wore yellow and had been defined as Anna Kendrick after I had begged the casting directors to try and convince her to come for an audition. She had been making movie musicals for the last couple of years, but was glad to come back to where she had begun. Finally, the leader, described as a ‘mythic bitch’, the always-in-red Heather Chandler was to be portrayed by Emma Stone, who was coming right out of an Oscar nominated movie and Cabaret run.

I couldn’t believe I had managed to fill the lead cast with old friends, but that was just my luck. From day one, the hard, long process had been made lighter by the laughter and loudness that came with the familiarity we had with each other.

We worked the entire day, restlessly, with no day offs and the promise things would calm down once we opened. We rehearsed for a month before heading into Tech Week, and put on a preview performance for journalists to promote the show and get reviews going.

Broadway.com and a few other media outlets released short videos from the performance and the fans went a little crazy with the footage of Tyler and me kissing. The hashtag #JenLerLIVES was trending for a good while there.

It had already been more than a month since seeing Harry in the Bahamas - more problematically, I hadn’t been with him since the night of the eight of February, in London. He was five hours ahead of New York, which meant he was having lunch as I was waking up, and tea while I was having lunch, and going to bed as I had my dinner, so even when I spoke to him on the phone we were was always at different moods.
One particular day during my break, I had texted him that I missed him, which he quickly replied saying he missed me too, to which I answered specifying, to quote, that I “missed his head between my thighs”. Listen, it had been more than two months, okay?

The problem was, as Harry quickly called to inform me, after a few problems with nosy tabloids tapping their phones a few years before, his family now employed a security measure in which most phone calls and texts sent by them were save in a database. Weekly, those were analyzed by special agents to, in Harry’s words, “track the numbers we’re talking to, to make sure we’re not in touch with terrorists pretending to be friends, or being blackmailed or hacked by reporters”, because, again to quote from him, “it had happened before”.

So no sexting, it’s what he meant. But a week later, I realized what exactly that security report meant when Harry called again.

“My dad called me for a meet this week…”

“Okay…?”

“Apparently he got a security report that informed him that I had been in close contact for the last few months with a certain, in his words, ‘Mrs. Smith’ and, well, basically,” he sighed again, heavier, “he wanted to know if I was seeing a married woman.”

There was a second of silence as I tried to decode if he was joking. Then I scoffed.

“What?” I asked, as I laughed.

“It’s not funny, Jen.”

“I’m sorry, babe, but it’s pretty funny!”

“Jen, Jesus! Come on, do you know how many times I’ve fucked up in the past?” he asked, harsh. “Dad was pretty pissed at me. I’ve been busting my ass trying to look good and do the right things to stop being the family issue and now he thinks I’m having an affair that could ruin the entire family!”

I realized how big the problem actually was, feeling guilty about laughing.

“…I’m sorry, I didn’t-I didn’t-I’m sorry. I didn’t realize.”

“Yeah.”

I sighed. “Well, what did you tell him?”

“Well, first I tried not to tell anything, because you asked me to…”

I realized just how horrible I had been, telling his friend, Guy, my friend, Alli, my therapist, and even a stranger in a bathroom about us as he got himself in trouble by trying to follow my rules. And all while not even knowing how bad I liked him because of my unexplainable feelings—paranoia.

“But I had to say something to ease his mind. So I told him the Mrs. Smith thing was just a nickname, and that I was seeing someone, but she was single.”

I gulped. “It’s okay. It’s fine. I mean, it’s your dad. It’s not like he’s gonna call the media.”

I heard a small chuckle on his end of the line. “Yeah…”
There was a pause.

“What else did you say?”

I could almost see the little sad smile tugging in at his lips when he spoke next.

“I told him I’m in love with you.”

I felt a short intake of breath as I gasped, slightly; off guard.

“Take it back.” I said, before I could even think about it.

“I didn’t say it directly at you,” he justified, “I was quoting what I said to my father, so technically-“

“Harry…"

“I take it back.” He surrendered.

I bit my lip, and let out a breath I didn’t know I was holding. I felt my muscles relax and a feeling of assurance that made me think of Alli’s Psychology of Choice again.

She wasn’t wrong. The words made me feel safer. Almost happy.

“Jen, we need you in costumes. Jen, you’re needed in costumes.” The robotic voice called me through the speakers, and I sighed.

“I heard that.” Harry told me. “You have to go.”

“Yeah.” I said, sad. “I’ll see you soon, though.”

I smiled. “I can’t wait.”

There was silence, as I didn’t want to hang up.

“Jen, I L-“ he sighed, “I like you a lot.”

I smiled, closing my eyes.

“I like you too.”

“…Not a lot?” he teased.

“Shut up.”

Right before we went into Tech Week, where all our positions were to be sorted out, and the costumes and wigs fitted, lights decided, and the music was to be flowing out of our lips in perfect synch, I had two days off because of my birthday.

I had wished to see Harry, but because life was just that hard, the closest I got to him was the huge bouquet of pink roses he sent me.

Per Taylor’s request, I flew to Los Angeles instead. The official excuse was to celebrate with my friends there, which I did afterwards, but the hidden motive was to be in her Bad Blood music video.

“You’ll play an assassin who’s helping my character train to get revenge on her friend who
betrayed her,” she told me a few months before, “I want everyone on it!”

And everyone she got, or at least, most of our group of friends. The only ones who weren’t in the video only weren’t in it because they absolutely couldn’t work out a day in their schedules to do it.

And because all of our schedules were so hectic, we had to shoot mostly separately. On the day I was there, the Saturday before my birthday, it was only me, Taylor, Cara and Ophelia, hiding away in the studio with all the secrecy a Taylor Swift project took.

Ophelia – Callis – was an eighteen-year-old actress I had known for five years. She and I met at a Comic Con when I was 20, one of my many with The Mediator, but her first ever. At 13, she had just started in an HBO show about the teenage years of the X-Men as a young Jean Gray.

I had shown her the ropes and on the next day, gotten us Power Ranger costumes so we could walk around the convention amidst the fans and craziness incognito. We had fun, and kept on doing that every year from then on until my show had been over and I didn’t go back after winning the Oscar.

“Talk about betrayal…” O said, standing in high black boots, her long white legs showing under the leather shorts she had been given. “You win an Oscar and forget about your friends…” she teased.

As I watched her grow up, her problems had gotten bigger now – older men hitting on her and tabloid rumors – and even though she was a big girl now, sometimes I still wanted to hide her in a Power Ranger costume and whisker her away from danger.

They dressed me in a black leather skort, some sort of thing that was a skirt in the front and shorts in the back, so I could “be comfortable in a fight”, according to Taylor. Which was hard to imagine because of the weird top I was wearing, a bunch of black leather straps twisting around my breasts and torso in a confusing way – took three stylists to figure out how it was supposed to look.

“I have never felt this uncomfortable.” I said, admiring the result in the mirror, with the black spikey boots, black leather fingerless gloves and my Goth makeup – a black smokey eye and black lipstick.

“But you’ve never looked this sexy!” Cara said.

As Cara was my high standard on all things sexy, I decided to believe her. So I asked Ophelia to help me take a picture of myself, with all my weaponry and a daring pose, and texted it to Harry.

‘Wow!’, he replied later, ‘nightmare and fantasy collide…’

I knew what he meant, of course. The fantasy I supposed was the outfit. But it was adorned with one rifle on each of my hands and two shotguns hanging from a harness around my arms, plus another strapped to my thigh. All fake, sure, but looking as real as could be.

‘Any chance you get to keep that outfit? ;)' 

I smiled at his words, and waited to casually ask Taylor later.

“You still have to give your character a name!” Taylor reminded me, after I was ready, as she took me to sit in a chair in front of a camera to be interviewed about the video for a behind the scenes later.

I sat there as they set up, trying to come up with an idea, when Harry called.
“Sorry I went MIA earlier when we were texting,” he said. “I was walking into a meeting and Edward started giving me shit about it…” I heard someone talk to him on the other line. “Shh! Meeting is over now but he is still giving me shit, actually.”

I smiled at the memory of his ever-irritating secretary. “It’s cool, I’m actually starting to get busy here… I need a name for my character. What do you think of Hot Shot?”

“Hot Shot?” he considered. “Edward, Jen is playing an assassin and her character needs a cool nickname, what do we think of Hot Shot?”

I giggled, biting my lips, knowing he felt so relieved not having to hide our secret away from Edward anymore, and in fact, enjoying how little he liked the idea of us.

“What?” I heard Edward’s voice in a distance. “Was Royal Pain taken?!”

I laughed, and heard Harry’s own chuckles over the phone. “I heard that,” I told him.

“Not a bad idea, you know? Royal Pain.” Harry added.

“Yeah, because the press wouldn’t pick on it immediately.” I ironized.

“Well… who cares?” he asked. “They don’t know we’re together.”

I considered it for a moment, “Do you really not mind?”

“Think of how funny it’d be.” He replied.

So a few minutes later, I crossed my legs allowing the shotgun on my thigh to be seen and stared into the camera with my sharpest look.

“My character is called Pain,” I stared, before raising both my hands, pointing the rifles up in the air, “Royal Pain. Because that’s what she gives her enemies.” I smiled, raising an eyebrow daringly.

“And you know what Harry tells me?” Edward asked, about a month later, in Cannes, looking like he really understood the whole Royal Pain thing.

“You mean after you’ve invaded his privacy and checked his phone records?”

He ignored me. “That you are not his girlfriend.”

“I’m not.”

“Still…” he sighed, “You’ve already been together almost as long as the first time around. And I understand you are not seeing other people. And, according to my records…” he checked something in his tablet. “You talk to each other an average of thirty times a week.” He looked at me again. “And that’s not counting the texting, of course, I’d rather not think too much about the amount of texts-“

I stopped him. “What are you getting at?”

“You are in relationship.” He said, and as I began to protest, he continued, “You may not be using the label of one, but every aspect of your relationship screams commitment and monogamy.”

I looked at him, puzzled, trying to think of an answer.
“Unless, of course, I’m wrong.” He granted, shrugging. “If I’m wrong that would mean that, in fact, you are merely having fun and have no intention at all of trying to pursue a life together.”

“I… Well-"

“If I’m wrong, then your relationship, for lack of a better term, is purely physical, sexual, and has no emotional commitment whatsoever.”

“Well, that’s just-“

“Am I wrong?” he asked. “Do you have some sort of emotional connection?” he leaned in, resting his elbows in his knees to stare at me. “Do you have feelings for him or is it just physical, Jenifer?”

I don’t know if it was because he used my name, but the alternative felt so wrong that I decided to tell him the truth.

“Yes.”

He stared in silence.

“I have feelings for him.”

He nodded. “Mm-hmm… Okay, well, because the problem is… If you don’t, which is what it seems like-“

“I just told you-“

“Yes, that’s right. You just told me. But you never had to watch the sorrow in Harry’s eyes when we asked him if you loved him, after he told us he loved you, and he said he didn’t know.”

I closed my eyes, realizing once again that of course he wouldn’t know. I couldn’t get the words out.

“That, Ms. Silva, is the problem. The problem is that you are a twenty-five-year-old, financially stable, attractive young girl, who should do, by all means, what you want with your personal life. You should live a fun, secret love affair with a high profile man just for the thrill of the secrecy if that is appealing to you.”

I realized, irritated, that’s what he thought I was doing with Harry.

“But the moment you know the person you’re with has serious feelings for you and you refuse to acknowledge those feelings just to keep doing what makes you comfortable, that’s when we have a problem.” He paused, taking in a deep breath. “A relationship is a 50/50 partnership, it’s a compromise. And from what I gather, only one person in yours is dictating the terms, and that person is you. So, yes, Ms. Silva, we do have a problem.”

He grabbed his tablet and the travel coffee mug in the floor and stood up.

“We have a problem because I think you are just having fun at his expense and I can’t stand by and watch it.” He closed the buttons on his jacket. “He barely got through Davy, and he obviously likes you so much more than her. I’m not gonna watch you break him once more.”

As he stepped out, making his way past me to the door, I got up.

“You’re wrong.” I said, making him stop and turn to look at me.
I could feel it again, what I always did when Harry said he loved me: the intensiveness bubbling up inside, my skin growing hotter as I realized the rawness and fragility that came with admitting my feelings.

“I’m in love with him.”

As the door opened suddenly, making me jump, I wondered why was it that I could say that to LF, but not Harry.

“Five minutes. You’re up.” Monica told him, standing by the door.

Edward never took his eyes from me and, right before he turned to walk away, I saw a creepy smile tugging in at his lips.

“Always a pleasure, Ms. Silva.” He ironized as he left.

“What was that about?!” Monica asked, in a whisper, after he was gone.

Janine walked in as well. “We need to talk about this.” She said.

“Who’s next?” I asked.

“Nobody, the interviews are over.” Monica replied.

“I have to go,” I told them, “but I’ll call you guys later, okay?”

“Jenifer, we need to talk about this Harry-thing!”

“Sure!” I said, already walking out with Eddy right behind me, “I’ll call you!”

The car given for my use at Cannes by the Bloodline studio drove me and Eddy (and Vodka) to the private airport in Nice after a forty minutes ride. It was the closest airport and simplest way to leave Cannes.

From there, the plan was to meet Harry – who was flying in from London – and get on a private plane to Corsica. When we were decided where to go for our last time together before I got too busy in Broadway and he went to Africa, Corsica felt appealing for a number of reasons. Firstly, we hadn’t had enough time there the first time around. Secondly, the people from the island had been good at keeping our secret. And finally, it was the closest place we could go to that we knew would be private – we didn’t want to spend our already short time with the traveling part.

It was getting dark when I got there, strutting along the place with Eddy to find the gate for our private flight, where Harry was supposed to meet us. I was glad by the time, knowing the chances of getting recognized dropped drastically.

When the car rode into the private section of the airstrip, my private plane was waiting and Harry was leaning against his own car nearby, with the Nate, Clark and Louis around him.

After two months without seeing him, I had to stop myself from running into his arms, but there was nothing I could do about the smile on my lips.

He walked over as I got out of the car and picked me up before I could even say hi, spinning me around once as our security details carried our bags around. His head tucked into the small of my neck, and mine in his, and I felt his smell that I had missed so badly and caressed his ginger hair as he refused to let me go.
He breathed in deep, and then sighed before looking at me.

“Hi.”

I smiled. “Hi.”

Vodka’s high-pitched cries echoed through the night, and Harry put me down to greet her.

“Hey, puppy!” He said, his own voice changing in tone as he kneeled to open her carrier bag by my feet and pick her up.

Vodka jumped, excited, her little body twisting around in joy as she tried to smell Harry. He could barely keep her in his arms.

In fact, at some point she jumped out, excited, and ran around him, who tried to grab her again. V thought that was a new game we were playing and had her fun running away from him, taking off, getting too distracted by everything else to remember us.

Harry ran after her first. Then Clark and Eddy followed him, and finally, I did too, close behind. Nate and Louis remained with our bags.

And all because we were trying not to draw attention to ourselves.

The four of us followed our little white ball of fur for just a short, nerve wracking few steps, as she ran passed the plane, before she stumbled upon someone else’s bag in a car waiting nearby, probably other passengers waiting for their own turn to get into a private flight. V stopped, confused. Seeing we were after her, the girl who probably owned the bag turned to pick her up before she could run again.

‘Great’, I thought. ‘Now we’ll have a random person tweeting about us. I guess this is. Secret’s out’.

I only had one or two seconds of worry, before I looked up and realized I knew the person who had my dog in her arms.

“Bee!” I said, surprised to see the girl I had met for the first time in a bathroom last November. A girl I had told all of my secrets to after knowing her for less than two minutes.

“Jenifer?” she said, looking confused. “What are you doing here?”

Quickly, our last joke came to mind.

“I’m your fairy godmother. I’m always with you.” I joked, looking solemn.

“Right.” She smiled, and I giggled.

I realized Kit by her side and smiled, greeting him with a quick hug, just as B.

“Were you in Cannes just now?” he asked.

“Yes. I wish I could have stayed longer, though.”

“Does this belongs to you?” Bee asked, looking at Vodka in her arms.

“Yes, she does.” I told her, and she returned my agitated puppy to my arms. “Thank you.”
“Hm?” Harry coughed, still standing beside us awkwardly.

“Oh, it’s okay.” I told him, “I know them!” I turned to my friends again. “Kit, Bee, this is Harry. My boyfriend.”

Harry looked at me in a split second before smiling at them, offering his hand.

“Nice to meet you.” Kit smiled.

“How are you?” Harry asked. “Big fan.”

Then he looked at Beezus. She didn’t seem to have noticed it was him until I had introduced him, and since then, her eyes hadn’t left him. I could see they were widened and her cheeks were turning red as her mouth stood open.

Harry offered her his hand.

“Hello.” He smiled. “I’m Harry.”

Bee held his hand, still not blinking.


I exchanged a look with Kit, and we smiled together at the adorableness.

Eddy approached to whisper to me and Harry that our flight was ready for us, and I looked back to them.

“We have to go.” I smiled, sad. “But it was nice seeing you guys again.”

“You too,” Kit smiled. “Take care!”

Bee raised a hand waving goodbye at Vodka, and then at us.

“I’m glad to see you’re taking my advice.” I told her, smiling.

She smiled, shy, looking at Kit for a split second, blushing again before looking at me.

“I’m glad to see you’re taking your own advice.” She said, stealing a look at Harry.

I smiled larger, “I’m glad about that too.”

“So…” Harry started, once we were on the plane. “I’m your… boyfriend?”

I knew that’s where he was going from the second the word had left my mouth mere minutes before.

The truth is I don’t know exactly when I had made the decision, but after talking to LF, I just knew I wanted more. I didn’t want the physical, emotionless adventure he talked about. I wanted the relationship.

And so I decided to mirror the only other good relationship I had had: Mine and Harry’s fake one. And the moment we had become ‘boyfriend-and-girlfriend-official’ in that one had been in the Met Gala, when Harry very casually had worked the word ‘boyfriend’ into a conversation that Taylor was a part of. Suddenly, it had been it. He was my boyfriend.
I figured I could try and do the same now things were real, but, of course, now things were real, Harry had a special interest in them.

“I was just, you know…” I shrugged. “Using our little story-“

“No, no, you weren’t.” He shook his head. “Because you didn’t call me ‘Vincent’ and you didn’t say ‘husband’. You used my name and you said I was your ‘boyfriend’.”

I breathed in, deep. “Well… don’t you… want? To be?” I stuttered. “My… boyfriend?”

I realized I had never had that conversation before. I wasn’t a fan so far.

Harry turned in his seat to face me, a smile very slowly taking space in his expression as I tried my best to look casual.

“Well, is that a…” he stuttered. “Is that an option?”

“Would you want it to be?” I asked in return.

“I just want to be with you.”

I sighed. “Okay, but in what capacity?”

“In whatever I can-“

“Harry, no.” I stopped him. “Tell me.” He seemed puzzled. “It’s been recently brought to my attention I may have been dominating all of the decisions in this…” I paused, before using the word, “…relationship.” His brows rose as he looked at me. “And I was thinking that, you know, you’re supposed to be half of it. And I never really asked what you wanted. I just, sort of, imposed. So…” I sighed. “Do you want it? To be my boyfriend, I mean?”

“Are you…?” he started, squinting his eyes at me, leaning a little bit back as if to see me better. “Is this you asking? Are you- wait.” He blinked. “Is Jenifer-Afraid-Of-Commitment-Silva, asking me to be her boyfriend?”

I smiled, contradicted. I knew he wouldn’t let this pass without humorously taking notice of the big step.

“Are you really asking me to be in a serious, committed, long-term,” he specified, “monogamous, long-distance, relationship with you?”

Serious, and with butterflies in my stomach, I looked at him.

“Yes.”

He smiled at the seriousness of my answer. Then nodded.

“Do you want to?” I went on. “Do you want to be my boyfriend?”

He smiled, playful.

“This isn’t very romantic, is it?” he teased, looking around. “I mean, we’re on a plane.”

I smiled, trying not to laugh. “Well, what do you want? Do you want me to kneel down and offer you a promise ring?”
He stared at me, smiling. “That wouldn’t be so bad, actually.”

I giggled now. “Okay.”

Then I laid down my seat, and stared out the window. Harry let a few seconds pass by before calling me again.

“Well?”

“Well, you want romantic. Okay then.” I shrugged, smiling. “As you said, a plane isn’t romantic, so you’re gonna have to wait.”

He smiled, before nodding and laying his own seat down. I could see by the corner of my eye he was biting his lower lip not to smile too much.

After a while, I felt his hand reach out to me and intertwine our fingers together. I couldn’t stop smiling either, though I was better than him at hiding it.

“Oh…” he turned to me, after a while, starting again.

“No.” I said. “You asked for romantic, now be patient.”

He laughed, before turning away again.

It was late at night when we landed. The smell of salt and lavender in the air of Corsica hit me like a brick as we made our way to the rented van waiting for us. Clark took the wheel and we made our way through the town, aiming to the same villa we had been hosted at the last time around.

The bars and restaurants were booming and the commerce was starting to close at this point. We stopped in traffic in the small streets before a gift store when I leaned in in my seat.

“Wait!” I shouted, unhooking my seatbelt. “I have to do a thing!”

“Jen…?” Harry started. “Where are you going?”

“You’re not the boss of me.” I joked, jumping out of the car with Eddy right behind.

The lady behind the counter was starting to close the store when I walked in, and it took some gentle begging for her to help me, but I walked out a solid fifteen minutes later with my purchase in my pocket.

We walked back into the van, and drove off, the plan shaping itself in my head.

“We’re gonna take the same way as last time, right?” I asked, and Clark replied affirmatively.

“It’s the only way there.” He said.

Harry eyed me by my side, but I just smiled, playful.

We enjoyed the car ride, feeling the breeze getting in through the windows, listening to the music from my iPod on the car’s speakers.

Soon enough, we were watching the moon and stars’ shine in the waters of the Mediterranean Sea as we took the brick road up by the mountain that had the cliff and sea by one side, and the vegetation and hills by the other.
The road had little rock decks every few meters, for tourists to stop and appreciate the view. In one of them, that I looked for attentively, Harry and I had met eight months ago when I told him I wanted to be with him.

“Here!” I shouted. “Stop here!”

“Jen-?” Harry questioned.

“Come on, out!” I said, already jumping through the door. “Oh, wait. I can do better.”

I turned back to the front seat, and Eddy handed me my iPod by the window. I searched at random for the first romantic song I could find, diving in really deep into Harry’s request.

I smiled as I pressed play, and raised the volume, and Ed Sheeran’s voice echoed through the speakers.

“When your legs don’t work like they used to before… And I can’t sweep you off of your feet.’

Harry gave me a funny look, with a smile, as he put his hands in his pocket as I walked over and grabbed him by his jacket, pulling him after me to the center of the rock deck.

I took a look around, at the immensity of the ocean ahead and the shining stars above, realizing what I was doing and, more importantly, that I felt excited about it.

Scared, sure. Terrified even. But, good God, how excited!

I turned to look at him, our mischievous grins meeting, and cleaned my throat.

“Eight months ago I stood right here and said I wanted to be with you.” I started. “We’ve seen each other maybe seven, eight times since then, and all I can think is… how could it have been so little time?” I smiled. “It feels like so much more… it feels like you’ve been here since ever.”

I watched his grin turn into a smile.

“And the thing is, it is still as true today as it was then…” I sighed. “I wanna be with you.”

I reached into my pocket, picking the thin bracelet I had bought in the store in town. A thin, laced, rope with a small piece of metal in the center.

“They didn’t any rings.” I told him, and gave him the bracelet, that I had had engraved.

“Promesse.” He read. Promise, in French. “A promise bracelet.” He chuckled. “Smart.”

He switched it in his hand, realizing the three letters in the back: J&H. He smiled.

“So…” I started, on a playful tone, kneeling down. I cleaned my throat again. “Harry, will you-“

“Hey, woah!” he interrupted. “You need to use my full name, is more romantic!” he joked.

“I don’t even know your full name!” I laughed. “You have a lot of names!”

“Well…” he shrugged. “You have to know my names if you want to be my girlfriend.”

I bit my lip, smiling.

“God…” I sighed. “Henry…” I started. “Al…?” I watched his expression, seeing I was wrong.

Harry smiled.

‘Honey, your soul could never grow old, it’s ever green… And, baby, your smile is forever in my mind, in memory…’

He took his time. Smiling, he took in a deep breath and looked around.

“Let me think…” he said.

I rolled my eyes.

“Yes.” He smiled.

He offered me his hands and pulled me up, quickly wrapping his arms around me and spinning us around in a tight hug, making me laugh.

“See?” he asked, without letting me go, “It wasn’t that hard, now, was it?”

I laughed. “You’re a jerk.”

“I’m your jerk.” He replied.

I giggled, resting my forehead in his.

He brushed our noses for a bit, and we let out a deep breath together.

“I love you.”

I felt the air escape me, and the butterflies in my stomach take flight as I saw the love in his eyes. He wasn’t smiling, he wasn’t kidding.

I leaned back to look at him.

“I take it back.” He said, allowing himself a sad smile to reassure me. “It’s okay, Jenny, I take it back.”

Suddenly, I understood Alli’s Psychology of Choice.

Harry didn’t mean the take back; but he said it any way, and every time he did, every time he lied to reassure me, he was hurting himself a little bit. Just to make me feel safe.

I remembered the Princess Bride, realizing ‘I take it back’ was Harry’s ‘as you wish’. Whenever he said it, what he really meant was ‘I love you’. Just a different version of it.

And for the first time in a really long time, I believed I was loved. And so I didn’t need the security blanket anymore.

“Don’t.” I told him.

He looked at me in silence, looking puzzled.

“Don’t?” he asked.

“Don’t take it back.” I whispered.
He blinked, a smile tugging in at his lips.

“Okay.” He whispered, smiling slightly now. “I don’t- I don’t take it back.”

He leaned in, pressing his lips on mine, letting me down so he could cop my neck with his hands to kiss me strongly.

He pulled away, smiling, and I wanted to say it. I wanted to say it back.

I felt him hug me again, his arms tighten around me, his nose brush against mine, and I saw the way his blue eyes were filled with happiness that made me so proud to know was there because of me, and I wanted him to know that I had never felt that way before.


“It’s okay.” He whispered, smiling, leaning in and giving me another quick kiss in the lips. “You don’t have to say it.”

I couldn’t believe the amount of patience and understanding in his voice – the kind that I never thought I could find, not even in myself.

“I like you a lot.” I told him, soft, hoping my voice wouldn’t break; wishing I wasn’t so broken.

Wishing there was a way he could know ‘I like you a lot’ was my ‘as you wish’. What I really meant was ‘I love you’.

He smiled.

“I love you, too.”
Saudade.

Chapter Summary

Jen embarks on a cruise with Mr Smith after a long summer of work and distance.

Chapter Notes

Hey!!! How did you guys like the chapter? Let me know? I like this chapter, one because I wanna go on a cruise. Two, because of 1989 catwalk! Three, I love Heathers the Musical! Four, kinky sex? Anyone? Yes or yes?! Let me know LOL Also, here’s a spoiler for next chapter: how long after sex do you think Jen takes to let Harry go of those handcuffs? ;D Anyhow, how are you guys going? How is life? I have a test tuesday. Keep me in your prayers. Like this chapter? Send me hello? Or suggest stuff? whatever you wanna chat about, I’m literally here every day hahah See you soon!

CHAPTER 34: Saudade.

“Esteemed Mr. and Mrs. Smith…” Harry read, as he picked the letter we found by the coffee table in the lounging area by the bar in the first level of our suite. “Welcome on board the Queen Victoria, we hope you enjoy your stay with us and find your accommodations suitable-“

I scoffed. “You could say that…”

The two-level first class suite was fancily decorated as a luxurious apartment. If you didn’t look out the windows into the vast Atlantic Ocean outside, you wouldn’t even be able to tell it was actually a cruise ship.

The Queen Victoria was high as an apartment building and walking inside it was as walking in a low-ceiling luxurious shopping mall.

As I explored our suite, walking pass the bar and the piano and around the narrow, round flight of stairs to the room above, Harry kept reading.

“In your accommodations, you’ll find your butler and concierge service-“

“Anything else I can do for you, Mr. Smith?” our butler – whom, I may add, was also British - asked as he followed the staff downstairs after leaving our bags in our room.

Harry looked up. “No, Mr…?”

“Smith.” He said, a polite smile never leaving his face.

Harry gave me a look before smiling back at him.

“Oh,” he chuckled, “what a coincidence…”
The butler, the other Mr. Smith, smiled more. “Yes, sir.”

“No, that would be all. Thank you.”

After he and the rest of the staff had left, Harry’s smile vanished.

“That was awkward.”

“Especially because he definitely knows your name is not Smith…”

“Yeah,” he nodded, before looking back into the pamphlet. “But he won’t say anything, they have a very good don’t ask, don’t tell policy from what I gathered at hiring.”

I passed by the windows, and closed the curtains. Most of the passengers were still embarking and I didn’t want to risk being seen – even though our windows viewed the sea. My paranoid mind told me some reporter could have hired a boat to follow us.

The entire room’s floor was carpeted and the sofas and dinner tables had more tapestry under them. In the walls hanged some impressive artwork and the flowers in every vase in every table had nothing of fake in them.

“You didn’t need to get the fanciest suite to ever fancy,” I told him. “We’d be fine with one of those tiny ones, like in the Titanic.” I joked. “It’d be romantic!”

“Yeah, for the rest of the trip…” Nathan said as he finished his security round on the place, “if you could refrain from making Titanic analogies, I’d appreciate it.”

Nathan wasn’t the only one uncomfortable by our unusual holiday idea: Eddy had stated from the start that he would not get his feet on a boat.

“It’s not the boat part,” he explained, “It’s that it’ll be on water for a week! In the middle of the Atlantic! In the middle of nowhere!”

So I told him to catch a plane in a few days and meet us in Europe with Vodka, like Harry did with Clark, who had no problem in letting us know his problem was indeed very much the boat part.

“It’s like we, as a society, learnt nothing from Titanic.” He said.

So we had Nathan and Louis, and they would have to do.

Harry kept reading. “We also have 24-hour room service,”

“Every good hotel has that.” I said.

“Bon Voyage bottle of Champagne and strawberries on embarkation.”

“Found it!” I picked the bottle in the coffee table by the sofas to show it to him, then grabbed a strawberry.

“Priority embarkation,” he went on.

“Check!” We were there, but it would still be a few hours before the ship took off.

“Exclusive access to the Queens Grill Lounge, single-seating dining in the Queens Grill restaurant.”
I made a sad face, “You think there’s a lot of people who come on these things by themselves?”

Harry shrugged, “Well, good for them.”

“Refrigerator, safe and hair dryer,” he went on.

“Good!” I said. “I forgot mine.”

“Soft Terry Robes and slippers,” his voice broke as he let out a giggle.

“Ooh!” I teased, “I wanna go find my soft terry robes and slippers!” I turned around, still holding the champagne bottle and quickly started climbing the stairs up to the suite.

“I’m gonna head out,” Nate warned. “You know where to find us!”

He shut the door on his way out and I reached the second level. The double doors were opened, revealing the luxurious California king bed with a ridiculous amount of pillows in it. I heard his steps as Harry followed me up.

“Found it!” I put the bottle on the nightstand and took off my denim shirt, leaving only the loose white and blacked stripped dress with flowers and put on the soft white robe, making Harry smile at me. I took off my Converse sneakers and jumped on the bed, feeling like a child – which is very much how I had felt upon embarkation.

Most of the people on the ship – as far as I had been able to tell – were well over their forties and fifties and the only non-gray heads I spotted were obviously dyed. All the women had heels or equally fancy flats or boots, all designer. And on the one day I decide to wear sneakers because my legs were tired of trying too hard – after an exhausting five months on heavy Broadway dance rehearsals and performances. It made me feel just slightly out of place.

“And did you find the…” Harry went on, taking another look at the pamphlet, “nightly turndown service with pillow chocolate?”

I raised my head on the bed to look at him, an eyebrow raised in interest.

“Now you’re talking my language.”

I got up and crawled on the bed until the pillows, throwing them to the floor dramatically.

“Though I never understood why can’t rich people just buy their own goddamn chocolate- Aha! Found it!”

I smiled at the little bars and placed them on the nightstand.

“How about the…” Harry laughed, before he could even finish reading, “Pillow concierge, a selection of pillows and duvets to suit your preference!”

“No!” I smiled, “they do not have a pillow concierge! That is not an actual job that someone has!”

“That’s not all,” he smiled, playful, “we also can count on satellite TV with multi language film and music channels,”

“Of course we can!”

“Daily shipboard newspaper…”

“Because internet is irrelevant at sea!” I joked.
“Fresh flowers and daily fresh fruit…”

“How does anyone travel without fresh flowers every day?”

“Personalized stationery, atlas and books.” Harry gave the pamphlet a weird look before looking around at the room. He walked until the desk by the windows and opened a drawer. “Oh, look at that. They made us personalized stationeries.”

He handed me a white envelope with a silver mark on the bottom right corner: a fancy S was drawn with the words ‘Vincent and Mary’ watermarked above it.

“Aw!” I laughed. “I’m gonna keep these!”

“Why?” he asked, with a smile. “It’s not even our real names.”

“Still, think of all the trouble they went through.”

“Think of all the paper they have to throw away after every cruise. No one actually uses these anymore…”

“What else do we have here?”

“Board games and computer games console.” He said. “That’s actually cool. And, of course, a bar stocked with spirits or wines and soft drinks.”

“Because I doubts those rich socialites drink anything but alcohol.” I added with a grin.

He left the pamphlet in the desk and came to sit on the bed by my side. We leaned against the bedframe and watched the room, smiling.

“This is gonna be fun.” I said, and looked at him. “Thank you.”

“I owed you a birthday present.” He said, smiling, as he passed an arm around my shoulders bringing me close.

“You sent me flowers.” I reminded him.

“Flowers are a compliment, not a gift.” He uttered, automatically.

“Says who?”

“My father. Is what I was taught.”

I smiled. “Okay, well, good for me, then.”

Harry passed an arm around my back, and I laid on my side to hug his chest. I slid my hands slowly over his torso, realizing it had been two months, almost three, since we had been together. I recognized his smell, of cologne and whisky, and my body responded in pain.

There’s a word that only exists in the Portuguese language, saudade. The feeling of missing something or someone, of yearning to be with them when they’re away. I had felt so much saudade as we were away, that even now, with him there, I still did. Even with his arm around me, I still laid my head on his shoulder and felt it, the yearning of being with him as much as I could, because I knew soon enough we’d have to say goodbye again.

I stretched to the edge of the bed and grabbed the champagne bottle, trying to shake off the sadsies.
The bottle popped with a noise when I opened it, sending the liquid everywhere before I engulfed its top with my mouth and drank it.

I raised the bottle to him.

“To The Queen Victoria.” I smiled, and Harry got the bottle from me to take a sip. “Best goddamn ship ever!”

“I thought you needed something special after working so hard for so long,” he smiled, putting the bottle on the nightstand. “Besides, I have ulterior motives to want you here.”

He turned to lay on top of me, and grabbing me by my knees, pulled me down so I was lying in bed. I wrapped my legs around him, pulling him close, and his nose trailed up from my cleavage all the way to my neck.

Harry had come back from Africa with a renewed beard, so the friction sent chills down my spine and in between my legs, my whole body responding to the ridiculous amount of time we had gone without seeing each other – or touching each other. Our skin ached with longing.

“There’s no Wi-Fi on the ship…” he said, looking at me, smiling. “So, you can’t work… I have you all to myself”

I smiled as he took in a deep breath in my neck and sighed, longingly. My body was lit up, every nerve responding to him, and I felt my heart so full I almost said it.

But then he did it first.

“I love you.”

I felt the little air on my lungs disappear, and my heart pound heavier on my chest, but I didn’t feel the need to look away, or to ask him to take it back.

This time I just smiled.

“I missed you.” I said.

Harry smiled, and I felt his hands linger around my waist as mine brought him closer in a hug.

After saying goodbye in Corsica at the middle of May, he went home to London to get things ready to spend his summer in Africa and I flew back to Manhattan to open Heathers The Musical in Palace Theatre in Times Square.

We opened on a Tuesday to a sold out first week. I got 200 pink roses from ‘Mr. Smith’. We had run the show three times already that day to make sure everything was in place and, finally, I went downstairs in my two layers of clothes – to take one off on my first costume change when my character went through a makeover. I adjusted my wig, they tested my microphone, and I walked to the center-edge of the stage.

The curtains went up to the sound of applause, the lights shone on me and I stared ahead, in character. The Veronica Sawyer in me was scared, exhausted and confused when she looked at the audience and spoke.

“September 1st, 1989,” she said, through my mouth, “Dear Diary, I believe I’m a good person. I mean, I think that there’s good in everyone, but… here we are. First day of senior year! But, uh, I look around at these kids that I’ve known all my life and I ask myself… what happened?”
Then a beat, and the song started as Veronica sang about the terrors of High School. Over the course of two hours, she gets a makeover, joins the popular girl squad in school, becomes the social pariah after standing up for her loser friend, sleeps with the weird new kid, accidentally kills Emma Stone’s character, then the jocks, then has to stop her new boyfriend from blowing up the entire school.

On the next day, we got in earlier to read the first reviews as a group, which proved to be a good idea.

Most of the reviews ranged from ‘good’ to ‘wow!’, praising the writers’ ability to transition the story from the original movie well into the stage and the costumes department ability to make people ‘wish the eighties fashion would come back’ for what was ‘probably the first time’. The Times – arguably the most important one – had quite a few things they wanted to say:

“Oscar winning, Tony nominated Jenifer Silva astonishes as Veronica Sawyer,” the director read, as we sat on the stage as a group on the day after the opening for warm ups. The cast cheered. “She starts as a scared, depressed teen on the verge of a breakdown and makes Veronica’s transition into a popular girl believable with her unsuresness of what to do with her new found fame; Dead Girl Walking sends an energy wave through the audience – I felt my crowd on the verge of a standing ovation.”

“Woo!” the group cheered, making me blush.

“She doesn’t blink when she tells bad boy J.D. she will ‘ride him till she breaks him’ nor does she shrink in awkwardness when the teenagers get intimate. Her character proceeds changing, as she remains herself, an awkward dork who just happens to have accidentally killed someone. Still, the highlight of Silva’s performance comes at her delivery of the heartbreaking Seventeen and the thrilling reprise of Dead Girl Walking until it climaxes in the last number, when in tears Veronica urges her classmates to be hopeful of the future. Five stars.”

The reviews kept on coming, the tickets kept on selling out. I started a tradition of always posting an #IntermissionSelfie (or video) to Instagram, with different cast or crew members, and there was always one (or four) group shots with the people that came to see us at stage door to get things signed or give us gifts – mission that usually lasted at least half an hour.

The paparazzi learnt that routine, of course, and they were always there when I got in and when I came out for stage door, before leaving, trying to pry on my conversations with the fans and ask questions.

A week later, we attended the Tony Awards, and performed a mash-up of Candy Store (the Emma, Anna and Carrie song that introduced the mean girls’ group) and Dead Girl Walking. I was nervous both because of the song, and because I knew Harry was watching, though I had failed to previously tell him what the number would be.

Dead Girl Walking was our sex scene, when a slightly inebriated Veronica decided to go after J.D. (Tyler) and sleep with him since she had nothing to lose after being cast out as a pariah by Heather Chandler (Emma). She breaks into his room and tells him she wants to sleep with him. They start making out and do it as the song – much as them – reaches climax.

It’s an awkward scene to do, but after everything Tyler and I went through it was really not a big deal. In the steamiest parts of the song, we made out as Ty brought me to sit on his lap and took off his shirt. I slap him, he grabs my boobs and rips my shirt open and we pretend to do it for a solid half a minute as we sing higher and faster.
I waited for him to explain what was wrong, but he didn’t.

“Are you…” I started, “jealous?”

He was silent for a second. “No.” He said, a little too late. “No, is not that. It’s just… you know…”

“What?”

“Well…” he sighed. “Nothing.”

“Harry…”

“You were on him.” He let out. “I mean, it was pretty explicit. You were… you know, rubbing on his lap…”

“I was acting.” I said, soft, though it felt a little reassuring we were talking about it. It was as if I had been waiting for him to raise the subject.

“Yeah, I know. I know.” He reassured.

There was a pause as I waited and, sure enough, he spoke again.

“It’s just,” he sighed. “It was really convincing… and you looked so hot, so into it.”

“Acting.” I repeated, not able to take off the smile on my lips that I was glad he couldn’t see.

“I know, I know, but…”

“But?”

“Well, it’s Tyler.” He admitted. “Behind the acting, I know you’ve done that before.”

“That?” I asked. “Or him?”

“Him, Jenifer. I just can’t help but picture you doing him.”

“Trust me,” I said, “that wasn’t anything like Dead Girl Walking.”

“Really?” he asked, interested, and paused. “Is he better than me?”

I bit my lip, trying not to laugh. “No.” I admitted, feeling bad about the honesty.

“Really?” he asked again, a little happier now.

“I don’t think I’ve had better than you.” I said, reassuring. “And if you must know, I’ve been thinking about you to get, you know, inspired to perform that song...”
He was silent.

“Really?”

I smiled. “Yeah…”

“I couldn’t help but notice you sounded different acting an orgasm than you do when you are actually having one.”

I smiled. “Really?”

“Yeah. You moan a lot more.”

“With you.” I said, smiling. “You make me.”

“Exactly. You’re too… sure. Too sure of yourself. When we’re together I can make you weak.”

I bit my lip at the easiness with which the words had come out of his mouth.

“Do you, now?” I asked.

“You know I do. I like to hear your voice break when I make you come.”

I started to wonder whatever had happened to the security checks he had been so worried about not long ago.

“I like it too.” I said. “I wish you were here making me weak right now.”

“…I guess you’ll just have to wait.”

And I did.

I did my months of waiting. He flew to Africa, the Skype calls got rarer, and automatically, the days got longer. Our Cast Recording album came out, and reached the Billboard top 10 and was the number one on iTunes for the first week and remained on the top 3 for the next two months. After the Tony Awards performance, our sales grew and we sold out for the whole first month. On the second month, the tickets sold out even faster. We returned almost half of all the investment in the show in less than two months.

We were featured in cover stories for The New Yorker, Vanity Fair, Glamour and Seventeen, and went on every New York talk show. The first cover was just me and Ty (“Young Love Has Never Been This Deadly”), the second was me and the girls (“The Original Mean Girls”), the third was only me, for Glamour, a picture with shirt ripped opened like after Dead Girl Walking. In the fourth cover, Seventeen featured the five of us calling it “Broadway Goes Pop”.

We always wore our characters colors, blue for me, red for Emma, green for Carrie and yellow for Anna. Ty was always in black.

We kept on being invited to sing at fund raising Broadway events around New York, and going, blissfully, happy to perform our own songs – to the delight of the public who had purchased the songs online – or covers of other musicals.

Another one was opening on a Theater near us, Hamilton: An American Musical, all in rap or R&B telling the story of the founding fathers of the United States. As they went into previews, they started a lottery every day to give away tickets for first roll and the actors always performed a song to the crowd waiting to be sorted in front of the theater. Lin-Manuel Miranda, the writer and star,
invited me after we met at Broadway in the Park. I sang Blank Space as he beatboxed beside me in a crappy microphone at a crowded Times Square, but the video went viral.

After we spent a few weeks in the top of the US Charts with our album, Z100, a New York based radio station, invited us to go host their morning show, so Tyler and me woke up extra early one day after promoting it on twitter. We sat in the studio speaking to a live audience, of usual listeners and a lot of fans who tuned in just because of us (including international listeners who listened from the livestream on the station’s website). We played our favorite songs (current and old, musical theater-y and pop), speaking about them, about the show, about life, and taking questions from twitter. We gave love advice, spoke about our favorite parts of Heathers, and the things we missed the most about The Mediator. We had an almost half an hour long conversation about avocados. We spoke casually, sometimes forgetting we were supposed to play another song, or call a break, talking to each other as we usually did – like friends – and some hilarity ensued. Our hashtag, #JenlerTakesZ100, trended worldwide again, and the fans didn’t miss the fact we put the ‘Jenler’ in it ourselves – though we meant it platonically.

I texted Harry throughout the show and played some songs he suggested (“This next song is I Know Places, by my good friend Taylor Swift, and we’re playing it as a request of my friend Vincent, who wants me to say he dedicates it to the love of his life, Mary”).

But the problem came on the next day. The media finally bought in on the fans’ speculation and started running the rumors again that we were dating. The tabloids talked and talked about how our chemistry reignited when we started working on Heathers again and how “it was never really gone”.

Harry wasn’t pleased, but who could blame him?

“I heard you have a boyfriend.” He said on the phone on the first day the stories started.

“Yeah, you.” I said, “I thought we went over this last time we saw each other.”

“Are you sure I don’t have competition?” he asked, and I sighed, realizing what he meant.

“Harry. It’s a rumor.” I said.

I heard him sigh heavily on the other line. “I know…”

“Do you?”

“Yes.” He mumbled. “I just- I just miss you so much.”

As the weeks passed, Harry dove into work in the African reserve he was now working on. He used to send me picture of the rare animals he was working closely to, but the rare phone calls, and my eight-nights-a-week fake make out session with Tyler weren’t actually helping the relationship.

It didn’t help either that I was getting phone calls from my parents about it.

“We’ve always liked him, you know!” they said, about Tyler. “I think he might be the one!”

I groaned and rolled my eyes and gently explained we were just friends, as I kept doing when the fans asked on stage door and when interviewers kept asking about it.

“You could tell them we’re together.” Harry said, when I complained about my parents.

I could. But here was a better idea: not. It was bad enough for me that Janine, Monica (and, by
default, Richard) now knew about me and Harry, I didn’t want to get lectures on another side of my life.

“That didn’t end well the first time around!” Richard said when he came to Manhattan for a lunch after Janine and Monica told him about Harry and me. “Why would you do it again?!”

“It ended very graciously the first time,” I argued.

“In comparison to your other breakups, sure. But that’s not really a parameter to go on, is it?!”

Luckily, they agreed to not tell my family about it, and let me do it in my time. Which afforded me some time to procrastinate that as long as I could.

Interestingly enough, after some time, Harry’s take on it shifted.

“I like the fact that they are so wrong about it.” He said. “When, in fact, I’m your boyfriend.”

He seemed pretty proud about it. I still hated that he was my boyfriend now, and yet we couldn’t even see each other.

When June ran by, Taylor stopped by New Jersey on her 1989 tour and invited us – me, Emma, Anna and Carrie - to walk down her stage catwalk during Style with her. She also stopped by the theater to watch us on Heathers and was my intermission selfie of that day.

This was after Bad Blood had premiered, of course. The premiere had been in May, which I had missed because after Cannes I had gone to Corsica with Harry. But the video broke all kinds of records and everyone seemed pretty excited about my bit. My character, Royal Pain, was the weapons expert, so my scene was in slow motion, as I fired a rifle to the camera as my name flashed on the screen, my hair flowing behind. Taylor’s Catastrophe had to Matrix her way out of the bullets’ aim, which looked pretty awesome.

When Harry watched it, he asked again if I hadn’t asked to keep the outfit.

As the time passed, the amount of distance between us seemed to grow bigger. They released pictures of him working on Africa and I could see he was growing his beard. He emailed me about the work he was doing, the animals he was seeing and interacting with, and all I could answer was for him to please not shave.

Finally, I got my few days off of Heathers and my understudy took over so I could go on a few promotion events for my line with H&M: there were 26 dresses total, most knee length or shorter, in lace, candy colors, bright colors, denim, and some leather or pop prints. I modeled the campaign, and the marketing team did the rest. We had made sure there were plus size options available and that they would be selling online so everyone could reach them. And they did, since the line sold out – even online – in less than four days. I twitted about how excited I was at the response and that we were making sure there would be more available for purchase as soon as possible.

On June 26th, we partied. The Supreme Court of the US finally ruled favorable on marriage equality, and we all got a few hours off to celebrate in the streets of Manhattan with the crowds. At night, we made a free matinee in celebration, with open doors for whomever wanted to come watch us. The theater was crowded and people sat on the floor between the halls of seats, but no one seemed to mind, and we never had a louder and more excited and passionate crowd.

Harry called me earlier that day.

“Did you tell a guy to, er…” he seemed to stop and read something, “suck your dick?”
“Yes.” I said. “As a matter of fact, some homophobic jerk told me he was unfollowing me today after I celebrated the Supreme Court’s ruling on gay marriage, and, to be precise, I believe I told him to ‘suck my big gay dick, bitch, bye’. In all caps, of course.”

There was silence, as I recalled my passionate twitting earlier that day. Then Harry erupted in laughter on the other line and I couldn’t help but laugh with him.

It was the second time I made news’ websites have to write censured headlines about me: first it was when they had to write “Jenifer Silva tells old professor to kiss her a**!”. Now it was: “Jenifer Silva tells homophobic follower to ‘suck her big, gay d***’.

As we reached July 2015, I went into a two weeks promo tour for the premiere of If Tomorrow Comes on Netflix, which was about to happen. I did more talk show interviews about it – talked about my Heathers run coming to an end, and the ‘explicit’ performance on the Tony’s, and denied again the whole rumor about Tyler, which kept on getting stronger despite the time, because we just couldn’t avoid being seen together since we had to work.

Then the show dropped, and I binge watched all thirteen episodes while live-tweeting it (add another trending topic hashtag that I’m responsible for: #JenWatchesITC). Harry was on Skype with me the whole time, and we binge watched it together as I tweeted.

I enjoyed not only seeing the final cut of the show that I was so happy and excited about, but seeing Harry’s reaction too. I laughed at his freaking out expressions whenever there was a plot twist and at how he cursed my character’s fiancé when he left her.

The reviews came in, gushing about everything from the rawness of my delivery and well translated adaptation from the book, to the soundtrack and locations chosen. We were picked for a second season, that I had to be very careful about, explaining to the writers that I would only be in the show as long as it still followed the book. They agreed, and I worked out a specific shooting schedule with the producers so that I could work less hours on a day, but Monday-to-Monday, and instead take my days off for the whole month all together.

This way, every month I’d have four days to go see Harry!

Then, as I reached 100 performances with the company of Heathers The Musical, in the middle of August, I finally took my final bow and danced the finale song away with my friends ending a successful run.

“Next year,” the director told me, hopeful, “We’re coming for the Tony’s!”

Harry was back from Africa then, and he flew to New York to meet me. That’s when I said goodbye to Broadway and met him on the address he texted. He was there, at the Manhattan harbor, waiting to walk up into the Queen Victoria with me, both of us excited to be in the middle of the sea with absolutely no paparazzi and a whole week just to ourselves after almost three months apart.

Harry laid on top of me in all fours, with a knee between my legs. He moved his nose up from my bellybutton excruciatingly slowly, between my breasts until my neck. As his beard rubbed against my skin, he pushed himself forward, and I felt his leg rub against my groin. It felt good to hold him again, to have him on top of me with no distance between us after so long.

I hated that he could only be mine when we were alone, and that I couldn’t tell anyone. And that the world thought I was dating somebody else.
But right then, and right there, he was mine, and I liked not having to tone down how much I wanted him, so I reached under his shirt and caressed his back muscles, trying to somehow press him harder against me as his lips had their fun leaving marks on my neck.

I sighed, in bliss, and his hands started pulling my dress up, his fingers leaving marks on my thighs.

He stopped in my hips, realizing I wasn’t wearing underwear. He looked at me with a naughty grin on his face and nibbled my lower lip gently, as his hand cupped my butt cheek strongly. His hand circled my hip to my groin, finally sliding his bulky long fingers inside my big lips, and I felt the muscles on my legs tense.

Slowly, I pushed him away. He looked at me inquisitively. “I have something for you.”

He smiled. “What?”

In silence, smiling, I got out of the bed and walked over to the walk-in closet as I took off the robe I was still wearing and closed the door.

I tried to swallow down the embarrassment and took my dress off.

“Is it a present?” Harry asked, from outside.

Though I felt confident in myself, I couldn’t help but fear what he would think, so I tried to just focus on dressing up, which in itself took some time.

“Okay,” I said, finally, opening the door to the closet and leaning against the door frame. “Surprise.”

My teasing grin only straightened when I saw the look on his face. His mouth fell opened and he sat up quickly, staring at me head to toe. When I walked over to the bed, he started to smile, but still didn’t say anything.

“I asked around on set and learnt the costumes were gonna be returned to a store, so I bought it.”

I was wearing my outfit from the Bad Blood music video: leather short shorts that looked like a skirt in the front, and fingerless black leather gloves. Spike high heel ankle boots with a shotgun attached to my thigh in a holster and a latex/leather strap top that circled around my breasts and torso leaving a lot of skin out. I had a harness around my shoulders with two more fake shotguns in – it made me question the security level on the ship that I managed to board with them. I even had the black lipstick on.

Harry crawled to the edge of the bed, still silent and with his mouth opened. I let him approach, very slowly as he did, and right before his hand reached to touch my waist, I quickly grabbed the shotguns from my harness and pointed at him with both hands.

He smiled.

“What did I do?” he asked.

“I’m an assassin and you’re my mission.” I teased, sticking my arms out and pointing the guns closer to him.

He gasped slightly, playfully. “You’re here to kill me?!?”

“Or punish you very slowly.” I offered. “I’m still deciding.”
His smile broaden, and he looked down my body again, biting his lip.

“Most interesting person I know…” he mumbled.

“Well, come on, G.I. Joe.” I teased. “Someone’s got a gun on you, is that all you do? Stare in amazement?”

I had barely finished talking when he quickly held both my wrists and turned me around, standing up, passing my arms over my head so they were crossed with the guns pointing down. He was holding me from the back, and I couldn’t move anymore. One move of his hands on my wrists and the guns fell from my grasp.

“Okay…” I granted, feeling his beard in my ear from the back and the muscles in his arms around me, “that was hot.”

“Told you I could make you weak.” He whispered in my ear, sending chills down my spine, and making my groin tingle.

He held both of my wrists with one hand and turned me around, picking me up with his free arm, he threw me in the bed.

I sat by the bedframe while he took his shoes off, always looking at me. He kneeled in the mattress and crawled to where I was. Sliding his hands up my legs, up my inner thighs, before sliding them a little down to hold my knees and pull me down, fast.

I smiled, and he opened my legs, standing between them. He began to unlace my boots and threw each to one side of the bedroom without looking. He kissed my ankle and slid his lips down until my knees, leaving a trail of wet kisses over my thigh while his hand held onto my other leg, making me forget every single one of those days we had spent apart.

He leaned down and pulled my skirt up. He opened his mouth and gave a gentle, slow bite over my groin. I felt his teeth slowly hover over my big lips and felt my muscles growing weaker. I remembered him saying that’s what he wanted and made a decision to change the game. So I unhooked my fake gun from the holster and pulled it up in a quick move.

He looked up, seeing the gun, and smiled at me.

“You forgot one.” I told him.

Supporting his weight on his elbows in the bed, he put his hands up in a surrendering movement.

I sat up and got on my knees, pushing him to lay where I was, so we traded spots. Still holding the gun, on my knees, I threw a leg over each side of him and sat on his groin.

“Be a dear,” I asked, “and take what’s in my pocket.”

With curiosity filling his eyes, he raised a hand and slid it slowly up my thigh until my front pocket, and pulled the pair of silver handcuffs I had there.

He eyed the metal device, his eyebrow raising, and then looked back at me with interest. I kneeled closer to the bed frame and he dragged himself to the bedframe.

“Alright.” He said. “This is new.”

“Cuff yourself to the bed.” I said.
He stared at me for a long while, a side smile in his lips. Then, he opened the cuff and locked one end in his wrist, and the other on the bedframe.

“Now reach into my other pocket.” I asked, without breaking eye contact, or lowering the gun.

Smiling, with his free hand he did as I said and found another pair of cuffs, that he struggled to chain to his free wrist. I held the gun with one hand and tied him to the other side of the bedframe.

I threw the gun away now and looked at him, vulnerable and at my mercy in bed.

I thrust my crotch stronger against his and ran my hands up his torso under his button up shirt, then down again, allowing my nails to gently scratch his skin. I saw as a wave of chills pass through him and leaned down.

I brushed my nose against his and he smiled. I placed a kiss under his ear, on his neck, and kissed my way around it and back to his Adam’s apple. I kissed down, and began to unbutton his shirt, leaving a kiss for each button. I looked at him after every kiss and his chest started to rise up as his breath got heavier. I put my tongue out before a kiss, and licked his skin in a hickey. I saw his chest go up and down faster until his shirt was fully opened.

I ran my hands up and down his torso again, enjoying the sight of the black marks of my lipstick on his skin, scratching him ever so slowly. He raised his knees, trying to bring me closer and I granted, leaning in to him again. He thrust his face forward trying to capture my lips in a kiss, but I only let our lips touch slightly before leaning back again. I saw the vein in his neck stick out and I circled my hips on his groin, feeling him grow bigger against my crotch.

I slid my hand down his torso, and grabbed his bulge between my fingers. I saw him gulp strongly and close his eyes, so I kissed his neck as I caressed him. I heard a guttered moan leave his throat and he raised his knees again, trying to keep me close.

I sat up, and forced his legs down so I could sit in his crotch again and rubbed myself against him, feeling him harder them before. He tried to push himself up against me, and I saw his skin getting redder at each excruciatingly slow passing second.

I sighed, feeling myself tingling stronger, wanting him more and more, but refusing to speed up the pace.

“I love feeling you hard against me.” I whispered in his ear, leaning down to him again. I nipped his earlobe gently and kissed his neck again, leaving another trail of hiccys that I hoped would leave a mark.

“Mmm.” He groaned again.

I caressed his skin with my lips, and bit his lower lip gently. He came closer, trying to press his lips on mine but I pulled away, still holding onto his lip between my teeth. He groaned again, stronger.

I sat up again, and he let his head fall on the pillows, sighing heavily looking at me, distressed.

“Are you having fun, Mr. Prince?” I asked, teasingly.

He quickly raised his knees up again, thrusting me forward suddenly.

“Let me go and I’ll make sure you have some fun.” He said, his voice tense.

I smiled.
“Don’t make me tie your feet too.” I said, enjoying the whole game a bit too much, maybe.

I got up, standing in the mattress, I looked at him, and unbuttoned my shorts, slowly pulling them down my legs revealing the see-through black panties I had on, with open stripes on the sides.

“Do you like my underwear?” I asked, innocently.

I picked the shorts and threw it in his face. I kneeled down again, with a leg in each of his sides, and adjusted the fabric so his eyes were covered.

I leaned down to whisper in his ear.

“You forget, Mr. Prince, that I can make you weak too.”
I was sitting in the car, fidgeting with my phone, ducking on my seat as low as I could. The seat was on the left side of the car, despite me not having driven there, because, of course, it was Britain.

I stared at the phone and, taking a deep breath, decided that was ridiculous. What was the big deal, anyway? A lot of people already knew about Harry and me. And a lot more was about to. So why couldn’t I just bring myself to tell my parents?

His family knew. My management knew. Alli, Guy and even Beezus, whom I had only seen twice in my life, knew. So why did it feel like I was about to ruin everything? It’s not like we’re doing something wrong.

It’s not like we’re only pretending to date for the publicity… this time. It’s not like he’s twenty five years older – just six! And it’s not like he’s my college professor. Not to mention we’d done this before – not that it had been so great the first time around, with everyone meddling, judging and telling us we should probably break up already. But nonetheless, it couldn’t be that big of a shock when we had done this before. So why couldn’t I just bring myself to type the numbers and tell my parents: Hey! Remember the guy I dated two years ago? The prince! Yeah, the one you thought wasn’t a good idea… Well, that’s happening again!

I sighed, realizing I was running out of time. I looked around at the country club parking lot. I had rarely seen the same amount of fancy cars in the same spot – maybe sometimes at L.A. restaurants, but not at that kind of setting: that rural, farm-type kind of place that smelled of horse shit and leather.

I knew the polo match was gonna start soon, as I knew Harry’s family was probably there already, just as I also knew the press was too. But I also couldn’t just step out as his girlfriend in front of everybody and let my family find out about us through the papers again.

I suppose it was my fault for procrastinating this for so long. I had had a few days in which I could’ve picked up my phone and told them, but I kept thinking maybe I wouldn’t have to bring myself to. Maybe they would just know. Maybe I wouldn’t have to bring myself to say the words aloud and hear all of the judgment. Again.

I grabbed my bag from my feet and found the yellow paper envelope in which my name was written on a flowery, small handwriting.

‘Dear ‘Mrs. Smith’,’ the letter read,

I write you with the hopes this letter will still find you in London and that your generation still knows what a letter is. Let me clarify: it is like a “tweet”, but longer, personal and physical. It is how my generation used to communicate, and I still find use in it, as well as some beauty, as I hope you will.

I write to let you know we arrived safely in Versailles, and per your request, I had a croissant and a cappuccino by the Eiffel tower when we were still in Paris and thought of you. I pray you come see Versailles one day, the gardens are so beautiful they will make you find time to finally start you own.

I met my granddaughters here, and showed them the polaroid of us. They were so loudly excited I
had to cover my ears, though they don’t understand why I can’t tell them how we came to meet. It feels thrilling, however, to hold the secret.

I do hope you and ‘Mr. Smith’ will soon find in yourselves the courage to let the world know of your love. I have seen too many wars start and end and people wonder if they would ever have the chance to be with whom they wanted again, I hope you find strength in the privilege you hold that that is not your case.

It was clear for all of us aboard the Queen Victoria in every look and word that you shared that you and Mr. Smith share the kind of love our generation feared to have been lost in yours. But when we looked at you, and the way your Vincent looked at you when you dazzled the room with your entertaining stories, that fear was lost.

I do not know what kind of pain you carry on your shoulders and I can’t say I understand your fears of having the world know about your love. But if I have learnt one thing in my well lived seventy years on this Earth is that life goes by far too quickly for us to waste it worrying about what people who do not know us will think.

I do pray you will forgive my straightforwardness, but I speak these words from my heart.

Yours truly,

Alexandra Marie Burgoise

P.S: Ethel sends her love, though she is not here at the moment. She’s gone out to dine with a man we met last night at the Hilton… the slut.’

I smiled at her words as I had when I read them for the first time, dwelling on her words to find courage to let the world know about my love.

We met Alexandra on the first day on our cruise, though the meeting hadn’t been as classy as her letter.

I was strutting down the big stairwell in the main salon, feeling satisfied and energized having just finished my game with Harry and our handcuffs. As I went to take a shower, I realized I forgot my moisturizer, so I decided to find the drug store our welcome pamphlet told us was available. Of course, I hadn’t counted on the size of the boat, so as I reached the deck of the salon, which held one of the Queen Victoria’s main restaurants, I realized I was most likely in the wrong spot.

We were already sailing at this point, everyone was either unpacking or exploring, and in Alexandra’s case, she was sitting with Ethel in one of the gray wooden square tables near the big windows. The entire ship looked like the inside of a luxurious shopping mall, but the comfy soft chairs and linen towels in the restaurant just made me feel like I could be in a private restaurant in a hotel.

I was wearing sunglasses, and I had my hair pulled back, but still I decided to ask the pair of old ladies for information believing they would be less likely to recognize me.

“I know there’s a drug store,” I told them, after excusing myself into their conversation, “but I can’t seem to find it.”

“Oh,” the thin, petite woman, with a pixie cut, let out as she looked at me, “What’s your name, dear?”

“I’m Mary.” I said, without skipping a beat, used to my good, old alias. “Mary Smith.”
They looked at each other, and smiled as they did, right before they started to openly laugh.

“Child, surely you don’t think we’re so old that we don’t recognize Jenifer Silva when we see her.”

I felt my eyes widen and my heart stop beating in my chest.

“I don’t know what you mean.” I said, defensive.

The other one, taller, with a bobby cut and fashionable cat-eye reading glasses, said, “I’ve been watching the Oscars since before Grace and Audrey’s time, sweetheart, don’t you think for one minute I didn’t cheer loudly when you told your evil professor to kiss your ass in 2014!”

They laughed again, a nice, low, high-pitched laugh as they looked at each other in amusement, covering their mouths with their hands as if they were trying to behave. I couldn’t help but smile.

“I’m Alexandra Burgoise,” cat-eye glasses told me, “and this is Ethel Lafond. Now, go on, Mary Smith…” she smiled, and pointed at the chair in front of them, “why don’t you sit and let me tell you the story of the time I actually met Audrey at a fundraiser in the sixties…”

I was gonna just beg them not to tell anyone they had seen me and run away back to my suite, but then she mentioned Audrey. And I had to know.

“…Do you mean Audrey Hepburn?” I asked, taking a seat. Alexandra nodded. “You met Audrey Hepburn?!”

“Oh, yes, it was a summer in 62…”

What happened was this: about one hour later, we were deep in conversation of how things were in the olden days and my views of how they were now. Alexandra and Ethel met through their husbands, both now passed, who were business partners. They were rich Frenchmen who represented the interests of oil companies in western Europe (or something like that, they didn’t even seem to fully understand it). As a result, they often attended fundraising events for the high elite, including one in Paris in 1962 where Alexandra met Audrey Hepburn.

“You bare a striking resemblance to her, actually.” She told me, and Ethel agreed, leaving me at a complete lost for words with the best compliment of my life.

And that’s where we were in the conversation when Harry got there.

“Jenifer.”

I could tell he was mad because of the restraint in his voice. And also because he used my name instead of Mary.

I looked up at him, knowing there was no way Ethel and Alexandra wouldn’t know who he was – not when they were telling me only minutes before how they had thought I would make a ‘fine princess’ when they read Harry and I were dating in 2013.

He walked over and stopped to look down at me, still in the same jeans and button down shirt I had taken upon myself to undress him from a few hours before, plus a baseball cap. He had a hand in his pocket, and still a few black lipstick stains in his neck. I wondered how I was supposed to explain this to my new found friends.

“Are you insane?!?” he asked, mad. “What is wrong with you? I’ve been in that room for well over an hour now!”
“Harry…” I started, trying to point out to him that we had company.

“The sex was great, Jenifer.” He went on, and I looked down in embarrassment, avoiding Ethel and Alexandra’s eyes. “I mean, it was fantastic. Handcuffs? Great. Sixty-nine? Sure.” I wanted to kill him. “Champagne? Who knew?! But why would you leave me before unlocking the damn handcuff?!”

He took his hand from his pocket, revealing he still had the cuffs on his writ, but the other end, that was on the bedframe, had been broken.

“Thank God I managed to pull my pants from the floor and reach for the phone so I could call Nate!” he sighed, exasperated, and paused. “What do you have to say for yourself?!”

“The keys were by the door!” I justified, trying not to laugh at his face.

At this, the two women broke down laughing and Harry finally turned around to see we had company.

“Harry, these are Alexandra and Ethel.” I told him. “They’re in the suites next to us.”

Harry looked back at me, blushing, before turning back to them.

“Ladies. How do you do?” he asked, “I’m sorry for… well…”

“Don’t, Mr. Smith.” Ethel told him. “It’s been so long we’ve had this kind of fun entertainment in a cruise!”

“Yes,” Alexandra agreed, “unless you count the year Timothy Wellworth brought his girlfriend into the ship and only when he was here, he discovered his wife was coming too!”

They laughed, and Harry leaned down again to whisper in my ear. “Is this wise?”

I shrugged, letting him know I had no idea.

“Oh, relax, Your Royal Highness.” Alexandra said. “We know how to keep a secret.”

“Besides, who would we tell?” Ethel asked. “Twitter?”

They laughed again, before inviting Harry to sit down.

Ethel reached inside her purse for a handkerchief that she handed over to Harry.

“You have a little…” she gestured to his neck.

Blushing more furiously, he dapped the white fabric over his neck.

“Yes, there too…” She told him.

“I don’t think that’s lipstick, dear.” Alexandra told her. “Looks more like a hickey… or five.”

I bit my lip so I wasn’t smiling too much, trying to be solidary to Harry’s embarrassment, which proved difficult.

Over the course of that week, they did keep our secret. And even their friends did too. Ethel and Alexandra introduced us to them always as “Mr. and Mrs. Smith”, and, though most of them knew who we were, that was always what they called us.
We gathered for drinks at Mr. and Mrs. Whistler’s suite every night before dinner, talking about fashion, business, even the economy and politics, getting to know each other and gossiping about either the high society they were a part of, or each other.

It was weird being part of this ‘old people’s tuna can’, as they called it, but they were endearing and funny, and were willing to turn a blind eye on the fact that they had met us at all. So we enjoyed that week as if that was our whole world: as if we were merely Mr. and Mrs. Smith, the crazy kids who were pretending to be someone else so they could be together.

We wore black tie for the gala night, played cards, shared expensive bottles of champagne, played miniature golf, tennis, went to the hair and nail salon and had competitions in the pool to see who could hold their breaths the longest under water (or as Alexandra called it, “practicing death!”).

Harry and I ran all over the ship, together of from each other, deviating from the other passengers who looked at us in disapproval as we laughed so loud it disturbed their ‘indoor voice’ policy.

Finally, after a week, we exchanged emails and phone numbers – and in some cases, addresses – and bid them goodbye when we landed on Southampton, in the south of England.

Our friends went to France from there, and Harry and I had one simple plan: stay in his apartment – his small, barely furnished apartment – in Kensington Palace for one or two days, enjoying the steadiness of dry land after a week at sea. Then, we’d make our way ‘up north’, as Harry said it, to stay somewhere where the paparazzi wouldn’t find us.

Sadly, our plans were quickly crushed.

As it usually goes, we got ourselves into this one because we were horny.

We took the car from Southampton to Kensington that day and got there at night. I ducked in the backseat, but there were no paparazzi on the side gate, so we were safe.

We carried our bags into the building ourselves, just the small ones since we would be leaving on the next day.

“I’m not saying it’s an ugly apartment,” I had been saying as we made our way upstairs through the common atrium of Kensington Palace’s east wing. “All I’m saying is a big rug, a colorful painting, and maybe some matching furniture would go a long way.”

“I have furniture.” He told me.

I turned around, in the middle of the staircase to look at him, in the step below. “You have the strictly necessary, only the stuff that you actually use.”

“You’re telling me the secret to having a pretty place is buying furniture I don’t need?”

I smiled. “I’m telling you that you suck at decorating,” I turned around, climbing the steps again. “I mean, is your home. It should look pretty. If your home looks pretty, it makes you feel better to be there.”

“The only thing that would make it prettier…” he started, placing his hand in my calf and sliding it up slowly, “…is if you could be there all the time.”

I smiled, taking a deep breath as I stopped walking. I felt his hand caress my knee and progress slowly until my inner thigh, raising my skirt slightly. Harry climbed the two steps between us to stand right behind me, stroking my neck with his nose, weakening my leg muscles as he did. I
waited for his hand to stop, but he didn’t.

“Especially in this skirt…” I smiled larger, biting my lip at the roughness on his voice. I knew that as he got turned on, his voice grew deeper. “Or, you know… nothing at all.” It was almost thunder then.

I turned in the stair step again to look at him, making his hand fall, putting my heart shaped golden sunglasses up in my head.

“You like my skirt?” I asked, innocently, raising a little the short, gray MSGM red and pink floral print fabric. “Is the kind of color that would look nice in your apartment.”

He allowed himself a giggle. “It would look even better on the floor.” He whispered, raising his hand again to grab a sudden grip on my ass, bringing me close.

I felt my heart skip a beat.

“However would it get on the floor?” I teased, pulling back as he came closer to kiss me, I took a blind step back to keep on climbing the few steps until the end.

Harry followed me, sighing, keeping close. “Let’s just say I know all the right buttons to push…”

“You do, do you?” I smiled.

He kept reaching his hand, I kept walking away until were out of the stairs, into his hallway, our bags still in our shoulders.

Right before his door, he took a quick step and grabbed me. He turned me around, and pressed his body against mine on the door, his hands quickly caressing me. I sighed in pleasure, feeling the beginning of a hard-on against me as he thrust his crotch against my ass.

His lips, surrounded by the well-groomed beard he now kept for my delight, nipped on my earlobe, and I felt a heavy breath leaving his nose striking my skin.

“Yes,” he said. “I do.”

His hands moved down, over my skirt, pulling it up until the way was free. He reached under my underwear, unapologetically fast, until his bulky fingers were inside my vulva.

I gasped, breathy, throwing my head back, laying on his shoulders. We were still holding our bags on our shoulders, but it was hard remembering anything other than just us and how quickly he managed to make me feel hot and sweaty.

“For example…” he breathed, on my ear, “I know about this button.”

His fingers circled my clit, slowly, gently, and he kissed my neck.

“Do you want me to stop?” He teased, starting to pull his hands out.

I held them in place. “Don’t!” I begged, whispery.

I felt his smile against my neck.

But then I felt something else – something other than his growing bulge against my lower back. I felt the door open.
“Woah!”

“What the-?!”

Harry and I stumbled forward suddenly as it did, our bags falling on the floor with a noise, but he managed to hold us standing since his arms were already, you know, around me. On the shock, I noticed three things at the exact same time:

One, we were not alone. Two, my skirt was up, my crop top was messy and Harry’s hands were still under my pantie’s, between my legs. And three, there was not a chance in hell we could possibly explain that.

In less than two seconds, Harry took his hands from me and I pulled my skirt down, turning around to face the wall so I could try and do it with some dignity.

“Dad.” Harry half stated, half greeted. “Will.”

I closed my eyes in embarrassment before turning back, trying to act casual.

“Harry.” Will greeted back, he still had his hand on the door, before reaching for the floor to grab my purse, that he walked over to hand me. “Jenifer. Hello.”

I didn’t look at him to see if he was being nice or nasty, because I still couldn’t take my eyes off the floor, and I couldn’t tell by his voice because he just sounded really shocked, but here’s what I can tell you about my purse: It was shaped like an elephant. Also, as I’ve mentioned, my sunglasses, still on my hair, were heart shaped and shiny golden. My mini skirt was really mini and floral and my top was a crop top that left half of my stomach out. As a last blow, I was wearing white Keds.

I tried not to focus too much on the social pants or button up shirts his family was wearing, or the cargo blazer around his father’s shoulder. Instead, my genius brain decided to remind me that the last time we had met I had carefully designed every outfit choice to make sure, if I didn’t impress them, that at least they wouldn’t have anything to hold against me. And now, the second time they ever saw me, the very moment they find I’m the girl their son and brother is dating, I am wearing the most obnoxiously childish ensemble that I can think of.

And they had found us while Harry had his hands under my underpants.

“Wh-what are you doing here?” Harry stuttered, discreetly trying to pull his cargo shorts loose around his crotch.

‘Look away, Jenifer!’, I thought. ‘If you look away maybe they’ll look away from you too!’

“…we were waiting for you… we want to talk about Tedbury.” As William spoke, I realized how wrong I was, because despite talking to his brother, his eyes were still on me. “We let ourselves in to have some tea, we hoped you wouldn’t… mind.”

“I said I can’t go.” Harry said.

“I, I- I…” His father stuttered, finally, walking from the couch to the door where we were still standing. “I don’t understand… uh… uhm. Miss Silva?” I took in a deep breath and looked at him. “Whatever are you doing here?”

There was a moment of intense, awkward silence as I felt my brain buffering for an answer.
“Well…” I started.

“They’re dating.” Will mumbled, sounding as surprised as he looked.


Nine ‘no’s? Was it really that unbelievable?

“Dad…” Will gave him a look. He didn’t say anything else, but if I had to guess I’d say he was mentally asking the question: ‘how else would you explain the thing they were doing at the door?’

“No.” His father repeated, still smiling awkwardly. “I mean, Harry is dating that girl. The one he calls Mrs. Smith.”

“You’re her.” William guessed, a grin on his lips. “You’re Mrs. Smith!”

Now I forced myself to look at Harry through my embarrassment, asking for help. He cleaned his throat before speaking.

“Dad…” he started. “Jen and I are dating.”

After a moment of understanding, in which I faced the floor with renewed interest, crossing my arms low on my stomach trying to cover up my exposed skin, Prince Charles nodded.

“I see… well, good for you.” I felt my eyebrows raising in disbelief before I could try and stop it. “I mean, you’re young. Is the time for…” He seemed to search for the right words. “…Casual fun… and… uh… flings.”

“Seems pretty serious to me.” William mumbled.

“Well, how serious can it really be?” his dad replied. “Harry’s been away all this time, Ms. Silva lives in New York-“

“It’s pretty serious.” I said, finding surprise in how strong my voice sounded – strong as I didn’t feel. “I’m his girlfriend.”

I didn’t struggle to overcome my deepest commitment issues to have someone doubt the seriousness of our relationship, so yeah, I took it personally.

“Well-“ He sounded like he had a reply ready, but William intervened with a cough.

“Anyway…” He started, turning to Harry as his dad and me kept on staring at each other. “We’ll see you this Saturday, surely? In Tedbury?”

“No, sorry… we have plans.” Harry justified him.

“But, Harry, surely you can’t cancel this one too.” His father argued. “You already missed so many because of Africa. You know we’re expected to help raise attendance… and how much your presence improves the donations.”

“I’m sorry,” he said, shrugging. “I just can’t.”

“Surely Ms. Silva can be okay for an afternoon as you play…” He argued.

Harry sighed. “I’m not missing it because of Jen, dad.”
“Well, then what could it be?”

“I’m sorry,” I interrupted, “what’s this?”

“We play a few polo matches every summer for charity.” William told me. “Harry missed most of them this year because of his trip.”

“I’m sure you can go.” I said, hating the way his father had made it sound like I was ruining some good charity’s chances at raising money. “I’ll be fine.”

“Well, why don’t you come with, Ms. Silva?” His dad asked, making us all look at him. “We’d hate to get you away from your, uh… boyfriend.”

“Oh,” I said, trying to ignore the laughable way in which he used the word. “I’d love to. I really would. I quite like polo. But—”

“Great, then we’ll see you there.”

“Dad, we already made plans.” Harry told him.

That wasn’t a complete lie. We very much intended to spend every single day of that week in bed, maybe watching movies and TV shows, but mostly hooking up.

“What could be more urgent than giving back?” Charles asked.

“I believe they are trying to avoid the cameras, dad.” William offered, then looked at me, didactic. “The press always covers the polo matches we play…”

“Why, whatever should they?” He looked at me. “What’s the problem with people seeing them if they’re so, uhm… serious.”

I could see he almost made quotation marks with his hands, and maybe because it felt like he was almost daring us to go together to a public event, I couldn’t help but say what I did next.

“I’m sure we can find time in one day to go to the match.”

They looked at me.

“Uhm, J?” Harry asked, “There’ll be a lot of press there.”

“I know.” I said, sustaining his father’s look with a smile. “Should be fun.”

“Wonderful!” Charles said, “I shall see you then!”

After they made a quick exit, walking around our bags on the floor, and with William mouthing ‘sorry!’ before closing the door behind them, we walked in silence to sit on the couch.

“What was that?” Harry asked.

I sighed, trying to understand it myself.

“I think…” I started. “We’re going to polo…”

“Jen… People will know.”

“I know.”
“They will see us and they will know you’re there with me. They’ll know we’re dating.”

“I know.”

He paused, looking around.

“Then why did you agree?!”

“Your father was almost daring me to!” I justified.

“Well, yes.” He rolled his eyes. “He would. He thinks I shouldn’t be with you, he was so glad when we broke up… he thinks you’re too young for me.”

I scoffed. “Rich from the man who married a nineteen year old when he was thirty-three!” Harry gave me a sharp look, and I sighed. “Sorry! I just… sorry.”

He ran his hands through his hair.

“The point is… they’ll know. They’ll know about us. And the moment they know, that’s it. We can’t go anywhere. We can’t go on dates. We can’t travel. We can’t see each other without it being a headline. And the rumors, there’ll be rumors.”

“There’s always rumors.” I said. “We know they’re not true, that’s what matters.”

“They’ll follow us everywhere—“

“Well, at least we’ll be going somewhere.” I argued. “In contrast to having to stay locked inside the entire time so that no one will see us. I mean, it’s fun, sure. But, Harry… What’s the point of being in a serious relationship that we don’t have to hide from everyone if we keep on having to hide from everyone?!”

“You’re the one who came up with this rule.” He reminded me. “You invented the aliases and everything.”

“When we were just hanging out.” I justified. “When it was just supposed to be casual and fun, and temporary… but then we made it exclusive. Then we made it serious. Now I’m your girlfriend and I’m tired of having to fear for our sanity every time someone sees us.”

He considered my points, staring at the rug instead of looking at me.

“It’s gonna get out at some point…” I argued. “We just told a shitload of people in the ship… And there’s the entire Corsica village where we always stay…”

“They all promised not to tell, and they haven’t.”

“So far.” I said. “But these things have a way of coming out eventually. I mean, come on. We’re inside a palace in central London. What if there was a reporter at the gates?”

“There wasn’t.” He said.

“But could have been… What I mean is, they’re gonna know eventually. It’s a miracle we managed this far. Wouldn’t you rather it happen in a controlled environment where we can know how everything is gonna go down instead of stressing about every person that comes near us?!“

“And you think the best way to do it is by hanging out with my family?!”
"I think-"

"Listen," he took in a deep breath. "You think you know what is like, but you don’t."

"I’ve literally dated you before."

"Yes, but is not the same. You didn’t care before. You actually wanted this before. Now it’s real, now we’re invested. Now you already have your own tabloid bullshit to deal with, and they’ll add mine on top of yours!"

"But at least I know what to expect." I said. "And it would be like this anyway…"

"Jenny…" he pleaded, sighing.

"I wanna hold your hand." I said, bringing my knees to the couch to crawl over to him. "In public. And go to a restaurant, and the movies. I want to do this, Harry. I want to have a normal relationship."

I held his hand in mine, enlacing our fingers together.

"There’s nothing normal about this. You have so much going on already, and with this… you’re gonna- you’re-“ He sighed. "You’re gonna grow stressed, and tired, and soon enough you’re gonna leave."

I realized, suddenly, the sadness in his voice. Realizing he was the one who cared now in contrast to the last time around. Realizing he had seen this happen far too many times – girls claiming they could handle it, and then leaving. His ex-girlfriends, Chelsy, his mother, Kate. Harry was an expert in watching girls leave.

In a way, I realized having a public relationship was to him what ‘I love you’ was to me: an anxiety trigger that made him want to hide away under the covers so no one could find him.

"Look at me." I asked, and he brought a leg up to the couch so he could sit facing me. "I’m Jenifer Silva. They can’t break me."

He smiled, slightly.

"I don’t want to lose you."

I sighed, trying to be careful not to make promises I couldn’t keep.

"If this ends," I started, "If we don’t make it… it won’t be because of the paparazzi. It won’t be because of the rumors. I can handle paparazzi. I can handle rumors. They’re part of my life with or without you."

He closed his eyes, resting his forehead on mine.

"But they won’t help either."

"No, they won’t." I said. "But at least I’ll get to hug you whenever I want without having to look around to check if someone recognized us."

He looked at me, seeming to think about it.

"And I could go see you in Los Angeles when I get a day off, but you don’t." He offered.
“Yes!” I smiled. “That would be nice.”

He sighed, trying to smile. “I guess we’re going to a polo match.”

On the next day, Harry went to practice with William and his team. I enjoyed this time to walk over to Will and Kate’s apartment near Harry’s in Kensington Palace to ask Kate what the hell I should wear.

Apartment was a weird way to call a fifteen-bedroom mansion, but I’m not about to tell aristocrats how to do their shit. The place was impeccable, with beautiful artwork on the walls, modern wallpaper and minimalistic furniture. Fresh flowers in every surface, long clear curtains, high, decorated ceilings with gorgeous chandeliers and central air-conditioning – something I had come to learn was highly unusual in England.

Kate smiled when she opened the door, greeting me excitedly as we hadn’t seen each other since that awful weekend in Scotland in 2013.

“I was so excited when Will told me you and Harry were back together!” She said, inviting me in. “Of course I already knew, but it’s nice to have confirmation. Will owes me fifty pounds now, so thanks!”

“You…” I started. “You knew?”

“Oh, of course.” She nodded, carefully rocking the sweet-looking baby in her arms, that she had introduced as baby Charlotte. “Will was sure I was wrong, but I knew I wasn’t! Harry is a good boyfriend, but the only other time I remember him checking his phone every five minutes was when he was dating you. So when he started doing that again, I knew there was something there…”

Kate asked if I wanted something to drink before guiding me upstairs to see her closet. I noticed with interest she opened the door herself, hair up in a messy bun, barefoot, instead of relenting the job to a butler or a maid, which I had assumed would have been there in a house that big. I told her this as we walked upstairs.

Kate laughed before she answered. “No, no. We don’t want a big staff. Though I suppose we do have more than most people. We have a nanny, but she had to leave earlier today for a personal appointment. And a cleaning team that comes every two days. But that’s it, really.”

“You don’t have a cook?!” I asked. “Harry said he had a cook growing up.”

“Yes, they did.” She smiled. “But even when we were dating both Will and I agreed that felt so unnecessary. So when we got married we just accepted the cleaning staff, because, well, it’s a big house… and then we got a nanny when we had George, so we could go back to work sooner rather than later. But that’s it, we do all else. Even cook!”

I liked that, her attempt at remaining as commoner as she could even while leaving in a palace.

We passed by a room where blondie little George was playing loudly with an electric train set.

“Hey, sweetie?” Kate called, and he raised his head to the door. “Can you say hi to Jen?”

He looked back at the train before we heard his timid, “…hi.”

Smiling, she was kind enough to show me what she planned on wearing – jeans and a normal long sleeved shirt, with flats.
“I though polo was a fancy thing?” I asked her, just as Charlotte had started to cry in her bassinet in the room, outside the closet.

Kate walked out to go tend to her baby girl.

“It is sometimes.” She said. “Depends, really. Sometimes it’s dresses, heels and hat, and sometimes it is jeans and a shirt.”

“Okay, then.” I said, following her. “I guess I’ll wear flats.”

“Muuuuummy!” George barged in, running as fast as his tiny, little legs allowed. “Mah-cheess!”

I looked confused as Kate just sat in her settee with the baby. “You want mac-and-cheese?” she asked, and he nodded excitedly, his blonde hair waiving around. “Can you wait for mummy to finish feeding your sister?”

Because of the baby crying, and Georgie stomping his little feet impatiently around the room, I went ahead and offered to make mac-and-cheese – one of my only accomplishments in the kitchen. In her job as a host, Kate was very politely trying to tell me not to worry, but I insisted, so at last she turned to her son with a smile.

“Go ahead, baby. Aunt Jenny will help you!”

I felt a little weird being called ‘aunt Jenny’, especially in reference to a boy that wasn’t really related to me – but I guess that’s what being in a relationship involves. You kind of take on each other’s family. Which was my whole point about going to polo with Harry.

A while later, George was babbling in his own baby-language as I cooked, and I kept on replying with the voice tone I felt appropriate depending on how he sounded, when Kate found us downstairs.

“Really?” I asked George, after he finished saying something. “I agree, isn’t that great?”

“How are we doing here?” she asked.

“Almost done,” I said, “how’s Charlie?”

“Asleep.” She sighed. “Do you want me to take over?”

“I’m good.” I shrugged, turning the oven down and grabbing a bowl to put the mac-and-cheese.

“So…” She started, as she sat beside her firstborn in a stool by the kitchen isle. “Who’s excited for polo Saturday?!”

George raised his hands in the air, smiling. “Meeeee!”

We laughed at him, and I gave him his food with a small spoon.

“Jen?” Kate asked, before she started to blow it cold for him. “Are you excited?”

I took in a deep breath. “Excited is a strong word.”

“I know it can be overwhelming.” She said. “But for whatever is worth, I think you’re making a brave decision.”
“It could either go very well… or very wrong…”

She nodded. “If you were, you know… a civilian, perhaps I would say it’s a bad idea… But you aren’t. So I do think it’ll be fine. I mean, there’s no way of knowing if you’re really going to make it as a couple until you take on all of the heavy stuff. This is just the first step.”

I wasn’t sure how comforting that was.

“Oh, my God.” She said, after tasting some of the mac-and-cheese. “What did you put in this?”

“Is it bad?” I asked.

“It’s amazing!”

I laughed, and told her about my use of basil and oregano, and we chatted happily for a while, until finally she sighed heavily before speaking.

“I know that in a way, you’re much better versed at these things than I am…” she started, slowly, “But, what this involves, it’s pretty heavy… and as someone who’s sort of been where you are… if you ever feel like no one understands, I do hope you’ll call me to chat.”

I smiled, before realizing something. “You had it pretty bad, didn’t you?”

She sighed, cleaning the sauce from George’s cheek with her hand.

“The media here…” she looked at me. “They’ll try and break you just to see if they can.”

I nodded, feeling myself more and more nauseated at the idea of the world finding out about us.

“It’s not the kind of thing you can prepare for…” She said, “I can’t give you advice, or tell you to be strong… at the end of the day, you’re either cut out for this life or not. It’s in your best interest, and Harry’s, to find out. Unfortunately, there’s no other way but through.”

Will and Harry came back from practice about half an hour later and, when they did, Kate and I were wearing aprons in the kitchen, deep on preparation of a casserole that she swore I had to try, so that’s how we decided to stay for dinner with them.

First, I delayed the call to my parents by arguing I had time. Then, that I was busy. Finally, Harry and I were parked in the country club on Saturday, about to go show the world we were together, and my parents were still unaware.

“Go ahead!” I had told Harry. “I’ll be right there, I’ll just give them a quick call!”

He looked at me one second too long before grabbing his water bottle and getting out of the car.

It wasn’t half a minute before he came back and knocked on the car window by my side. I opened it, and he leaned down to talk to me.

“I’ll understand if you don’t want to go.” He said. “It’s fine, you can take the car if you want.”

“Are you calling me a chicken, Mr. Prince?” I teased, and he smiled.

“I’m serious.”

“I know.” I told him. “And I’ll be right there.”
He sighed, before leaning into the car to give me a kiss on the lips before leaving again.

That’s when I started fidgeting with my phone. There were no reporters there, they had another entrance, and only had access to the field, which was further away. So I was alone and Harry was right: I could still leave and no one would know.

I stared at Alexandra’s words in her letter: life goes by far too quickly for us to waste it worrying about what people who do not know us will think.

I sighed, remembering one of the nights in the Queen Victoria. Harry woke me up in the middle of the night and made me put my shoes on and follow him. In our pajamas, we held hands and walked through the empty halls until we were in the promenade deck.

Harry leaned against the rails and looked at me with a grin on his face.

“Would this be where they met?” he asked. “Vince and Mary?”

I smiled, feeling the cold, salty breeze from the Atlantic blowing. “Yes.”

“And he would be standing here, all sad and down, thinking about death and the pointlessness of life,” he stared off into the sea. “And then he’d look back,” he looked at me, smiling, “And she’d be standing right there… inadvertently bringing the light back into his life…”

I felt my lips stretch as my smile grew bigger. I took some steps towards him in a slow pace.

“And they’d talk about the beauty of the stars that night…” I said, and we looked up, “and as she spoke she’d realize the stars weren’t the only beauty she could see.” I looked at him, who smiled. “And she’d tell him that the gentlemanly thing to do would be to ask a lady for a dance.”

“There’s no music.” He complained.

“That’s exactly what he would say…” I teased. “But Mary would simply give him her hand.”

I raised him my hand, which he held, passing his other arm around my waist, and we started to rock to the rhythm of the waves, as I felt his smell when his cheek touched mine.

“Call the Justice of the Peace, but don’t tell him our names…” I started to sing, feeling his smile against my skin, my voice echoing through the silent night. “Don’t put out a press release, or mention baseball games… Book the nearest bridal suite, one room will suit us fine, for the desk clerk that we meet, the only autograph we’ll sign is… Mr. and Mrs. Smith, simply the folks next door…”

Harry raised my arm, making me spin as I still sang.

“People who use their kitchen each night, and never been in couture… Nothing can beat the view, when as far as the eye can see, there’s no one but Mr. Smith and me…”

He smiled, pulling me in again.

“No early calls, no big premieres, no less romantic theme… we’ll spend the nights making our own little league football team!”

With both of his arms, he closed a hug around my waist and picked me up, spinning us around, making me laugh as I broke out of song for a couple of seconds.

“We’re no one you’ve ever seen… movie stars don’t live anywhere here, except on the local drive-
in screen, yes, I’d gladly disappear! If it might guarantee a view of no one but Mr. Smith…” I sighed, and looked at him. “And me.”

His lips kissed my cheek, and for that moment, being Mr. and Mrs. Smith was enough.

But we weren’t Mr. and Mrs. Smith. We were His Royal Highness Prince Harry of Wales and Oscar-winning actress Jenifer Silva. And I was tired of having to pretend to have a different life to be able to enjoy the man that I, well, loved.

So I unlocked my phone’s screen, and typed a text message.

‘Hey, mom. How is everyone doing? I’m fine. Just thought I should let you know I’m dating Harry. I’m dating Harry again. It’s been a while, actually, sorry I didn’t say anything sooner. I know you’re gonna have a lot of thoughts on this, and maybe questions. But before you call me so we can talk, please consider if those really matter. Because, the thing is, I love him. And he makes me really happy. And I don’t remember being this okay before.’

I knew the conversation wouldn’t end here, and I’d still have to hear about this. But for now, it felt enough. For now, all I wanted was to go be with my boyfriend.

So I opened the door and got out of the car, leaving my phone in the glove compartment, deciding I really didn’t want to hear about it until all was said and done.

I found Eddy waiting for me outside, looking relieved I was finally done with whatever I was dealing with, so we walked together through the grass pathway around the stables towards the field.

Nobody noticed for a while, for a short while I was just another girl, in cream pants and flats and a fuchsia sweater, coming around to watch the royalty play polo.

Then I walked over to the big, white changing tents by the side of the field, where Kate was standing with George and some other people – and a lot of blonde kids.

“Ms. Silva.” Prince Charles said as I walked over. “I didn’t think you’d come.”

What I wanted to say was this: you’d like that, wouldn’t you?

What I said was this:

“Well, I’m here.” I smiled, as he offered me his hand for a handshake. I took a small curtsy as I held it, knowing that pictures were being taken, even if the photographers hadn’t recognized me yet. “It’s a beautiful day for polo, isn’t it?”

“Yes, it is.” He agreed.

“Excuse me, sir,” I smiled. “I’m gonna go say hello to Kate.”

She smiled when I approached, leaning to give me a kiss on the cheek.

“You did it!” She said.

At a distance, I heard the clicking sound of the cameras flashing away. A sly look told me where the paparazzi were standing, across the field from us, clearly having now recognized me.

Kate walked me around, introducing me to those I didn’t know – like a couple of her friends, and Zara Tindall, Harry’s cousin, the sister of Peter, whom I had met in Scotland and only daughter of
Princess Anne. She gave me a stern, uncaring smile, though it might have only been because she was busy with her daughter, a blonde toddler in jeans. But something told me she might be more similar to her mother than Peter was.

And talking of Peter, his wife was there (he was playing too). Autumn greeted me smiling, both of us a little shocked to see the other remembered us. At five years old, her daughter, Savannah, was now a lot more talkative than she had been in Scotland, immediately inviting me to come and play ‘down hill’ with her and her sister, Isla.

Playing ‘down hill’ included sliding down the small hill behind the tents with our butts, which seemed to greatly entertain them. But not much more than my helicopter stunt.

George brought it up as soon as he saw me, probably remembering the dinner only a couple of nights before.

“TA TA TA TA TA!” he said, mimicking the sound of a helicopter, asking for me to hold him and spin around like a helicopter’s propeller.

Which I did, making the same sound, making him giggle loudly as the others laughed at us.

When I put him down, the other kids came around claiming it was ‘their turn’.

“You found the most exhaustive way of entertaining them!” Autumn said, as she and Kate laughed.

So I put my sunglasses up in my hair, and held kid after kid, spinning us around, making them laugh, telling myself at least it was a good workout.

“My turn, my turn!” they chanted again, just as I put Isla down.

“No, now is my turn!” Harry’s voice made me turn around, to find him smiling at me just two steps away in his riding boots and white pants, with the team shirt.

“I’m not spinning you!” I joked. “You’re taller than me, you spin me!”

He laughed, before reaching for my arm and pulling me into a hug.

“Ew!” we heard the kids go, dispersing around at our small sign of PDA.

In flats, my head just barely reached his neck. He wrapped his arms around my shoulders and I held mine around his waist, feeling him kiss my forehead.

“You’re giving them a picture.” I said, trying to block out the clicking sound that doubled in volume from across the field when he showed up, and the whispers from everyone around.

I knew, in the back of my mind, what was happening in real time as we hugged: the photographers across the field were snapping frantically, quickly uploading their pictures in a laptop and connecting to the internet to send them to their editors. In just a few minutes, those pictures would be all over the internet, as the pictures of me talking to his family, and playing with his nephew and cousins, probably already were.

‘Jenifer Silva and Prince Harry are back together!’, the headlines would read. ‘Jenifer Silva Spends Time With The Royal Family, Is She Dating Prince Harry?’!, ‘Stop Whatever You’re Doing! Prince Harry and Jenifer Silva Are Back Together!’.

At this point, my parents, Taylor, Selena, Ophelia, Tyler, and every single person I knew were
probably wondering what the pictures meant. ‘Are they really back together?!’, they’d wonder.

I smiled at the thought of Alli, and maybe even Bee, seeing the pictures and feeling happy for us. For the end of our secret. I imagined Alexandra and Ethel, laughing their sweet, high-pitched laugh when they saw the tabloid freak-out that was soon to happen.

I tried not to think of the fans, who would mostly be a little heartbroken the Jenler rumors were really not true, after all. Or of the press editors, who were probably smiling at the amount of money they would make with us now.

Instead, I just focused on Harry. In his smell, and his arms around me, and the way he grinned when he told me:

“No. I’m just hugging my girlfriend.”
The Coat

Chapter Summary

Jen surprises Harry for his birthday, when the unexpected happens.

Chapter Notes

Thank you so so much for reading! Sorry about the delay!

I was wearing a red Armani overcoat and golden Jimmy Choo shoes, with drop golden earrings. And nothing else.

“Aren’t you hot in that?” Eddy asked when we stepped in the elevator.

“Not really…” I smiled, “I’m not, uhm… Not wearing much else.”

It took him a second to understand what I meant, but when he did, he sighed.

“I didn’t need to know that.”

Eddy stood by the door with Nathan when I walked into the bar. Harry was sitting in a stool drinking whiskey, wearing dark jeans, a white button down shirt tucked in and a black blazer. Clark was sitting by his left, so I walked past them to sit by his right.

“Is this seat taken?”

Harry looked at me, a smile immediately taking over his lips. His eyes shone in excitement as he stared at me up and down.

“Jen.” Clark greeted me before making an exit. I smiled as he left and looked back at my boyfriend.

He leaned down for a hug, but I raised a hand stopping him, something that went against everything my body begged me to do.

“Hold there, stranger.” I teased.

Harry immediately sighed.

“Ok, can we pause the game for a second?” he asked. “I haven’t seen my girlfriend in a month and I really want to hug her.”

I smiled, unable to contain myself at the words ‘my girlfriend’ coming out of his mouth.

“Okay.” I granted, and he leaned down, wrapping his arms around me faster than I could think the words ‘I love you’.
And I was thinking them. I was thinking those words really loudly. It had been a month of non-stop work, and of seeing him only in poor quality Skype connections, and I couldn’t stop my own brain when his smell invaded me – the sweet mixture of whiskey and his cologne. The words just echoed: I love you! I love you! I love you!

“How way your flight?” He asked, letting me out of the hug slowly, providing a helpful distraction from the intrusive thoughts I wasn’t ready for.

“Long.” I answered.

“Madam, would you like a drink?”

“Vodka soda,” Harry told the bartender, without breaking eye contact, before I even had a chance to look at him.

I smiled, a little turned on. Was it that easy? Well, it had been that long.

“So, am I gonna know what the secrecy is about?” he asked, “You got here earlier and I couldn’t pick you up from the airport, you’re not staying with me, all I got was the cryptic napkin.”

I just smiled.

“Do you like my coat?” I asked.

He smiled back.

“It’s pretty.” He said. “Thank you for the present, by the way, not the annoying one. The letter.”

“Was it to your satisfaction?” I teased, watching his grin grow mischievous as he thought about it.

“Oh, yes.” He nodded. “You could, uh… you could say that. You could also read it to me, I’d love to hear the words in your voice.”

I smiled larger, remembering the gifts I had sent him that morning.

Harry was thirty-one years old that fateful Thursday in September 2015, and I had spent the entire month we had been apart planning our first night back together.

That morning, I was almost asleep in my hotel room on the Connaught Hotel after the long flight to London when Harry called.

“Good morning.”

“Hhhhm.” I groaned, miserable, after being pulled away from a state of almost-sleep that I so cherished when I was in a tight schedule.

It is worth mentioning that was my first real day off in a month, since I had given up my Sundays off to be able to fly to see him.

“How are you doing, Jenny?” He asked.

“Hm.” I groaned again. “I was almost asleep!”

“Oh, good.” He said, and I heard the sarcasm is his voice. “Good for you. You know who was actually asleep? Me.”
I felt my face wrinkle in confusion. I took the phone away from my ear to check the time: just over seven a.m. in London.

“What?”

“Yeah. I was asleep. Enjoying that good part of sleep right before you have to actually get up. You know how it is, right? It’s like right before you have to wake up, that’s the best sleep you get.”

“Harry…” I sighed.

“But, then, they woke me up. Like, an hour before I had to.”

“That sucks.” I mumbled.

“Yeah… You know why they woke me up?”

“…No?”

“Really?” he asked. “So you didn’t hire a barbershop quartet to come serenade me at seven in the morning to the sound of the Emperor’s New Groove’s birthday song?”

I sat up, suddenly fully awake, with a smile on my face, realizing the date I had been too tired to remember.

“Happy birthday, Harry!” I said, slow, enjoying the present I had hired for him weeks in advance – so in advance I forgot about it.

“Thank you, love.” He said, still a little sarcastic, though I could almost see the smile in his face as he spoke. “Did it have to be so early in the morning?”

“Yes.” I said, allowing myself a giggle. “It had to be the first thing in your day.”

“Well, the first thing in my day was my security supervisor waking me up to let me know six men were here to see me.”

I laughed again, trying to paint the scene in my head.

“Did they let them in?!”

“No, of course.” He said. “I didn’t know them, so if I wanted to know what it was about I had to go down and talk to them myself.”

“Did you?”

Harry paused, sighing.

“…Yes.” He replied, and I smiled. “In my pajamas.”

I laughed loudly. Vodka woke up from her sleep in the other end of the couch near me.

“I’m glad you’re having fun.” He said.

“Come on, you must have at least smiled while they sang!”

“You know, it wasn’t the fact I was in pajamas.” He started. “Or that I didn’t have a shirt on, or that it was seven in the morning, or that I had to leave my apartment and walk all the way to the
security headquarters where my protection officers were holding the six man dressed in red and white stripes blazers and hats—“

I interrupted him with my laughter again.

“No,” he went on, “No, the walk wasn’t the problem. The problem was that when I got there, I had to stand, shirtless, through their entire almost ten minute number as all of my protection officers stood watching and judging silently.”

I covered my mouth with my hand, breathing deeply, trying to stop laughing.

“I so wish someone filmed it!” I said.

I heard his laugh now, and smiled to the ceiling of my Los Angeles bedroom.

“We don’t do that.” He said. “Thankfully. I think having it engraved in my memory forever is bad enough.”

“Well, think of it this way: now the worst is over you know it’s all smooth sailing from here.”

“Smooth sailing like the breakfast basket that was waiting for me when I got back to my apartment?”

“Oh, yeah, happy birthday!” I smiled.

“How did you get this here?”

The answer: Thomas.

“A girl never revels her secrets.” I teased.

“Thank you, J.” He said. “I wish you were here already, why don’t you come be with me?”

“Patience, Mr. Prince.” I said, turning to lay on my side to hug my pillow, missing his sweet smell on me. “Soon I’ll be hugging you.”

“I wish we could do more than hug.” He teased.

“Well, I can’t help with that right now,” I started, “but if you look hard enough you might find something interesting in the basket.”

“What?” He asked.

“Do you see an envelope?”

“Oh, yeah, is it a card?”

I smiled, feeling naughty. “Not really…”

“Okay, a lot of pages…” He said, “So a strongly worded letter. Your corresponding to Alexandra is getting out of hand…”

“It’s something you’ve always asked me to tell you about and that I never did.” I explained.

“What?” He was silent, and I could almost see his eyes widening as he realized the content of the letter. “Oh. OH!” I smiled, biting a lip. “Wait. Is i- Is it what I think it is?”
“It is a… retelling of my, let’s call it, bi-curious experience when I was at NYU.”

He paused. “…Are you serious?”

“Yes.”

“You wrote it down?”

“I changed the names to make sure it couldn’t be traced back to me… the envelope was closed right?”

“Yes.”

Good, so Thomas didn’t open it…

“But wait, do you say… everything on it?” He asked.

“Everything.”

“Everything that happened?”

“Yes.”

“Everything you did?”

“In full detail.”

“And all that was done to you and how it made you feel?”

“Why don’t you just read it?”

“Oh, I will.”

I giggled at the eagerness in his voice.

He sighed. “You’re the best girlfriend ever!”

“I know.”

“…I wanna see you.”

“…so I can read it to you?” I teased.

He laughed. “No. Well, sure, that sounds fun. But… I just, I just wanna see you.”

“Well, you will. Actually, on that note, isn’t there something else on the envelope? There should be.”

“Wait, let me… see… uhm, yes. There’s a… napkin?”


“What’s this for?”

“Well, I don’t know. What kind of napkin is it?”

“It’s from the Coburg Bar, at the Connaught Hotel.”
“Hhm. That’s interesting.”

“Is it where you’re staying?”

“Who knows?”

He laughed. “It says 7pm, am I supposed to meet you at the hotel bar at 7pm tonight?”

“Hhm… It does sound like a good theory.”

“…you won’t say much else, will you?”

“No, actually I have to go to bed now. I have a thing at lunch…”

“I love you.” He said, suddenly.

My heart missed a beat, but I smiled.

“I’ll see you soon.” He said.

That month of September had begun as insane as I had thought it would: on a pretty positive note, the Emmy nominations came out and I was nominated for Outstanding Lead Actress in a Drama Series! Not only that, but If Tomorrow Comes also got nominations for Outstanding Drama Series, and Outstanding Supporting Actor and Actress in a Drama Series, for Robert DeNiro and Daffany Clark, my castmates. After the good reviews and even greater streaming numbers we had gotten on Netflix, the nomination came as the cherry on top.

When I came back from London, instead of New York I had gone back to Los Angeles, as my job now involved shooting season two of If Tomorrow Comes. So now that I was back at LA, I made a point to visit Janine and Richard more frequently as they were now new parents to baby Kidd Merchant-Artchet. Before you ask, yes, I did ask them not to name the poor boy ‘Kidd’. But they were unconvincing.

That was the second crazy thing about September: going to the Artchet house and finding the already big and loud family with its two new members: Janine and baby Kidd. I had expected to find the whole thing weird, and to see them out of place or in a mess as everyone tried to adapt. But, even as a newborn, Kidd fitted right in. He was constantly in the arms of either his parents or siblings, and Janine, now stepmother of four on top of mother of one, was as in control of herself and every possible situation as she was at work.

On the other parts of the family, Hunter was doing pretty well as linebacker to the 49ers, Asher was still a pretty somewhat famous internet celebrity, Poppy had finally managed to convince her dad to let her have a youtube account and Aiden was just enjoying school and learning to skateboard with his brother. They all were all over Kidd.

After the nominations came out, Rich and Janine had been quick to remind me this was the second stepping-stone on the way to my EGOT. I was quick to remind them these things took time and most shows didn’t win until many nominations later.

However, the nomination itself was so exciting I even managed to ignore how I was announced by a particular tabloid: ‘Prince Harry’s Girlfriend Nominated For an Emmy!’ . It was an exception, thankfully. One that I dignified with a sass-filled reply on twitter and moved on from.

That was, of course, crazy September number three: Harry and I were officially publicly back together.
On one part, there was my management: Richard and Janine were appalled that I wanted to ‘go there’ again, but they shut up after I told them I’d be careful not to hurt myself. Their kids were pretty excited, and quickly went back to calling me ‘Princess Jen’.

On the other hand, there was my actual, biological family, which was crazy on a different level. Livia was happy for me, Lucas was just casually indifferent this time around. My father had many questions. One of them was if I was sure whatever it was the reason we broke up last time wasn’t still an issue. The other was if Harry was ‘treating me right’. To both questions, the answers were yes. He moved on after this, which was refreshingly new considering I had expected a whole talk.

But then there was my mother, who made sure to get away from dad before starting an entire conversation on birth control and ‘sanctity’, which included the fact I could still ‘go back to Jesus and he would forgive me’ even though I had ‘given away my purity’. Then there was the part of the conversation that was about how if Harry couldn’t respect my principles, than he was probably not the one, to which I was just forced to say Harry was very respectful of my principles, they just didn’t include saving myself for marriage.

You can imagine the conversation went on for a while after that…

Dealing with the Harry-related tabloid bullshit again after so long was easier this time around. I was more prepared, more confident. Back then, I saw any mention of us as a victory – a justification for our crazy plan. Now, each ridiculous headline only meant people were paying attention to something that for the past year had been ours and ours alone. Our relationship wasn’t ours anymore, it belonged to the world now. But I was more confident to handle myself.

Everyone now felt they regained the right to have an opinion, to tweet me those opinions, to tweet me Photoshopped pictures of me and Tyler kissing – scenes from The Mediator and from Heathers and even Legally Blonde.

For a few days after the polo match we attended – when the world found out about us again – the fans had the hashtag #JENLERFOREVER trending worldwide on twitter. My mentions on the website were forbidden territory again, as it was the virtual site of a civil war between my fans.

Part of them were twitting us – both me and Tyler and even Harry - offenses and rage over us not being together. They even twitted the Kensington Palace account a number of childish insults to Harry for ‘stealing me away’ and ‘getting in the way of true love’.

The other part of the fandom tried to defend us, protecting our right to do whatever we wanted with our lives, and insulting the first fans for even believing that we were together in the first place when we always stated we weren’t.

On top of that, there was the media. The women’s magazines published articles about how bad it can be to go back to an ex after so long, others wrote about how couples sometimes need time apart to find each other again. Us Weekly had a piece about how we only broke up so I could enjoy my award season from 2014 without bringing Harry bad press, but were getting back together now that my career was ‘established enough’.

Others pointed out that we broke up before I won the Oscar – and everything else in early 2014 – because Harry couldn’t help but feel left out of my life, even suggesting (and by suggesting I mean stating very clearly) he had jealousy of my success. TMZ quoted ‘palace sources’ that affirmed Harry had to break up with me before because I was getting too famous, and that we got back together now because I was becoming ‘irrelevant again’.

Ugh!
Harry called me every day to ask if I was okay. It wasn’t like the everyday calls from before, when we just chatted and caught up – we still did that, but now the conversation always started with his concerned ‘are you okay?’. It was a kind of anxiety-driven question that served a simple purpose, which he would never willingly tell me about: to make sure I wasn’t about to break up with him. Every new day, every new headline, he called to make sure I knew it was a lie, that I knew he loved me.

“I know.” That was the first time I gave a real answer to those words.

The fourth crazy part about September was that some magazine had a poll to elect the best ‘facial hair’ of the world and, would you believe it: Harry won, because of course he did. My boyfriend officially had the best beard in the world – something I already knew, of course.

Twitter was quick to agree, as it did not only when the poll results came out, but whenever Harry was seen in public.

When I walked from my car to a restaurant for a meeting one day, I had paparazzi asking me about it.

“Jenifer, do you agree with that poll that said Prince Harry has the best beard in the world?!” a guy asked, shoving a camera on my face as he filmed me. “Jenifer, do you like guys with beards or do you have your boyfriends shave for you?!”

As much as I wanted to make my many thoughts on the topic known, I just smiled and walked in silence, as Harry had asked. Everything was too new to go about talking about it and making the fans and media more excited than we’d like. So I just showed my pride in my smile, and waited to enjoy the world’s best beard in person.

It was a couple of weeks later that I was at the Coburg Bar, using all of my strength not to jump on him in public.

“It’s your birthday gift.” I told him, after asking if he liked my coat.

“The coat is my gift?” he smiled, looking down through my body again, “That’s not really my color.”

“Why don’t you search the pockets?”

“Ok…” he smiled, putting his hand on my right pocket and finding a card. “A key.”

“We have a honeymoon suite reserved for the next three days,” I told him.

“…you really don’t like my apartment, do you?”

I laughed. “There’s more.”

Dipping his hand into my other pocket, he didn’t even take its content off.

“What’s this?”

“What’s it feel like?”

“…lace.”

“Ops.” I opened my mouth, faking shock. “It might be the underwear I was supposed to be wearing tonight.”
He looked at me, before getting a hold of my waist with his hands to bring me closer, between his legs.

“You see, the coat is the wrapping paper, Mr. Prince. I’m your gift.”

He smiled. I leaned in, on my tip toes, to whisper in his ear.

“I’m wearing nothing but the wrapping paper.”

“What?”

I took a sit in the stool now, very carefully and slowly crossing my legs. The coat’s fend opened slightly as I did and Harry could partially see my thighs now.

The bartender put my drink before me and Harry leaned in. He let himself get as close as inches from my face, his breath sending chills down my spine, but then he looked down. He held the lapel of my coat and pulled it forward just slightly to take a peak underneath. Realizing I was naked, he closed the coat again, quickly, and took in a sharp breath looking at me. I saw the color making his cheeks redder and a mischievous grin on his lips as I grabbed my drink and took a sip, feeling the alcohol fill my mind and throat.

Harry held my look when he held his own cup and down the last of his whiskey in one gulp. He stepped down from his stool and leaned in closer to me – I felt his hand rest on my knee and make its slow way up my inner thigh.

“Let’s get out of here.” He said.

“Woah, hold there, cowboy.” I teased, slapping his hand down. “Buy me dinner first.”

He whispered in my ear, his beard touching all the right parts of my neck. “Are you serious?”

“Yes.” I smiled, gently pushing him away so I could step down from my own stool.

I walked us over to an empty, round, metal table with three little candles inside mason jars. Two comfy chairs by its sides, that looked more like thrones, one red and one black. I sat on the black one, in front of Harry, and crossed my legs carefully again.

He brought his chair closer to mine before sitting.

“I haven’t seen you in a month,” he started, whipsery, looking more to my legs than my eyes, “let’s just get out of here.”

I smiled, and the sommelier came to greet us.

“Good evening, sir.” I smiled.

Harry still hadn’t taken his eyes from me when he was handed the wine list.

“You know what?” He asked the sommelier. “She’s choosing.”

The man smiled at me, taking a step before handing me the list. It was an old and sexist tradition that the man usually chose the wine at a restaurant.

As I looked at the list, I remembered my last first date, with Todd in New York, as Harry waited at home. I remembered how he had ordered the wine for me and smiled. I sat straight, and raised my feet to caress Harry’s inner leg as I thought. I didn’t raise my eyes from the menu, but I knew him,
and I knew he was looking at the sommelier, uncomfortable, to make sure he wasn’t paying us much attention.

“Well, is hot, so I was thinking something light. Aren’t you hot, love?” I looked at Harry, my foot reaching higher under the table, on his thigh. He took in a deep breath, smiling. “So the Aligoté will do well.”

“Great choice, madam.” The sommelier smiled, before taking the menu and leaving quietly.

Harry’s hand held my foot, stopping it from climbing any higher.

“Let’s just go.” He asked, smiling, tracing my calf lightly with two fingers. “Come on.”

He leaned forward, supporting an arm in his thigh, so his fingers could reach the crook of my knee.

I pulled my leg down, biting a lip, feeling the tingling increase between my legs.

“You see, there’s things we need to discuss.” I told him.

“Such as?” he smiled, still staring from his position, supporting himself on his thighs.

“Well, I’m your birthday gift. But I need to know what you’re going to do with it.” He grinned again. “Or else, how do I know you deserve it?”

He raised a hand and touched my knee gently; tracing patterns absentmindedly up as he looked at me.

“I’m gonna do so many things with it.”

I smiled, and leaned forward too, leaving our faces inches apart. “Promises, promises…” I teased.

He came closer, and his stubble rubbed against my skin gently as he came to whisper on my ear.

“I’m gonna start by throwing that coat away… and then I’m gonna touch every inch of you with my tongue, from your neck to your thighs, to your cunt, while my hands work on your nipples…” he stopped talking to nib at my earlobe, “…I’m gonna make you dripping wet before I-“

I saw the sommelier come back, so I pulled away suddenly, cleaning my throat loudly in a cough so Harry would stop talking.

He leaned back in his chair as the man opened the wine ceremoniously, his face a mystery only I knew how to solve. I could tell I was the one blushing this time, and even though I was wearing very little, I had started to feel so hot I wanted to take off even the coat.

“Madam?”

I held the cut-crystal glass he handed me and twisted the wine inside, I tasted the Bourgogne Aligoté from 1997 after smelling to make sure it had decanted long enough and the taste exploded in my mouth.

However, now there were other things I wanted to do with my mouth. So spending the next half an hour eating with Harry’s words swirling around in my head was no longer an option.

“We’ll take the bottle to go.” I told the man, who assented, smiling, before closing the bottle again and leaving it for us on the table.
Harry handed him our room key, and he walked over to the bar to credit our purchase to it. We stayed there, sitting back, staring silently into each other’s eyes with playful grins in our lips until he came back. I held our room key, and smiled a goodbye before walking out of the bar. Harry followed with our wine.

In the atrium of the Connaught, we turned left to the staircase that lead to the elevators. It was a marble, magnificent staircase, but we took the escalator by the side.

I turned to Harry, who was quick to climb into the same step as me, leaving no distance between us.

His arm wrapped around my waist and he kissed my lips with his, ardently. I widened my feet apart, feeling the breeze between my legs, trying to keep myself standing despite how much weaker my muscles had suddenly grown.

Harry brought his hands from my back to the buckle of the coat’s belt, and started to unhook it.

I cleaned my throat, leaning back from the kiss, making him look at me. “We’re still in public, Mr. Prince.”

He had a mischievous grin on his lips. “Just looking to save time.”

I smiled, holding the coat closed with a hand after I felt the belt drop open. Harry made to kiss my neck, but the escalator was over, so we just turned to the front to leave.

But then, just at the exit of the escalator, something pulled me back. I looked, but there was nothing. Harry didn’t have the same issue, as he saw that I was looking for something, so he stepped out of the way, so I could look at the steps. That’s when it hit me.

My belt was stuck between the steps of the escalator. In an interval of two seconds, I saw the buckle being crushed by two steps. Then, there was a loud noise when I barely realized that my coat would be pulled down entirely, and then the escalator stopped moving.

“What just happened?” Harry asked.

“I think I broke the escalator.” I said, a little relieved that at least my coat wasn’t about to be pulled down.

Harry’s face was frozen in place as he looked helpless.

I held a grip of my belt and tried to pull it out.

“Harry?” I asked, “I’m stuck.”

“What?”

“I’m stuck, my coat is stuck!”

“Well…” He started, sounding a little too calm for my taste. “Wait.” I saw the realization down on him as he remembered what I was wearing underneath. Or, better yet, what I wasn’t. “Oh, no.”

“Yes!” I whispered, desperately, as a couple of women finished climbing the escalator by foot.

I smiled politely to the ground while they passed us by, on their way to the elevators.

“Are you okay, dear?” One of them asked.
“Oh, I’m fine, just an incident.” I said, still staring at the ground hoping they didn’t recognize me.

“Why don’t you pull that belt off?” her friend asked me.

“It’s attached to the coat…” I told her.

“Do you want us to call someo-?”

“No! No, I’m fine. Thank you.”

They exchanged a look before going on their way.

“What’s going on?” Nathan asked, as he and Eddy reached us. Clark was probably covering the entrance of the hotel.

“I’m stuck!” I complained.

On that unfortunate turn of events, there were a few things I was glad about: One, I was glad the escalator was small, so people just willfully stopped climbing it when they realized it was broken, opting for the stairs instead. Two, it was a Thursday on the middle of September, so there wasn’t a lot of people on the hotel. And three, Harry had finally caught up on the urgency of the situation, settled the wine on the floor, and kneeled at the first step of the escalator to try and pull my belt free.

“Well, should we call management?” Eddy asked.

“No!” I said. “If you do, there’ll be one person here, who’s gonna have to call someone else, until finally there’s a handful of people, some of whom may talk to the press and we can’t have this get out!”

“It was just an accident…” Nate argued.

“With Prince Harry and Jenifer Silva,” I replied, “It’ll be a big deal.”

“Okay, second idea.” Nate said. “Take off the coat.”

Harry looked up. I exchanged an embarrassing look with Eddy.

“Not an option.” I said.

Harry groaned as he pulled the coat harder.

“Why not?” Nate asked. “We’ll stay here until management can get it out to bring it back to you.”

Eddy cleaned his throat before approaching Nathan to whisper something in his ear. I closed my eyes when Nathan’s face reached a serious level of understanding.

“Okay.” He said. “Plan B. Let’s cut it out.”

“Yes!” Harry said, standing back up. “We need scissors!”

“Wait-“

“I have a pocket knife in the car, it’s parked outside.” Nate went on.

“Wait, what?!?”
“It’s just the belt.” Harry argued. “We cut off the belt, and you walk away.”

“Excuse me, sir!” I said, outraged, holding the coat tighter. “This is Armani!”

I heard the three of them sigh at the same time.

“Jen,” Harry started, “Jenny. I want you to ask yourself this: does it really matter? In the big scheme of things, with everything that hangs in the balance here, does the coat - this gorgeous, wonderful, Armani coat - really matter?”

I sighed, realizing if this got out – not only just the problem with the coat, but the reason why I couldn’t just take it out and walk away – if people got a hold of this, I would be ruined.

“Fine.” I said, teeth clenched.

“I’ll go get it.” Nathan said, walking out.

A new wave of people showed up by the reception.

“Oh, no.” I complained, in a whisper.

Harry stood up and held my arms so I’d look at him.

“Hey, it’s okay.” He said. “We’ll cut you out in no time.”

“I had everything planned so perfectly…” I mumbled. “Now the mood is ruined.”

He smiled. “Jen, I promise you. Nothing is ruined.”

“My career is over if the tabloids find out about this.”

“That’s a bit overdramatic.”

“Oh, yeah?!” I raised an eyebrow challengingly. “What do you think The Sun will have to say about Prince Harry’s girlfriend found naked in public?!”

“You’re not naked!” he argued.

“Prince Harry and Jenifer Silva found half-naked in erotic adventure in Hotel…” I said, almost seeing the headlines in my head. Harry sighed.

“I’m gonna go… wait over there.” Eddy said, taking a couple of steps away.

“We’re gonna be fine.” Harry told me, reassuringly.

“Code red! Code red!” Eddy mumbled, walking back to us.

I looked down at the atrium, and a new person was approaching the reception.

“Sweet Jesus…” I let out, defeated, seeing my career end take shape before my eyes.

“What?” Harry asked.

“The woman by the reception, the blue shirt…” Eddy started, “it’s a reporter.”

I turned again, giving the reception my back and staring into the wall, still holding the coat closed with both hands.
“She interviewed me today at lunch about the Emmys.” I said.

“That’s what you were doing earlier today?” Harry asked, and I gave him a look. “Never mind.”

He turned too, to stand by my side. Eddy handed him a baseball cap that was folded on his pocket and he put it on immediately, trying to hide his hair away.

I realized, in that moment, my life was over. There was no way I would get out of that one.

“My life is over.” I mumbled. “I’m gonna die.”

I could almost hear Harry’s eyes rolling. He kneeled down again, and started to pull the belt strongly.

I took a deep breath, watching the muscles in his arms flex and the veins in his neck pop as he pulled. That wasn’t supposed to be the reason why that happened. I was supposed to be making his muscles flex and his veins pop for better things, in the bedroom, as we made up for lost time.

The hurtful part was: despite the confusion, I was still turned on. Part of me was almost throwing this coat on the floor and running to the elevator before anyone could see us, just so I could be intertwined to him as fast as possible.

Hell, part of me was ready to do him right there.

I covered my face with a hand, sighing, then I heard it.

“Hey, Jen!”

I took some comfort on the fact it wasn’t a women’s voice, so it couldn’t possibly be the reporter and, when I turned around, I saw Kit Harington’s long messy head of hair climbing the stairs with Beezus by his side.

What was up with that girl that we kept meeting at the weirdest situations?! I tried to smile, hoping my face wasn’t as pale as it felt, as they approached.

“How you guys doing?” Kit asked, reaching the final steps and walking over to us.

“We’re fine!” Harry said, standing up, trying to appear as casual as possible.

I looked back at the reception, the reporter had left, but still no sign of Nate. Who else was I gonna run into in this unfortunate night? An ex-boyfriend? My parents?

“Is your belt caught?” Beezus asked.

“Ah…” I looked down, “…yeah.”

“Well, take your coat off.” Said Kit, pointedly.

Harry, who had been tugging at my belt a little too frantically, stopped and looked at him. Then at me.

I hoped there was an answer I could give them in a casual enough way that would make them leave already, but even I wasn’t that good of an actress.

“…I can’t.”
“Why? You naked under there?” Kit joked.

There was a moment as he and Bee giggled, before they saw our serious, desperate expressions. Harry bent down again and started to pull the belt out more desperately.

“Oh!” Kit said, realizing the truth in his own words.

Then he burst out a snorted laughter that he quickly tried to pretend was a cough. Bee slapped him.

“Oh, God.” I covered my face with my free hand, the other still the only thing holding the coat together.

“I know what to do!” Beezus said, sounding a little surprised.

I don’t think she was very used to saying those words.

“Hold this.” She thrust her handbag in Kit’s chest, which he held, before she approached us. “Harry, uhm, Your Royal Highness,” she started, a little awkwardly. “You need to move.”

Harry looked up at me, his face almost redder than his hair, before standing up.

“Nate should be here soon.” He whispered, before walking over to where Kit was after grabbing our bottle of wine from the floor.

“Jen,” she said calmly, taking her own coat off, “follow my lead.”

She wrapped her coat around my shoulders – a black one, even bigger than mine - and pulled the sides forward by the lapel, stepping closer to me so that we were both hidden away inside it.

“Oh, okay.” I said, realizing what we were doing.

With the wall behind her, and our sides covered by her coat and herself, I was fully hidden away, so I just opened my coat and took my arms out.

“Hey-“ I heard Nathan as he got back from the car, probably with the pocket knife.

“Sshh!” Harry said, and I realized both he and Kit were looking at us a little too attentively.

Feeling a thrill knowing just steps away there were so many people, and I was just standing there naked, I got each arm out and put it in her coat’s sleeve, starting to feel my coat fall to my feet.

I stretched my arm inside the sleeve so the coat would fit right, smiling at Beezus’ looking away from my naked body like the polite bubble of adorableness she was, and she hugged me, patting my back, so no one watching would suspect anything.

I closed her coat in front of me and she stepped out, giving me room to walk away leaving my coat – my beautiful Armani red coat - fall in the escalator behind me.

We stepped out, just as Kit had raised his hand to Harry in a fist bump, that he gave without looking. They had their mouths opened and I would have rolled my eyes if I wasn’t feeling so relieved.

“I’m free!” I squealed, running into Harry’s arms, that he wrapped around me.

“Told you it would be okay.” He said, cockily.
I turned to Beezus, and walked to her, hugging her tightly and closing my eyes.

“You saved my life!” I let out, dramatically, but honestly.

She giggled, patting my back a bit awkwardly. I had to remind myself again foreigners weren’t usually huggers, but at that moment I didn’t care much.

“Well, maybe just your career from mild embarrassment.” She joked.

I let her go, holding her shoulders so she would see the truth in my eyes.

“You saved my life, Beatrice.” I told her. “I owe you!”

“…okay.” She smiled. “It’s not a big deal, I’ve done it before.”

“You what?!” Kit asked, confused.

I walked back to stand by Harry’s side, who passed an arm around my shoulders.

“I will, uhm… Give this back to you when I see you next.” I told her, gesturing to her coat, as I closed the buttons.

Buttons! So much better than belts!

“Not a problem.” She smiled. “I just hope next time you see me isn’t another one of these accidental, anxiety-driven moments.”

“Yeah!” I agreed. “We keep meeting like this, it's too weird!”

“We should schedule something, then.” Harry offered.

“Double date!” Kit agreed.

“Fun!” I smiled. “We’re, uh… kind of busy these days, but I’ll be back in the country next month, I’ll text you guys!”

They nodded, smiley, and then we kind of just stared at each awkwardly for a moment. I don’t know what the others were doing, but I was just relieving what had almost been and it didn’t feel great.

“Alrighty, well…” I started, “We’ll see you!”

Before they could say anything else, I grabbed Harry by the hand and walked us out into one of the elevators that was almost closing before we got there.

Harry pressed the button to our floor, and we leaned our backs against the wall, taking a deep breath.

Then, we started laughing. It started as a mild snorted giggle, and ended as a loud, breathless laughter as we remembered how terrifying that was. It hadn’t even been five minutes, but if had felt like hours.

“I thought I was gonna die!” I said, turning to look at him, whose face was red with laughter.

We sighed, calming down, and he took an impulse and came to stand in front of me, pressing his body on mine against the wall.
He rested his forehead on mine, gripping my hips.

“I’m sorry I ruined our night.” I said.

“First of all, it wasn’t even your fault.” He sighed. “Second, there’s nothing ruined.”

“The mood is ruined.” I complained.

Harry lazily raised a hand from my hip to my ribs, and touched the first button on Bee’s coat.

“I don’t know…” he said. “I don’t think there’s anything ruined.”

He opened the button, and slid his hand in. His skin on mine sent chills over my body as his fingers traced me down my belly button.

His lips followed my jaw line to my ear, his beard frisking on my skin, making every sensation greater. He nibbled on my earlobe, then kissed my neck. I felt my breath grow rarer as my legs grew number.

His lips found my ear again, just as his fingers had found my big lips, in the secrecy of the coat, making me tilt my head back.

“I still wanna touch every inch of you with my tongue.” He whispered, just as we heard the ‘bing!’ when we reached our floor.

I pushed him out suddenly, passing a hand through my hair to make sure all was in order. We stepped out into hallway and he opened the door in a hurry with our room key.

I slapped his hands away from my body, walking through the lounge area into our room.

I walked a few steps ahead, before looking back at him, taking the coat off very slowly. I had let a bow on the table by the bedroom door, which I now picked.

I attached it to my skin, about a palm under my belly button, before turning to him, who was looking at me a little eagerly, and who couldn’t help the smile that grew on his lips.

I smiled. “Happy birthday, Mr. Prince.”
Chapter Summary

Jen is nominated for an Emmy and gets sassy on the red carpet. Her friend has issues with a guy and that gives her an idea. Harry says the "F" word (forever!).

Chapter Notes

Thank you for reading and for being wonderful! Also I’d love to hear from you, so send comment anytime! Thank you so much!
Next chapter: Harry and Jen go on a double date and things don’t go as planned…

“So… tell me about your boyfriend!”

In other circumstances, the question would have freaked me out. In a red carpet, for example, as it did happen a couple of weeks later. But on that particular day, a sunny September day in Los Angeles, it wasn’t a reporter trying to pry into my personal life to get more clicks into her tabloid article about me. It was Ophelia – the redhead I’d known for five years and loved like a sister.

“So… tell me about your boyfriend!”

“Do you want all the details or the short version?”

“Do the details include a lot of sex?” she asked, with a cheeky grin.

“If I say yes, will you choose the short version?”

“No, if you say yes I’ll want to know!” she smiled, before taking a sip of her drink.

The drink was a courtesy I provided her eighteen-year-old self for two reasons: one, as someone who grew up in the limelight and used to underage drink, I thought it was smarter to allow her to drink in a controlled environment. And maybe teach her myself about never driving under the influence – a lesson I could have used at her age, before it was too late. And two, Ophelia was from Australia, not the U.S. and in Australia, like in Brazil, the legal drinking age was eighteen, not twenty-one, so technically she was allowed to drink. Just not in that particular geographic part of the globe (but… details).

“Then no.” I told her.

“Boring.” She dismissed. “It’s you and Prince Harry, can you blame me for wanting to know? Anyhow, give me the short version.”

I smiled. “I didn’t see him for almost a year after we broke up… then I ran into him at the World Cup and we tried to go back at being friends, until he told me he had feelings for me when I went to see him on his birthday last year.”

“Last year?!” She looked at me, her mouth dropped open. “How did you manage to keep it secret for so long?!”
“We were just having fun at first, we even tried seeing other people, but then…” I sighed. “Then we didn’t want to see other people. Then we wanted to make it serious. Next thing I know he’s saying he loves me and it doesn’t feel scary…” I smiled into the horizon, at the view from downtown Los Angeles far ahead from my pool. “It just feels… warm.”

Ophelia turned to lay on her side to look at me. “Warm?”

“Yeah…” I smiled. “Like a hug. It’s like a hug in word form.” I laughed at her silence.

“Is he the one, though?” She asked. “I know you’ve always talked about getting married and having five kids in a house with a backyard… so, is it serious?”

I allowed myself a nervous smile. “God, I don’t know. It’s so complicated… I try not to think too much about it.” I sighed, shrugging. “All I really know is that it feels better when I kiss him.”

“What does?”

I smiled. “…Everything.” She raised an eyebrow looking at me, and I laughed again. “I make no sense, do I?”

“No, no…” she shook her head, taking in a deep breath. “You make more sense than you know.”

I saw the way her smile weakened, until there was only an air of joy about the way she laid on her back again, staring at the blue sky through her cat-eye sunglasses.

“What about you?” I asked, “Any progress on the Chris-front?”

About a year before, while shooting a movie, Ophelia was working with Chris Pine, right after he had shot a movie with me and while they worked, Chris had made it very clear to O that he was interested in her… after she turned eighteen. She was still seventeen then, Chris was thirty-six.

“No,” she dismissed, “nothing like that…”

I waited. “Okay…”

The sun burned our skin in a good way, though both O and I would be the first to say a sunny day in our home countries was a lot hotter. We laid by the infinity pool in my deck, overlooking downtown Los Angeles, O in her Zimmermann dark blue, two-piece floral swimsuit and me in my black and red Dolce and Gabbana one.

“I feel like sushi for lunch. Do you feel like sushi for lunch?”

“I had sex with Oscar!” Ophelia blurted out, following by biting her lip and avoiding my look.

“Oh…” I started, with caution.

If I was being honest, I wasn’t that surprised. I thought it was weird when a couple of months ago she was seen hanging out with Oscar Isaac – another of her co-stars - at San Diego Comic Con despite having spent most of the time she worked with him in a movie last year complaining of his dick behavior. ‘He explained it and apologized!’ she had told me when I questioned it then. ‘He’s actually very nice’. Very nice apparently, if sex was now involved.

But that was not even my biggest concern.

“Isn’t he in his thirties?”
“…he’s thirty-four.” She told me.

‘Eighteen!’, my mind screamed. ‘Ophelia is eighteen!’

“Which is why I thought he only wanted sex…” she went on. “Which is fine, since that’s what I wanted too. So I told him we were cool and left.”

She was already dealing with the situation in a more mature way than I had when I was her age.

“But apparently, he wants to be with me.”

The smile on her lips didn’t escape my notice. “How do you know?” I asked.

“He told me.” She sat now, turning to look at me. “He said he wants us to be together… So he’s been trying to prove it. He calls and tells me something he knows about me. Everyday. Sending me flowers, and recordings of him singing his song to me.”

“That one on the radio?” I asked. Oscar Isaac was yet another actor turned musician and, though I wouldn’t admit it, he was quite good.

“Yes!” she smiled. “Never Had! It’s about me, J. He wrote that song about me!” It was a wildly known fact to anyone that knew her that Ophelia had a thing for brightly colored shoes, a characteristic that was mentioned on the song. “I was wearing yellow shoes when we met!”

I tried to think about it very carefully. On one hand, Ophelia was over eighteen and somewhat knew what she was doing. On the other, Oscar was thirty-four.

“Do you regret it?” I asked.

“What?”

“The sex, O. Did you like it?”

She giggled, color filling her cheeks, matching her red hair. “Yes.”

“Okay.”

I tried to think of a way to know if she was being played. To assert if she was being used or manipulated without ruining her joy over the whole thing.

“I never felt that before, Jenny.” She mumbled, fiddling with the little shoe pendant around her wrist in a bracelet. “I’ve grown to anticipate every new day just to see what he’ll do, you know? Just to see what he’ll say. Just to remind myself that he wants to be with me.”

I remembered how Harry had spent every day of a week asking me to go out with him, and how everyday felt like an adventure as I tried to know what he’d pull out next. I remembered how he instantly stopped when I asked – even accidentally.

“Did you ask him to stop?” I asked her.

“What do you mean?”

“Well, you have a crush on him, okay. But if you asked him to stop and he didn’t, that’s not romantic, it’s just disturbing. It’s just disrespectful of your wishes… so, did you? Did you ask him to stop?”
Ophelia pulled her sunglasses to stand on top of her head, and stared into the ground attentively. After a long pause, she finally spoke.

“…no. I didn’t ask him to stop.”

“Would you like him to stop?”

“No.” She looked at me, a tiny smile crippling its way into her lips. “I don’t remember ever feeling this… excited about anything before.”

I sat, turning to Ophelia, taking off my own sunglasses.

“O…I need you to know this, and I need you to believe me.” I stared into her eyes. “You are the most amazing thing to have graced the universe in a million years.”

Ophelia giggled, and rolled her eyes slightly, but I kept on staring at her as serious as I felt.

“I’m serious, Ophelia. I need you to believe me. I need you to take the words that I am giving you and keep them in your heart and tell yourself that every single day. Can you do that for me?”

Her smile shortened until she was finally serious.

“Why?”

I took in a deep breath. “Because when I fell in love with David, that was my mistake. I fell in love with how he made me feel so… unique and special. Like it was the first time I felt that…”

I gave a sad smile, realizing how terrible of a decision that had been. And I couldn’t even tell her about Adam because, well, no one knew about that.

“But back then, I only felt special because of him, so I grew dependent of him to feel good about myself, which gave him a sort of… power over me. As someone older and more experienced, he didn’t feel things as I did. He was more collected, rational. So he managed to keep a cool head and make the calls as I just followed him, you know? I didn’t know this at the time, of course, but it helped him convince me to do things I wouldn’t normally do. I’d dress the way he wanted, talk when or how he wanted, do what he wanted. Never violent, just kind and gently manipulative.”

I shook my head, deciding that was the kind of information she really needed.

“All because I kept thinking that he could never hurt me since he made me feel so amazing. And if he did, it’s because he thought that I was, so how could he hurt me? It’s important that you remember that you are amazing in yourself. Without him. A girl shouldn’t need a guy to feel like she’s the most amazing thing in the world.”

O nodded, thoughtfully.

“That’s the danger in age gaps, you know? You’re at an age where you’re still discovering who you are… and it’s really easy for people to influence you if they want to.”

“He’s not like that, though…” she said.

“Maybe not…” I nodded. “But nice guys can change before you even notice… So do yourself a favor and pay attention to these things. And tell yourself every day that you are amazing, with or without him, so if you do get together you can still be your own person, make your own decisions, have control over yourself and over your life…”
I sighed, caressing Vodka with a hand when she came sniffing my feet. “I don’t want you to end up accepting to be with him just because he makes you feel good about yourself. If you love yourself, you’ll want to be with him because you have feelings for him. Not because he makes you feel good. This way you’ll see it when he does something wrong instead of excusing him and letting him off the hook too easily.” I shrugged. “I just don’t want you to make my mistakes.”

I laid back again, bringing my sunglasses back down and trying to breath in and out slowly.

I remembered the meeting I had with Richard and Janine just a couple of days before, when the subject of the book a publishing company wanted to pay me to write came back into play.

“I told you I had to think about it!” I reminded them.

“You said that a year ago!” Rich said.

“They really want to release a book with the story of your Oscar speech,” Janine said, in the midst of breastfeeding Kidd, “So it needs to be while it’s still fresh on people’s heads!”

“And they just made another offer, too!” Rich added.

“It’s not about the money…” I told them.

“For you, maybe.” He smiled. “Come on, J. What’s wrong? Why don’t you want to do this?”

I did manage to write a few pages over the last year, to see if I could before signing the book deal, but then I had stopped. I had stopped at realizing I couldn’t just tell parts of my story, so I’d have to tell all of it. And even if I changed people’s names, and even if I tried to make it sound less terrible than it had been, I’d still write the facts. I’d still write about the sex, the alcohol, the drugs. About Adam, about Hollywood, about David, about the DUIs. And the thought of having people know these things, of having to tell my parents about these things… I wasn’t sure I wanted that.

But then Ophelia sighed. In her dark blue bikini, on a sunny day, she bit her lip before telling me:

“I do have feelings for him.”

I sighed, thinking if only she knew… if there was a way I could tell her everything I had been through, to warn her, to let her know how important it was to be careful. If only my past was public knowledge instead of a secret… maybe then I could help her better.

“And, for whatever is worth, Jenny…” she went on, bringing her sunglasses down and laying on her back. “I think you’re pretty amazing.”

I smiled, watching the confident way she crossed her arms behind her head, as a pillow, and stared into the sun with the bravery of someone who knew what she was doing. I knew her confidence and bravery wouldn’t matter much if that Oscar guy was simply a dick who was fooling her, and I wished, more than I had ever wished for anything else in my life, that I could do more to help.

---

“So… tell me about your boyfriend!”

Now, in a red carpet with a woman in too much makeup and a sheer pink dress pointing a
microphone at me as a camera captured all of my reactions, the question didn’t feel so innocent. So I did what any celebrity does best, I stalled.

“Well, I’m just really happy to be here tonight. Tonight is about the stories we get to tell and, and, uhm… and really recognizing people’s talent and hard work!”

I spoke loudly, pretending I could barely hear her through the noise around us, and gave an answer as generic and bland as I could muster.

“You’re right, and you’re nominated for If Tomorrow Comes tonight, record breaking streaming numbers on Netflix! You must be proud!”

I smiled. “I’m so proud! I’m so happy! It’s a really fantastic story that was very difficult to shoot for a number of reasons, but mostly, uhm…”

“And you’ve had such a good month, too! The UN chose you as their Goodwill Ambassador, and Prince Harry was chosen this month as the best facial hair!” she interrupted, her fake smile never flickering as she looked at me. “Big month for both of you! Do you like men with beards? Or do you prefer a clean face?!”

I stared at her in silence, slowly blinking my eyes, my polite grin never flickering either, trying to honestly decide if that was a real question she was actually asking.

“Do you tease him about it? Or did you feel maybe a little bit proud?” She went on after I didn’t say anything.

I sighed, slowly, squinting my eyes at her. “Is that really your question?” I asked, finally, trying to sound as polite as I could. “As a woman do you really feel that’s the type of question you should ask another woman at a professional, work event? How I feel about men?”

Her smile disappeared now, and she stuttered, looking at the notes she had, giving the camera an awkward look. “Oh, uhm… well…”

“I’m nominated for an Emmy award for a good show that was really hard to make and that touches a number of problematic issues, from unlawful imprisonment to rape and the reinsertion of ex-cons as contributing members of society, and you wanna ask me about men?”

I saw Monica sigh heavily about a foot from me. As Kidd was still only a few weeks old, Janine was not currently working, so Monica had asked to sub in for her, as PR training. I could tell I was not making her life easier.

“I know you probably haven’t watched If Tomorrow Comes, if red carpet reporters were to watch every show they had to talk to celebrities about, when would they have time to go to the gym and dye their hair? Still, a professional would have at least googled it to come up with a good question. Hell, if she asked for twitter suggestions, I’m sure the fans would have given her good ideas.

I waited a little, but as she only stuttered on her own words, I finally gave her another smile.

“Well, it was nice to meet you. Have a good night.” And walked out.

Monica sighed.
“I know, I know…” I told her. “Be less aggressive.”

“No,” she said, “that will probably get you some good press…”

I smiled, realizing she would be better at this than I had imagined.

The UN Goodwill Ambassador thing had happened not very long ago, and interestingly enough I had the hate-fueled drama on my social media to thank for it.

I was forced into a social media hiatus after the news broke of Harry and me, trying to avoid the fan-hate and craziness that came with the fandom being so revolted I wasn’t dating Tyler. So I began to focus on the parts of the internet that were safe to me: the parts that didn’t give two shits about celebrities - like the news.

I dove into reading about the political scenario in Brazil, where extremists were asking for the president’s head on a silver plate – not really, but almost, going as far as asking for an impeachment that had not constitutional foundation.

The head of our Congress had been particularly positive to the subject, even though a bunch of million dollars accounts had been found on Switzerland on his name, something the country – people and media - seemed to want to ignore. If that wasn’t enough, he and the Christian side of the politicians had been on a crusade to diminish LGBT and women’s rights, by approving that family be considered as an union between a man and a woman – even though gay marriage was legal – and prohibiting the plan B pill, and approving a law that rape victims had to prove to having been raped to get medical assistance. The protests against the president had taken such a weird turn some people were beginning to ask for the Military Dictatorship to come back – that had been my last straw.

After that happened, I got in touch with some people and wrote an op-ed piece for The Huffington Post on topics ranging from all the gore details of the torture from the dictatorship and why an impeachment was unconstitutional, to why women and LGBT rights had to be respected. I wrote all of this and mentioned even that rights had to be respected against religious principles, considering Brazil was supposed to have separation of Church and state – something my family wasn’t as okay with, by the way.

That’s when I got back into Twitter, to defend myself from the good old folks who thought I should keep my mouth shut and to write even more. There, on Twitter, it’s when I got in touch with a man called Renato Tapajós – he was the writer of my favorite Brazilian book, In Slow Motion, a romance about the dictatorship period and the fight, and we started emailing back and forth about the book, politics and movies. His support only helped me keep going.

So I wrote more. Huffington Post asked me to write another op-ed piece, and I focused on the women’s issues this time. Another bill they were trying to pass would change the legal consent age from an already low 14 to 12 years old. So I wrote about how children are not capable of consent, and how this law would support pedophilia and make it harder for children victims of sexual assault to come forward. I wrote more about the pill they decided to prohibit and the hardening on the help to rape victims, and that was the first time my past mistakes made themselves valuable.

I still remembered feeling too scared to talk to anyone about Adam, and I remembered how long it took me to realize that relationship – and even the one with David – had been unhealthy and abusive. Though I didn’t mention my personal experiences, I wrote from that point of view. The new law would only protect victims of the kind of rape when women had their clothes torn and bruises on their skin, but what about the kind of rape when the assailer is a boyfriend? What about the drunk victims who barely remember the face of the person who hurt them? The drugged
victims? I spoke on the kind of assault that people already have difficulty coming forward with, for knowing they will be doubted, and that would disappear under the new, unjust law.

I wished I could have talked more on the consent part, but how could I when nobody could know about Adam? How could I explain my own experience being manipulated at seventeen if I couldn’t have people knowing about it?

I also started reading on the political scenario in the U.S. (Trump for president? Had the world gone insane?!) and the refugee crisis in Europe. That particularly resonated with me since, as much as people choose to ignore it, I was an immigrant too. The level of unkindness and misinformation from nations that closed their borders on people from Syria, that level of despair from the people that would rather risk their lives than live another day in their own homes, it had me thinking about my early days in California. On how hard it was to fit in, to try and be like everyone while also trying to remain yourself. I had to wonder how could people think anyone would put themselves in that position unless they absolutely had to.

So I did the only thing I could about it: I wrote some more. First on twitter, which made the rounds and got talked about and, after I got a call from an editor who had read it, another op-ed piece, this one for The Sunday Times.

So at some point, Richard told me a UN representative had asked for a meeting. With my experience working with charities – including my own – the meeting didn’t feel so strange. The estrange part came when he offered me a job as a Human Rights Goodwill Ambassador.

“For the UN?!” Harry asked, sounding even more excited than me, when I called to tell him right after the meeting.

“Yes! Can you believe that?! The UN!”

“Jen, that’s amazing!”

“I know, right?! For Human Rights!” I squealed. “They’ll announce it soon and I have to write a speech for the UN General Assembly in November, and after that we’ll be in meetings to define a plan early next year!”

“You’re gonna speak at the General Assembly?!” He asked. “In New York?!”

“Yes! The one all the presidents speak at!”

Harry sighed, happily. “You’re gonna be so amazing at it!”

So if the reporter on the red carpet didn’t watch my television show, the truth is I didn’t expect her to have read my political article on the Brazilian constitution and the necessity of teaching about the historic torture activists had to undergo in the sixties in schools.

After I posed for pictures in front of the wall of photographers in the red carpet, in my red Tony Ward dress with a fend from my mid-thigh and a deep v-cleavage, I walked into the Microsoft Theater, glad about the air conditioning in that uncanny hot day in California. For me, it was an usual Brazilian summer day; for the Americans, it felt like the world was ending.

I was late, so I didn’t have much time to chat with friends as an assistant producer ushered me through the halls to get my seat in first roll. I only half-managed to tell Lady Gaga she looked absolutely stunning before Monica made me keep walking.

“Oh my God, I miss you guys!” I squealed, excitedly, when Dan, my old producer from Game of
Thrones stopped me to say hello.

“Good luck tonight!” They told me.

“You too!” I waved at the cast, sitting around them. “Oh, and happy birthday!” I leaned down to hug George R. R. Martin.

He giggled. “Thanks, dear. I saw you on Broadway in the summer.”

“You did?! When?!”

“Oh, I sneaked in and out. I’ll tell you about it at the after-party. But you were fantastic!”

“Thank you!” I smiled.

Then, looking ahead on his roll, I noticed the long haired head of Kit in a black tux.

“Hi!” I waved, “Where’s-?” I was about to ask for Bee, when I realized the stunning brunette in a light-orange dress by his side. “Oh, my God! You look stunning!”

“Thank you…” Kit said, looking cocky, flicking his hair back.

“Not you!” I laughed, though he did look pretty good.

“We need to schedule our double date!” Bee reminded me.

“We do!” I said, feeling Monica pull me again. “We’ll talk details at the after-party! I’ll see you later!”

I only had time to smile when they shouted a ‘good luck!’ before I left.

Andy Sandberg walked in not long after that, raining on everyone’s parade by stating from the start that Justin Timberlake was not coming.

A few jokes later I was still laughing at his take on Kim Davis when – surprise, surprise - he mentioned me.

“Jenifer Silva is nominated tonight!” he stated, smiley, to the applause of the room, and particularly my costars and producers sitting around me. I saw a camera turn to me, knowing that was my close-up moment. “Yeah… you might remember her as the girl who left TV then won the Oscar and more recently became a UN Goodwill Ambassador.” He paused to allow the crowd’s applause. I smiled, blushing. “What’s the word for that, again? Oh, that’s right, traitor!” he looked at me, dramatically fake-angry, before laughing. “And now’s she’s back and nominated for Outstanding Actress in a Drama?!” He asked, faking outrage, to the sound of more applause. “If Hollywood was a High School, Jenifer would be that exchange student that literally just got here two weeks ago and is already sitting at the popular kids’ table and being voted Prom Queen!”

I laughed, with the audience, before he went on to talk about Mad Men.

The show moved along, starting as it usually did, by the smaller awards. A couple of breaks, a couple of jokes, and then they announced a song.

The side stage was lit suddenly and Oscar Isaac was sitting on a stool with a guitar on his lap, and he started to sing his hit song, Never Had.

I paid attention to the way he behaved, trying to get a feeling of the type of person he was and how
he felt about the song – or maybe the girl who inspired it – but I couldn’t tell much. He seemed pretty passionate about music, and kept looking back as he sang with a smile on his face.

After he was done, as well as the applause, I heard the narrator voice from the microphone announce Ophelia Callis on the stage, and it all made sense now, as I knew why he was looking back as he sang.

In a black Maticevski dress, O made her way to the microphone and announced the category she was presenting: Outstanding Actress in a Drama Series.

I smiled when the camera panned on me, feeling Dafnee, my co-star, give me a smile by my side. I ignored the buzzing of my phone on my clutch, wondering if it were my parents or Harry, or maybe Taylor or Alli, and focused on the redhead on stage, struggling to open the envelope and looking as anxious about the winner as if she was the one nominated.

Then, I saw Ophelia’s entire face be taken over by shock. Her mouth dropped open as her widened eyes found me in first row. I only had one second of hope as I tried to convince myself it couldn’t be, her expression just couldn’t be what I thought it was, when she squealed in the microphone:

“Jenifer Silva!”

I felt my own expression mimic hers as Dafnee hugged me. Robert deNiro made me stand up to hug him and gently pushed me towards the stage, as I was still in shock. I managed to hold back the tears this time, only feeling my hands tremble with excitement.

Then, as I climbed the stairs, I saw Ophelia, holding the Emmy Award – my Emmy Award! – and jumping on her heels in excitement as I came over. Her smiled looked like it would burst out of her face and her eyes shined with happiness. I had a feeling I looked just like that, so I started laughing at her.

She hugged me tight when I got to her, and we jumped excitedly in the hug, squealing non-sense in each other’s ears before she finally let me go so she could hand me the statue.

“You won an Emmy!” she shouted.

“I won an Emmy!” I shouted back, and we laughed.

I was feeling too numb with joy to notice then, but the room was laughing with us as this happened.

Finally, the song dimmed down and I approached the microphone, holding the award tightly so I wouldn’t drop it like I did with my Oscar, begging myself not to say anything meme-worthy this time. Let’s just keep it simple this time. Let’s just keep it normal.

“You have to respect Ophelia’s ability to remain impartial!” I joked, making the room laugh. “Oh, my God! Thank you! Thank you so much! For this, for everything! Thank you Netflix, and Dianne and Martin,” I named my directors and producers, “for the trust, the care, the patience! Thank you Dafnee, and Robert, and all our cast for being such a joy to work with! Thank you mom, and dad, I miss you every day. And uhm,” I laughed, remembering Richard and Janine watching at home, and how they had been so completely against this show when I told them I wanted to do it. “And thanks to my management, for trusting my instincts and letting me come back to the small screen even though they thought I should have stuck to movies…” the audience laughed, and I pointed at my Emmy excited looking at the camera. “Rich, look! I won an Emmy!”

As they laughed, I smiled one more time and left to the sound of the applause. I hugged Ophelia on the way backstage, and we jumped in excitement some more as we walked, as if the victory was
both of ours.

We were jumping and laughing so much, as we walked through the narrow passageway from the stage to the backstage area, where photographers were waiting, Ophelia raised her hand to cover the sight of my boobs through the sheer red fabric of my dress.

“You’re gonna pop a boob!” she joked, “Jump less!”

“I can’t!” I said, jumping again to side-hug her as we walked, the flashes following us. “I’m too excited!”

The photo made its way around the web the following hours, Ophelia looking happily worried as she covered my boobs with a hand and I hugged her with one arm as the other raised my award to the air in victory. Much like the other pictures, from the stage, and the ones we took backstage – the professional ones, to memento the day, with me, my presenter and the award. We had our fun, making shocked faces and ‘awkward prom photo’ faces. Even what we called a ‘squad face’, the type of cocky expression of power we usually did when we were hanging out and taking photos with Taylor and the other girls.

It was nice to think I’d be making headlines for my actual job this time, in opposite to the clickbait articles about me and Harry.

Finally, Ophelia’s handler came to call her for an interview with E!, and Monica took me to the line for the pressroom – where winners answered a number of questions about the recent award.

Another person was there then, so I busied myself with talking to the people around. Amy Poehler high-fived me in her way to the stage. Andy passed by after calling the break and we took a selfie for Instagram – he apologized for calling me a traitor, and I made sure he knew it absolutely fine.

Then I saw Sofia Vergara and Gina Rodriguez talking Spanish not far from me, and I joined them excitedly.

“Chicas, esto es español que escucho?”

“Ei!” they shouted, warmly, when I approached.

“Únase a al club!” Gina invited me into the club after I asked if that was Spanish I could hear.

“Por supuesto, nos Latinas tenemos que estar unidas!” Sofia added, about how Latina women have to be United in Hollywood.

We talked for a couple of minutes, and I posted a picture on Instagram of the three of us (“The Latinas in Hollywood Club”, I captioned it). Then, right as they waved me goodbye going in different directions, I saw Oscar Isaac leaning against a column with a glass of champagne in one hand and the other in his pocket, looking attentively at Ophelia a few feet away as she gave an interview.

“They say it’s just a couple more minutes.” Monica informed me, about the pressroom.

“No rush.” I said, absentmindedly. “Here, can you hold this? I’ll be over there when you’re ready for me.”

I gave her my Emmy, and grabbed my phone, dialing the number as I walked over to an emptier corner. In moments when I couldn’t decide if I was making a good decision or a hurried one, I needed a friend to talk to. And there was one in particular whose opinion I was worried about.
“Well, if it isn’t my girlfriend,” Harry greeted, cheekily, “Emmy winner, Jenifer Silva.”

“Was my speech okay?” I asked, with a smile. “I never remember what I said until I watch the video.”

“It was adorable, I like to see you all happy and freaked-out on my telly.”

I giggled, biting a lip. “I have a question.”

“Ask away.”

I looked around, at the room of people around me, on their power suits and black tie gowns; cameras and drinks, desperate for an entertaining story to sell or be a part of. I watched the picture-perfection of the well-engineered Hollywood machine wondering how many stories like mine and O’s were underneath all of it.

“It’s a weirdly timed question.”

“I’m not doing anything.”

I sighed. “…You remember my file, right?”

Harry paused. “The one Thomas made about you? Before I moved to New York?”

“Yes.”

“What about it?”

I looked down, at how my red, peep-toe La Perla sandal matched my dress, wondering now how could I tell him about it; realizing just now how this could potentially ruin him too.

“They want me to write a book,” I started, “about my life. They wanted the backstory of the Oscar speech, you know? And how I made it. How those two educators I mentioned helped get where I am and how I made it here. Stuff like that.”

“A memoir.” He said. “You told me about it.”

“Yeah, something like that.” I agreed. “I didn’t know how to do it without talking about all the bad parts, you know? How do I explain how Adam diminished me without talking about the affair and his wife… and everything else.”

“Okay…”

“And some stuff happened lately. And I’ve been thinking that maybe I shouldn’t. Maybe I should talk about it. Changing the names and everything else I can, but maybe I should tell the world about what happened. The things I did, the things that were done to me, and how I moved on from them. Maybe people need to know, maybe there are girls out there,” I looked at Ophelia, smiling in front of a camera as she talked about her career, “who need to know how to spot when they’re being played, or used. Maybe if they knew what I wish I’d known when I was their age, maybe they could protect themselves. Maybe they wouldn’t be in harm’s way, maybe I could help…” I sighed. “…you know?”

There was silence. I took the phone from my ear to see if the call had lost the signal, but nothing of the sort. Harry was just thinking about it. I heard his heavy sigh on the other line.

“Say something.” I begged.
“I like it.” He said, finally.

“You do?”

“I think…” he paused. “I think it’s been very… hard for you to have this all as a secret. I think…” He paused again, thinking of it as he went. “I think it would be good for you not to have to worry about someone finding out and ruining you.”

Though I liked his opinion on it – I knew for a fact David would never be okay with me making something known to the world that would be harmful to his image – I needed to know that he had thought this through.

“You know what this means, right?” I asked. “You know this will spill onto you.”

“Yeah.” He agreed. “I don’t think that should be your concern.”

“But it is.” I said. “I don’t want to hurt your image.”

“My image it’s been through a lot, mostly by my own doing. It can take it.”

I smiled. “I’m serious, Harry. It’ll be serious.”

“Jenny, just do what you gotta do.” I smiled, “I’ll be here for you.”

I bit my lip, wanting so bad to just write an entire book about how happy he made me.

“Besides,” he went on, “I don’t want to freak you out… but I want to be with you. And I think having these things out in the open would make that easier.”

“How?”

“Well, you know how that file was everyone’s argument to wanting us to break up.” I agreed, so he went on. “If it’s all out there, people will know about it, and let it go with time, so in the future they won’t ever be able to hold it against us anymore.”

I thought about it for a while. “I’m not sure I understand that logic.”

He chuckled. “Well, you’ll learn after you write it that it’s easier to explain mistakes than to try and keep them hidden.”

“Yeah, it’s what I’m hoping.” I said, “But I still don’t understand how it makes it easier for us in the future. What do you mean?”

“If I explain,” he started, “do you promise not to freak out or read too much into it?”

“What?” I asked. “What does that even-?”

“It doesn’t mean anything, it’s just something far into the future that may or may not happen that would actually be made easier if you do write this book.”

“I don’t…” I sighed. “What are you talking about?”

“I’m talking about forever.” He replied. “If we were to be together, you know… forever, this would be a good first step.”

There was a long pause as I felt my whole body go into shock mode. Did he mean what I thought
he meant?

“I don’t really know what to say to that.” I told him, though the idea of us not having to worry about a deadline to the relationship felt really good.

“Then don’t say anything.” He added. “Just remember that you should do what makes you happy, what makes your life better. And if writing this book will do that, than that’s what I think you should do.”

I had never wanted to tell him I loved him so badly.

“You’re pretty amazing, did you know that?” I asked, instead.

“Never hurts to hear it.” He joked.

As I looked back, Oscar was just stepping out of an interview himself, and my own happiness served only as an incentive to do something, so I told Harry I had to go.

“One more thing,” he said, “I wish I was there to rip that dress right out of you.”

I bit my inner lip – trying not to mess my lipstick – and smiled.

“This is a Tony Ward, Mr. Prince.” I joked. “You’re not ripping anything.”

He laughed. “God, I love you.”

I closed my eyes, feeling my skin warm and my heart beat faster.

“I’ll see you soon.” I told him, so I wouldn’t say anything else.

“Soon.” He echoed.

I walked over to where Oscar was leaving his reporter, on the way to go approach O, so I stopped him with a smile.

“Hi.” I said. “I don’t think we’ve met, I’m Jenifer.”

He gave me a smile. “Of course, hi. I know you.” He offered me his hand, which I took in a handshake. “You’re a client of Richard’s, right? Artchet?”

“How do you know?”

“So am I. I signed with him less than a year ago.” He chuckled. “He actually used your name to convince me.”

I nodded. “Oh, good for you. He’s amazing.”

“Thanks.” There was an awkward pause, as I held his look on mine confidently. “Congratulations on your Emmy!”

“Thank you.” I said.

As he looked increasingly uncomfortable, I wondered if he knew that I knew. I thought it didn’t seem so, so I wondered how could I let him know. How do I let him know that I would be watching, just waiting for the moment he messed up?

As we turned to face him, Oscar rested his arm delicately in a respectful part of my back. A few more photographers around – from the event itself and other channels or different parts of the media – gathered around us, snapping away in what quickly became a rain of flashes.

“I don’t mind the photos so much,” Oscar said, near my ear so no one would hear him or be able to read his lips, “but the flashes are just so inconvenient.”

I understood it was an awkward situation, posing with someone you just met, so it was clear why he wanted to make conversation. But the moment felt as good as any to approach the subject that really took me to talk to him.

“You know what I find inconvenient?” I asked, before turning to speak on his ear too. “Older men with predatory behavior.”

I faced the photographers again, more loudly now asking us to smile – or worst, hug – and Oscar just looked at me in surprise.

“What?” He asked, more whispery now. “Not-nothing happened until she was eighteen.”

“I’m sure I don’t have to tell you that waiting for a teenager to turn eighteen is just as predatory as being attracted to one in the first place.”

I saw the color fade from Oscar’s face, as he gulped. I kept my smile for the cameras, like the pro I was.

“Thank you!” I told the photographers, dismissing them with a move of my hand. “That’s enough, thank you.”

They walked away, slowly. And before I could turn to Oscar, Ophelia came to us.

“Hey.” She said. Oscar smiled, still a little uncomfortable. “I didn’t know you guys knew each other.”

“We have the same manager, apparently.” I told her. “Oscar was just telling me about how he was born in Guatemala.”

“He was?” O asked, and Oscar nodded, seeming surprised I even knew that.

Truth was Sofia and Gina had told me that earlier, when we were talking about who else we knew from the business who was also from Latin America. ‘Oscar is from Guatemala!’, Gina had said.

“Jen, we need you now.” Monica approached, to take me to the pressroom.

“I gotta go, I’ll see you at the after party?” O smiled, and I kissed her cheek quickly before turning to Oscar.

“It was nice to meet you, Oscar.” I said, smiling. ‘Recuerda lo que te dije.”

I knew for a fact O had studied French in high school, and that she wouldn’t be able to understand our Spanish, so I told him to remember what I had said.

“No quiero herirla.” ‘I don’t want to hurt her’, he told me.

“Good.” I said, “Tenga en cuenta que si alguna vez la tratas como si fuera algo menos que lo más
I finished the line with a sweet smile, as his eyes widened. O was confused.

I followed Monica, who handed me the Emmy again.

“What did you just tell him?” she asked.

“I told him to keep in mind that if he ever treats her like she’s any less than the most amazing thing to grace the universe in a million years I have many ways of making his life a living hell.”

That’s when I decided I was going to write a book.
Double Date

Chapter Summary

Jen and Harry go on a double date with Kit Harington and Beezus Quinn and things get a little too intense on the way out.

Chapter Notes

Who else loves drunk-Jen?????? I do! Thank you for reading and for being awesome! Leave a comment maybe? Lets talk! I'd love to hear from you!

“Tell me again why we’re doing this?”

I threw my hair back, plumping it up with my hands after spraying it upside down.

“Because we’re socially apt people who like to spend time with friends?”

“Friends? We barely know them.”

“I know them.” I argued, putting my earrings on.

“You’ve seen her twice.” He laughed.

“No!” I turned to him, pointing a finger. “Technically I’ve seen her… four times.” He gave me a sassy look. “Besides, I know him. We were on Game of Thrones together.”

“You didn’t even shoot with him.” He said. “You only saw him for promo.”

“That’s how you make friends in my line of work.” He sighed. “Harry, she saved my life last time we saw each other.”

“That’s the problem!” He expressed. “That was so awkward. Normal people would avoid each other for the rest of their lives!”

“It wasn’t that bad-“

“Jen. You were naked.”

“Half-naked.” I argued. “And it was scary as shit. And she saved my life. So, yes, I’d say we owe them a dinner.”

“You just don’t want to admit that you were drunk when you agreed to this.”

“You’re wrong!”

He was right. But in my defense, everyone is always drunk at Emmy Awards’ after parties. Unsurprisingly, especially HBO ones.
I was spinning around in the dance floor with Jesse Tyler Ferguson to Uptown Funk as his cast-mates and mine cheered us on excitedly when in the midst of watching the room spin I saw in a split second Bee and Kit making out against a column in the corner. So I grabbed Sofía Vergara’s hand and pulled her to replace me in the dance floor and made my way to them – but not before I grabbed myself another gin and tonic from a passing waiter.

“You guuuuyssss!” I shouted when I approached, wrapping my arms around both of them who stopped kissing when they heard me. “You’re hereeeeee!” I proceeded to kiss Bee in the cheek. “See? I’m smiling! That means I’m happy that you’re here!” I sang the song from The Last Five Years, before leaning in and kissing Kit’s cheek too. “Oh, don’t give me that look, you two! Why are foreigners so afraid of affection?!”

They laughed as I untangled my arms from them, who in return untangled themselves from each other to talk to me.

“It’s nice to see you!” Bee smiled. “Woah!” She let out when I waved my Emmy Award a little too close to her face.

“What is that dress, by the way?!” I asked Bee, who was wearing a light orange lace gown with simple, short sleeves.

She giggled. “I don’t know, it’s a complicated name.” I turned her around in a quick move and moved hair to check the label under the leather backpack she wore with her Oxygen tank.

“Hamda Al Fahim!” I said. “I’ve heard of them. You look great!”

“Thank you.” She smiled, turning back.

“And are those Sara Weinstock earrings?! I have those!”

“You do?” She asked, excited. “They’re really pretty… and kind of expensive.”

“Yeah, my manager is a jewelry snob. He always gives me this sort of stuff when something good happens… Hey. Did you, uhm-“, I cleaned my throat, awkward, “get your coat back?”

“I did, thanks. You didn’t have to get it dry-cleaned.”

“My pleasure.” I said, handing Kit my glass, which he eyed with confusion, so I could lay a hand
on her shoulders to make her understand how seriously I meant my next words. “You saved my life, Beatrice. How could I ever repay you?”

Bee giggled, color filling her cheeks. “Oh, it’s okay. You don’t have t-“

“Non-sense!” I shouted. “I owe you my life. And I wish I could do better by you, Beez, ‘cause that’s what you deserve.”

They laughed. That was a City and Colour song, but I wasn’t sure they knew that.

“Well, we could always get that double date going.” Kit suggested.

“Yes!” I agreed, enthusiastically, giving him another kiss on the cheek, leaving another lipstick stain where he had just finished erasing the first with a handkerchief. “Of course! The date! Let’s make plans.”

“We should exchange numbers and plan it tomorrow, sober.“ Bee suggested.

“Non-sense, I’m not drunk. I have Kit’s number already, just text me her number.” I told him. “What do you guys think? What should we do? Where should we go? What do people do on double dates?”

“We could have dinner.” Kit shrugged.

“Sounds fun.” Bee agreed. “Do you have anywhere you would prefer?” she asked me.

But I was too busy thinking to answer.

“Have I ever gone on a double date?” I wondered, aloud. “I don’t think I have.”

“Really?” Bee questioned, sounding surprise.

“Well, this is the first time I’m in a healthy relationship, so what do I know?” I looked at them. “That’s rhetorical. The answer is nothing. I have no idea what I’m doing.”

“Have you never-?” Kit started, but Bee knocked her clutch on his arm so he’d be quiet.

“That’s okay.” She said. “At least it means that you know what to avoid.”

I scoffed. “That I do!”

“So, dinner?” Kit asked again.

“No!” I shouted, suddenly remembering something.

“No?” he looked confused.

“That’s a lie! I have been on a double date!” Kit put his phone back into his pocket, realizing I was on a path and not about to make any plans.

“See?” Bee smiled. “That’s good.”

Then I made a terrible pout face. “No. No. That’s not a good memory at all now that I think about it.”

“Why?” she asked.
“Maybe we shouldn’t talk about it?” Kit suggested.

“Brody.” I told them, ignoring him. “Ugh. That was an awkward night.”

“More awkward than standing stuck on an escalator wearing nothing but a coat?” Kit teased, but I wasn’t listening.

“We doubled with his sister and her fiancé.” I said, remembering the night sometime in 2011. “They were fighting because of a failed attempt at something they had tried during sex, I don’t remember what it was. I tried to block the whole thing.”

“Wait, do you mean Brody Jenner?” Bee asked, with a renewed interest. “Oh, my God. Do you mean you double-dated with Kim Kardashian?!”

“Yeah.” I said, in a sigh. “That was horrible. I wouldn’t mind pretending I wasn’t listening to their problems, I do that a lot on Hollywood, Kit knows what I’m talking about.” He nodded. “But the cameras were just so intrusive-“

“They were filming?!” She asked, eyes widened. “You were on Keeping Up With The Kardashians?!”

“Just one episode or two. I’d rather forget it ever happened.” I dismissed.

“Okay.” Kit said, a little louder, to get our attention, as Bee still looked mesmerized. “Dinner. What are we thinking? Casual? Fun? Fancy?”

I threw a hand in the air – drunk Jen thought it would look fancy - and made my best British accent. “I am always fancy, old chap! Nothing but your finest china and Bordeaux for moi!” Then I looked down at them with renewed excitement. “Oh! I know! Let’s go have dinner in Paris!”

They raised their eyebrows at me. “Ma-maybe some other time…” Bee started.

“Yes.” Kit agreed. “Let’s stick to the UK, I do have a job there.”

We giggled. “Fiiiiiiine. Oh! I know! I know!” the eyed me with suspicion. “I know this great place, someone recommended it once. They say it has some coolio foodsies and it’s out of London so, can you say with me?!” I put a hand in my ear, but said it alone. “No paparazzi, bitcheees! Who’s in?!”

--- ---- ----

“You chose a restaurant called The Fat Duck,” Harry started, a month later, as I grabbed my black Alexandre Vauthier jacket with a fox fur collar, and headed for the door. “And you’re telling me alcohol was not involved in that decision?“

“Bitch less, live more, Mr. Prince.” I smiled, when we got into the car. “It’s gonna be fun!”

We picked up Kit and Beezus at their address and headed to Berkshire with our security following in a car behind us.

“Jen.” Kit greeted. “Nice to see you wearing clothes.”

I closed my eyes in an embarrassed smile, while Harry masked his with a cough.
Bee leaned forward in her seat. “Ignore him. He’s been planning that joke for two months.”

“I wanted to do it at the Emmys, but I feared you were too drunk to appreciate it, so I’ve been saving it.” He joked, making us giggle.

“Ahaa!” Harry shouted, abruptly hitting the breaks before taking on, “So she was drunk! I knew it!”

“I don’t think Jen is ever not drunk at award shows, mate.” Kit said. “She ever tell you her nickname?”

“Suze-Booze!” they chanted together, laughing, and I rolled my eyes remembering how Harry thought he wouldn’t have what to talk about with Kit.

“Why Suze-Booze?” Bee asked me. “Is it Suze as in your Mediator character?”

“Yes.” I said. “Regretfully, I got a little too hammered in our season one premiere party.”

We chatted about the restaurant in the way there – I remembered now that I was sober that a fan had recommended it to me a few years ago on a fan convention in Ireland. It must have stuck with me due to the weird name.

“They call the chef a culinary alchemist!” I said, turning back in the seat to look at them, who held hands in the backseat while Harry drove. “Whatever that means.”

When we got there, we quickly discovered drunk-Jen’s assertion was true: there were no paparazzi. There wasn’t much of anything in Bray, a small little town in West Berkshire, with little, old houses and narrow streets.

We walked up and down the street a couple of times after parking, confirming the address that I had found online, because we just couldn’t find any restaurants there.

“Maybe you can just call the number you called for the reservation?” Kit suggested.

“I didn’t make a reservation.” I told them.

Bee looked at me a little scared. “Don’t fancy restaurants need reservations?”


As it turns out, the restaurant was right in front of us: a normal two-store house with a modern looking wooden door that we opened ourselves to find The Fat Duck: low ceilings, round linen cloth covered tables and wooden branches were all there was to see. Not many windows, not many decorations, just simple tables with wine glasses and linen napkins.

“Er…” I started, “I thought it was gonna be a little fancier.”

I didn’t mind the fanciness of the place. But I the boys were wearing blazers, Bee had on a cute dress and I was wearing a short Alexander McQueen pink, orange and black dress with ankle Stella McCartney boots and a Givenchy bag. Oh, and did I mention the dead animal around my shoulders?

“Well…” Kit argued. “Doesn’t look bad, though. Maybe the food will be good.”

So as no one really seemed to mind the fact we were slightly overdressed, we greeted the hostess –
who did a terrible job at pretending she didn’t know who we were. Which was good, as I’m sure that’s what made her not only give us a table in what was an almost completely full restaurant, but take us straight to a more private one in the back.

“Can I take your coats?” She offered, before we went.

“Oh, Jen likes to keep her coat on.” Kit joked, with a grin, before I had a chance to answer.

“You know,” I started, “you keep this up and I’ll be forced to tell your girlfriend about all your dirty secrets from that party we went to in Venice that time-“

“Anyway!” He interrupted, “Let’s go to the table already.”

“Yeah, I thought so.” I laughed.

“Maybe it’s good that it’s a simpler place.” Harry commented, a bit later, even though now we were seated I could see the table had a pretty fancy setting. “Usually simpler places have better food.”

“Yes!” Agreed Kit, “Because they don’t have the necessity of being pretentious.”

A sommelier came around to ask what we wanted to drink. I exchanged a look with Harry and we decided to ditch the wine. He chose a vodka soda, and I opted for the Long Island Iced Tea, whilst Bee chose a Mascato and Kit opted for a brandy.

“So you go straight for the drink with most quantities of alcohol in it.” Kit noticed. “Shall we be seeing more of Suze-Booze tonight?”

“Ha-ha.” I ironized. “Listen, I can hold my liquor.” The three of them sort of laughed together. “What?! I can!”

“Question,” Harry started, “did she randomly start to sing in the middle of a sentence at the Emmys?”

Kit and Bee smiled. “Yes!” The answered together, making me roll my eyes.

We didn’t have time for much more talk, as next thing we know the chef himself is there to greet us, making his way through the tables in his white outfit and fashionable reading glasses with a waitress coming after him with a cart.

He introduced himself as Heston Blumenthal, and his waitress quickly started cooking something in the cart that had a mini oven over it.

“I was excited to come and greet you all, such an honor having you here!” He smiled. “Can I walk you through our style here? Do you know what you would like to order?”

“It’s our first time here, actually.” Harry told him. “We’d love suggestions from the chef.”

Heston seemed to beam with happiness on his words.

“We call the menu here The Journey. It is designed to take diners on a story-telling journey aimed at capturing childhood feelings of adventure, discovery and curiosity.” He told us, who merely nodded slowly trying to translate that into actual-food terms. One of the chapters of the menu was seriously called ‘can I have some money for the ice cream man?’ “I’d suggest for you today our sixteen-course tasting menu, it’s the best way to get a taste of all our signature dishes. Would that
“be okay?”

“Uh…” We all seemed to utter at once – with either our actual mouths or our faces.

“Great!”

And that’s how our dinner started.

First, the waitress prepared for us in real time a mousse of lime and green tea that, as she explained, was a palate cleanser designed to ‘prepare our taste buds for the rest of the meal’.

When she left, we started at the spoonful of white mousse on what now seemed an unnecessarily big plate.

“So, I guess the food might end up being a little pretentious, after all.” Bee commented.

The mousse tasted well, we ate it all at once as we had been told to, so we waited on what came next, expecting it would at least be the good kind of pretentious food.

The next course was a plate with two small squares of jelly, an orange and a beet-red. Our waitress warns us to eat the orange first and leaves.

We look at it for maybe a second before looking at each other with raised eyebrows. Suddenly, we all started laughing at the same time.

“What even is this?” Kit asked.

“How fancy can jelly be?” I wondered.

“Does anyone else feel like eating the red first, just to be rebellious?” Harry thought.

We started by the orange anyway. It tasted like beet. We stared at it in disbelief. The red, as expected, tasted like orange.

“I mean, it’s smart.” I pondered.

“Yes, but is it worth it?” Kit replied. “In this economy, who wants to spend three-hundred pounds on a meal that is more smart than tasty?”

Bee snapped her head at him, suddenly. “This costs three-hundred pounds?! She asked, in a whisper.

“Relax.” He said, holding her hand and giving her a smile.

The next dish was one simple, small oyster in each of our plates. It had passion fruit jelly and a sprig of lavender inside.

“Okay, so the combination of fruit and bay is maybe delightful, but come on!” I told them. “I want more!”

“Now I understand why rich people are so thin,” Bee added, “it makes so much sense.”

Then we had Red Cabbage Gazpacho, served with a micro-scoop of Pommery Grain Mustard Ice Cream. Which, again, was served in a ridiculously small portion – like all courses were.

“I wonder if it’s just because we chose the tasting menu?” Kit pondered.
“Yeah, but do they even make normal sized meals?” Harry asked back.

As we looked around, everyone had the same sized plates.

Then, the unexpected happened; we were told to place a piece of small film infused with oak flavor on our tongues, ‘waking us for the touches to come’. There was a piece of oak moss on the table, that the waitress infused with some sort of liquid that made it instantly exert a smoke that looked a lot like dry ice.

I wished I had thought of photographing our faces then, because we all looked at it with distinguished suspicion.

Then we were served their ‘famous snail porridge’, which is when we decided that in this place it was eat or be eaten. That’s when a girl approached.

She couldn’t have been more than fifteen, with orange braces and the sort of straight blonde hair that one only found on Europeans.

“I’m sorry to bother,” she smiled, “but can I get a picture?”

She was looking at me, so I stood up and posed for a selfie with her, who soon after made Kit the same question. Then, right before she left, she recognized Harry by my side, and got a picture with him too.

“Does that happen a lot?” Bee asked, conversationally.

“A bit.” I told her. “Though it’s been getting harder to judge who is an actual fan, and who is just trying to get something to sell online. There was a girl once who asked me to sign the shirt she was wearing, and not two weeks later my friend Alli emailed me asking if it was really my signature on this shirt selling on e-bay for five hundred bucks. It was the girls’ shirt.”

Kit and Harry laughed, but Bee had her mouth opened. “That’s horrible.”

“Did I ever tell you Beezus used to have a poster of you on the wall in her bedroom?” Kit asked, with a grin, and Bee looked at him in shock.

“Not true!” she looked at me. “That’s not true!”

“Oh, no, it is.” I told her. “I learned it the hard way. Everyone called me that when everything started happening with me. You know, the meme thing and all. Apparently it’s what people call you when you are endearingly sweet.” She smiled. “…before they decide they’re sick of you. Then you’re a bitch.”

I took a sip of my drink, as she gave me a sad look. “No one’s sick of you. Everybody loves you. You’re even writing about human rights now, and you’re working with the UN!”

I didn’t feel like ruining the mood of the night – the food was doing that without my help – so I
tried to spare Bee from explaining how insane my social media life had been lately, because of exactly that.

“Unfortunately, what happens when you start speaking about things people don’t want to hear is that they decide they’ve had enough of you.” I told them.

“She’s right.” Kit said. “Every year there’s a new revelation, a new person that takes the industry by storm. They ride that wave of success for a good year, maybe two, and then everyone almost collectively decides they’re annoying.”

“Just look at Jennifer or Taylor.” I explained, realizing the last names might make a difference. “Sorry, I meant Lawrence and Swift. One year, Jennifer is in the Hunger Games and everyone thinks she’s so endearing for falling on her way to the stage to get her Oscar. Suddenly, she’s a fake and everything she does is to get attention. One year, Taylor is America’s Sweetheart. The next she’s either a whore who goes around breaking up with celebrity men to get famous songs on the radio, or an anti-feminist who bashes girls on her songs. You can never win for too long, it’s just the way it is.” I shrugged, sadly.

Our waitress brought our next course, so we paused the conversation for a few minutes – course is a strong term for it. It was a conch shell with an iPod nano inside. We were to listen to the sound of waves on the earphones, which we did for a couple of minutes, exchanging weird looks.

Suddenly, Bee pulled hers out.

“Okay,” she begun, “I get it. But, like… That’s not you. No one thinks you’re annoying or anything. I haven’t seen any of that going around, and you can’t take comment sections into account!”

I sighed. “It’s… beginning. I can feel it. It’s not fully here yet, but I can tell it’s coming. At the Emmys, two reporters went out of their way to make intrusive questions to try and get a rise out of me.”

“That red carpet interview?” Kit asked. “I did read about that, that was a good thing you did by leaving!”

“Yes. And if the media is doing that, when usually they’re more restrained to try and not lose the interview, than it means that’s what readers want. People like to read bashing stories about celebrities they don’t like.”

There was a slow sigh from Harry, and he looked at Beezus now, who still seemed intrigued.

“Jen doesn’t like to say it, but mostly it’s because of me they’re beginning to hate her now.”

“That’s not true!” I told him.

“Yes, it is.” He returned, on a monotone. “You know it is. It started when we got back together.”

“No, it started because they were mad over Tyler. Not you.”

“But on their minds, I’m the one keeping you from Tyler.”

I rolled my eyes.

“Sorry,” said Kit. “Tyler?”

“Right!” He nodded.

“The fandom really wanted us together in the show, and after when they discovered something did happen in the past, it kind of drove them insane. So when we got into Heathers, they thought I was single, because we weren’t out in public yet,” I looked at Harry. “And Tyler had just broken up with his girlfriend, so they just assumed we were together. Even after I left Broadway and came out with Harry, they thought I just got back with him after breaking up with Ty when I left Heathers. There’s no winning… It started with people’s hate over Tyler, then it became my political views, next thing you know this immigrant needs to shut up about things she doesn’t understand or she needs to move back to her own country.” I smiled, sad.

When the next dish arrived, served on a glass rectangular with a sand box underneath, we all looked at it closely for a while. It was a mixture of tapioca sand, sea foam, fried baby eels (“But did it have to be baby eels? Poor things”, said Bee), razor clams, cockles, and a quartet of Japanese seaweed species. As curious as I was, when Bee raised her head from the plate to suggest we took off we all agreed immediately.

“I could use a cheese-burger.” I told them, so I raised my arm and told the waitress we’d have to go.

I paid the check, telling them it was the least I could do after that ridiculous food.

“Sorry, guys,” I said, as we waited for out coats, “It’s DJ’s fault. Not the first time that bitch has ruined an evening for me…”

“Who’s DJ?” Kit asked.


“We have a problem.” Nathan told him, as we made our way to the door.

The problem was that someone had tipped off the media that we were there, and the narrow street of calm, slow paced Bray was packed with a group of about thirty paparazzi.

“I’ll go first,” Harry offered, “There’s a big chance they’ll follow me and leave you guys behind. Count to ten before you go.”

I felt my face twist in a pout before I could help it. I didn’t like the paparazzi situation, but having to walk out into it as if we were doing something wrong made it even worst. Still, I didn’t say anything. I didn’t want to bring Kit and Bee into it.

After Harry was gone, I followed with them right behind me.

Nate was standing guard near Harry, with Louis trying to make the paparazzi move away from the car – but most of them were still by the door of the restaurant. When I walked out, Eddy and Clark ushered us through, trying to keep them at least a couple of meters away, but desperate for a picture, they kept at hand’s reach. I tried to walk confidently, head held high, no smiles so the pictures were worth less. It was hard, as they were too close and the flashes were too blinding and the rude words they shouted at us were too loud.

Kit parted with Bee to go sit behind Harry’s driver seat on the car, and she followed me to sit on my side. As we were almost at the doors, I heard her voice as everyone suddenly got a little louder.
“Ouch!” She shouted, freezing in place.

I couldn’t tell if it were the paparazzi or Eddy and Clark yelling ‘hey! Hey! Look out!’, but I heard alarm bells jingling in my brain. As I looked back, Beezus was squatting down to pick something up, her hair falling weirdly on her face, and I understood that in the midst of the confusion some of the paparazzi might have grabbed her cannula by accident – or not, go figure.

I saw Kit begin to make his way around the car to us, with a deadly look on his eyes to the men around us. Clark turned to him, urging him to just get in the car so we could leave.

“All right!” I asked her, who got up now, trying to clean the transparent tube that went on her nose.

The paparazzi were yelling more now, everything from ‘what happened?’, to ‘we didn’t do anything!’. The flashes were still going.

“I’m fine.” She said, but I could see the way her hand went from her nose to her ear, realizing it must have hurt.

I helped her into the car, as Kit got in too, to check on her, and turned to the paparazzi who was closer – a big man in a white hoodie, who had been saying ‘I’m sorry, lady. I’m sorry!’ I assumed he had pulled the cannula, and even though it seemed to be an accident, I knew there was a very simple way that accident could have been avoided.

“What the hell is wrong with you?!” I asked him, ignoring the commotion around. “Give us some space! We’re just trying to get to the car here!”

“I didn’t see it!” He shouted back, raising his camera do take a picture of me. “It was a transparent thing, I couldn’t see it!”

With my reaction - my words, my anger, my look – they all started to snap away more eagerly. I knew giving them a reaction only gave them a story, exactly what they wanted, but I also knew someone had to say something.

“You wouldn’t have messed with it if you were giving us some space like we’re fucking human beings, did you fucking think of that?!”

“I said I’m sorry!” he shouted, still through his camera.

I raised a hand to cover his lens, and he lowered it.

“Talk to me like I’m a person for a moment!” I shouted. “Or better yet, like you’re one!”

“Hey, Jenifer! He apologized!” His friends yelled around, and I felt Eddy ushering me away.

“An apology doesn’t help my friend fucking breathe, does it?!”

“I said I’m sorry!” he shouted, still through his camera.

I closed the door with a loud, angry ‘bang!’, and we waited until they were in the security car to leave, Harry covering his eyes with his hand, clenching his jaw in anger as we were still covered with the flashes.

I turned back to look at Beezus, who was massaging her ears. Kit was sitting in the middle of the
backseat, closer to her, cleaning her cannula as best as he could.

“Are you okay?!” I asked, concerned.

“I’m fine.” She repeated, though her voice sounded shaky and weak.

I felt a knot on my throat in anger at the stupid mess we had gotten her into.

Harry honked the car, so the paparazzi would clear the way so we could leave. The boys followed in the car behind. Suddenly, the photographers snapped their last pictures and ran away to get into their own cars – probably getting ready to race us back to London.

The car did a burnout when we left in a hurry, trying to leave them behind. I heard a selection of insults leave Harry’s mouth in an infuriated, long breath as we left the street behind with our security detail following us up close.

“Are you really okay?” I asked again, turning in my seat.

Bee had finished untangling her hair and Kit handed her cannula back, which she adjusted into place in her nose, taking in a deep breath.

“I’m fine.” She repeated, a bit stronger now.

I squeezed her knee in comfort. Kit passed an arm around her shoulders, bringing her closer in a hug. The softness of his action came in contrast to the words coming out of his mouth.

“Those fucking vampires!” he uttered. “Bloody vultures! What’s wrong with these fucking twats?!”

Those were just the insults I understood.

Harry stepped heavier on the pedal, and we moved faster on the narrow roads of West Berkshire, making some dangerous curves. His phone buzzed, and he twisted in his seat to get it, driving with one hand to try and talk at the same time.

“Harry, give me the phone.” I told him, who took in a sharp breath. “Yes?”

“Hey,” it was Clark. “We have a problem here. The paparazzi are following us.”

“They’re following us.” I told Harry, who cursed again under his breath, before sighing and looking around and at the rear view mirror attentively.

“Tell them to go into protocol.”

“What’s that?” I asked. “Go into protocol.” I ordered Clark, who said an ‘okay’ before hanging up.

Suddenly, we heard another burnout, louder this time, as the car behind us, with our security, did a dangerous maneuver making a curve in the middle of the street and breaking suddenly, blocking the road. There was some more noise as the paparazzi cars all hit their breaks together to avoid hitting them. They honked in protest, and Harry accelerated and drove us off as they all stayed behind.

He turned blindly in some streets, always fast, trying to find a place the paparazzi wouldn’t think we would have gotten into.

“That’s protocol?!?” I asked, “Are you insane?!”
Harry ignored me, instead he finally made another curve and parked in a dark, residential street. He turned the car off, so the lights wouldn’t give us away.

“Are you out of your fucking mind?!” I shouted again.

“How are we doing back there?” he asked, too calm, turning in his seat to look at Beezus.

“I’m fine.” She said, still a little pale, though I couldn’t tell if it was from the paparazzi incident or the Fast and Furious moment. “Promise.”

We turned to sit upright in our seats, taking in a deep breath. His hand reached to get a hold of mine.

“Sorry.” He said. “Trust me, this is safer than driving back to London with them behind us.”

“Seriously?!” I asked him.

“Yeah.” He told me. “Seriously. You’ll remember I do have some experience on the subject of driving with paparazzi after you.”

I closed my eyes, mentally exhausted, remembering that was, after all, what killed his mother. I squeezed his hand on mine, so he knew we were fine. He was just trying to protect us.

Nearby, we overheard the loud noise of cars racing past, and Harry’s phone buzzed again.

“We’re fine.” He said, as he picked up. “Alright.” He turned up.

“How will they find us now?”

“They wait until all the paparazzi are gone, driving around for a minute to make sure no one’s following them, and then get here.”

“You didn’t tell them where we are.” I reminded him.

“They can track my phone.” He said. Of course they could. “I don’t even know where we are. Sorry I scared you.” He turned to look back again.

“It’s okay.” Beezus repeated, and thought that was the only thing she had been saying I did see the color start to come back to her face.

“…it was actually kind of cool.” Kit mumbled.

There was a second of silence before we started laughing at his words. I saw in the rear view mirror that he smiled looking at Beezus’ smiley face.

“Sorry I ruined the night.” She said, a minute later, after the laughter died out.

“Hey! No!” We all said, kind of together.

“It was absolutely not your fault.” Harry said.

“And if anything ruined the night it was my poor choice in restaurants.”

“Alright, let’s all calm down, the night is not ruined.” Kit said. “I mean, sure, the food was… unusual.” We giggled. “And the way out was tumultuous due to fucking morons who only want to profit from all of us, which if is someone’s fault, is ours.”
“Yeah!” Harry agreed. “Sorry, Beezus.”

“But, come on!” Kit went on. “The company was good, eh? The conversations were fun. It’s still a salvageable night… right?”

“You know what?” I asked no one in particular. “I could use a drink.”

“Me too.” Harry agreed.

“Me three.” Bee smiled.

“That’s the spirit!” Kit celebrated. “Now, come on, let’s go find some pub around with good booze and real food to end the night on a good note.”

--- ---- ----

We walked through the little red door into an establishment we found not far from there, a low ceiling, dim-lit, place with tiny booths and tables around. There were only two windows in the front, so we found privacy in a booth in the back, close to a small stage where a white-haired man in his fifties was singing I Love Rock And Roll.

“Oh, no.” Kit complained. “It’s a karaoke place.”

“We’re not leaving!” I said, “Not now that I’m actually starving.”

After the scare had passed, so had the nausea, and the hunger took over.

“Fine.” He mumbled. “But I will not sing!”

“Relax, nobody is asking you to.” Bee teased. “Jen, however…”

“Oh, no.” I told her. “I don’t do karaoke.”

“Liar!” Harry laughed. “You’re such a showoff. Why would you draw the line at karaoke?”

“Oh, you want me to sing, do you?” I asked, “Do you want me to serenade you, Mr. Prince? Because I will!”

“No!” He laughed. “Never mind!”

“I will pour my heart out into a song for you!” I teased.

“One day, maybe.” He smiled.

“Why ‘Mr. Prince’?” Kit asked. “How did that nickname happened?”

We exchanged a smile, and I told them the story of how drunk I was when we met, and I just refused to use his mouthful of a last name and came up with that instead.

“So I was right,” Kit teased, “It does always involve alcohol with you.”

“To be fair,” Bee pondered, “I was drunk too when I kissed you for the first time.”
So we laughed, and they told us the story of how they got together.

Kit got a text not long after, and asked if he could call some friends over. Turns out his friends were Richard and Jenna (Madden and Coleman), whom I knew already. They got there not fifteen minutes later, just as we were getting drinks and some chips, which is how brits called French fries.

“Okay, but then how do you call chips?” I asked them.

“Crisps.” Harry said, and I rolled my eyes, mildly outraged.

I took my phone out to get a selfie with Jenna and Bee, for Instagram, and that’s how I noticed a couple of texts, the most interesting of them from Ed.

‘Just read you’re in Berkshire? Whatya doing here? Wheres the noise at tonight?’

You had to laugh at Ed’s weirdly worded texts, but I asked around quickly to the group and told him to come meet us. So he got there about half an hour later with Niall Horan with him, which after a few drinks didn’t raise as many eyebrows as it normally would have.

We pulled another table closer to fit out little group, that quickly got louder and funnier as the alcohol took over and the songs from the karaoke got tackier.

Harry, easily the oldest of us, talked non-stop to Richard, Niall and Ed about sports. Kit was laughing as I busied Jenna’s ear with my undying love for Doctor Who, before I turned to Bee to chat about places we’d been and wanted to go to, and finally, somehow, the conversation turned to the Arab Emirates.

“Harry went to Dubai once!” I told her.

“But I heard Abu Dhabi has the best beaches!” She said. “Private beaches of white sand and crystal clear water…”

“We should go!” I said, loud, putting my glass down a little too dramatically. “We should totally go! Let’s go away together!”

So I told her about the full week I’d have off the next month – November – because I had my four days off, plus thanksgiving break. Ed couldn’t go because he had a work thing, same thing with Niall, who was releasing a new album soon. But Jenna and Richard were in, as were Kit and Bee. Harry merely kissed my cheek longingly in reply to my proposition, so I grabbed my phone and texted my friends with as many details as drunk-me could muster, which ended up sounding something like:

‘yo abu dabbi bitches whos in??????????//’

Their replies the next day were as confused as my question, so I explained, but on that night, that was all I could do.

Then I took to drunk-Instagramming for a while before we had a shot contest.

It felt good, sitting with friends in a warm pub God knows where, talking excitedly, holding Harry’s hand, or laying my head on his shoulders without having to worry about who was watching. A night that had begun badly, quickly became light-hearted and nice.

We could see the staff of the places giving us weird glances all the time, probably wondering where did all those celebrities come from, but we really didn’t realize much else outside our own
Harry turned to look at me with a smile at some point, that I mimicked, slowly caressing his hand with my fingers.

“I’m gonna say this,” I told him, whispery, enjoying the fact everyone was too busy to pay us much attention, “because I’m a bit drunk and I read that you should never leave a fight unresolved when in a relationship.”

He raised an eyebrow in confusion. “When did we fight?”

“In my mind.” I explained. “When we were leaving the restaurant… I don’t like when you leave me behind.”

“What?”

“I don’t like how you walk out and leave me behind to follow you to the car…”

“Jen, I-“ He stuttered. “Come here.”

He excused us, asking for Bee to step away so we could get out of the booth for a minute, telling the others we were going to get some water, and I followed him.

We leaned against the bar counter in a corner, at the other side of the stage, where not many people could see us. He turned me to look at him.

“The pictures are worth more if we’re both in them.” He said, and I rolled my eyes knowing that would be his argument. “It’s true! I don’t like giving them that satisfaction!”

“And I don’t like letting them change the way we do things.” I complained. “I don’t like that we have to change because they’re annoying and invasive!”

“Jen, is for the best-“

“No.” I said, firm. “It’s so that you can feel like you’re still in control of this, trying to stop them from profiting from us, when in fact you can’t! They will sell the pictures and they will make money, and that’s just how it goes. But when you leave me behind you are letting them influence us and I don’t like it.”

He sighed. “I’m trying to protect you.”

“You’re trying to protect your image.” I said. “So when we break up there’s less pictures of us on the internet for people to bother you about.”

“There’s already a lot of selfies of us online from when you lost your phone.” He argued. “Why would I do that?”

“I don’t know, Harry. But I don’t need you to. I need you to focus on the right now. This is our relationship, right now. And I don’t want them to hurt our now by making us worried about tomorrow.”

“I am trying to protect you from the harassment…”

“I don’t need you to protect me! I have Eddy for that. Especially from the press harassment, I’m used to that. I need you to be my boyfriend and hold my hand when we’re leaving a restaurant because it makes me feel safer.” I sighed. “You’re the first guy that’s made me feel safer and I
don’t like that I have to step out away from you like we’re committing a crime by being together.”

He sighed, and kissed my forehead before we got a bottle of water and went back to the table, to talk more with our friends letting the night go by.

I leaned my head on his shoulder again, and held his hand on mine so he knew we were okay. We were so okay I even forgot about it until it was time to leave.

With as many of us there, someone must have tweeted our location because by the time we left the entrance was packed with paparazzi too, though not as many as before. We took off first, Harry and me, leaving the rest of the group behind hoping they would be left alone. We let the security drive, since we had been drinking, and so I waited by the door as Harry made his way out.

After I finished buttoning my coat up, I looked up and realized he was still by the door, waiting for me. He smiled, raising his hand, which I gladly took, after pausing for a second to try and keep that image in my mind for as long as I could.

We made our way out into the wild – feeling as safe as could be.
The Speech

Chapter Summary

Jen makes a speech at the UN General Assembly, plays hotshot girlfriend and embarks on a couples’ holiday with friends, generally becoming more adult than she ever thought she would.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

There’s a very short list of things I never thought I would do in my entire life. Like fighting with my bosses on set, speaking at a UN general assembly or being on a relationship serious enough to go on a couple’s holiday with friends.

Before that November of 2015 was over I had done all of that.

After we finished shooting half the second season of If Tomorrow Comes, we welcomed my character’s new love interest, played by Scott Eastwood, into the set. That’s also when we received the scripts for the second half of our storyline arcs. And that’s when I realized something highly problematic: the book narrative was ending in this season, but instead of making it an ending, the writers had left it in a cliff hanger. I questioned them about it, about how mean it was, and was told that it would just be until next season – answer that only made everything worst.

“I made it pretty clear I would only stay as long as we’re following the book storyline.” I told them.
“I won’t sign a contract for a third season not knowing how the story will go.”

“But you didn’t know the script for this season when you signed it!”

“Not in detail, but I knew that we were still following the book.” I explained. “But the book ends this season, so how can I know if the next one will be good? How can I know if we’ll be able to sustain the quality level?”

“Well, Jen, there’s no need to get bitchy about this.”

This was the problem with men in Hollywood: they didn’t like women questioning their abilities. So when I said I wouldn’t sign the next season contract unless I could account for the quality of the storyline, they assumed I was questioning their talent. And that’s how things got frisky.

They tried to convince me to lay low and ‘do my job’; I tried to tell them that was my job; they made it clear I was ‘just an actress’; suddenly the polarization on set was so big I wasn’t even sure I wanted to come back for the next season at all.

“I thought you liked them.” Harry said, when I called him to complain about it for the third time in a roll.

“I do,” I sighed. “I did. Everything was fine. But question a men’s power and suddenly you have a war on your hands.”

“Hm…” He mumbled. “Not all men-“
“Oh, don’t even!” I complained. “They’re trying to argue me down because they know they can’t end this season on a cliff hanger if I say I’m not coming back for the next one. So they have to rewrite this one, which would be giving me the victory, or tell me what they plan for the next one and risk me not liking it and quitting, which would also be giving me a victory…”

“Win-win for you, though.”

“Doesn’t feel like a win. I haven’t disliked a work environment since…” I sighed. “God, I’ve never disliked a work environment before!”

“Wow.” He said, in a really bored tone. “You’ve had it pretty easy, haven’t you?” he teased.

Having Harry there made it easier. Right after our double date on October, I had to fly back to Los Angeles, and it was him time to attend a movie premiere (for 007) with his brother and sister-in-law. Kate had texted me a picture of her dress hours before, asking if I thought it was good enough for a premiere.

“You do have more experience with these things…” she said.

I told her she had no reason to worry - she looked amazing. So did Harry, actually. I saw the pictures online, texting him through, telling him he was the one who looked like James Bond in that tux.

“Is it true you were almost the Bond girl in that movie?” He asked, on the phone, the next day.

“Oh, yeah.” I told him, remembering the offer that had been made to me more than a year before. “I didn’t want it, though. I have no time for movies that don’t pass the Bechdel test anymore.”

Two days after that premiere, Harry flew to America. Unfortunately, not to see me – though we managed to arrange something. He was there to promote the next edition of the Invictus Games, which would be held in Florida on May of the next year.

He met the first lady in Virginia (as in, Michelle Obama) who guided him in a tour of the US’s largest military base. I helped him prepare his speech, I did that a lot now. I told him about how sometimes you need to unleash a few personal details so that a speech doesn’t feel forced or written for you, or even just cliché – that’s how I came up with mine. So he spoke about how he had felt inspired to create the games after his last flight home after his first deployment tour with the military, which he shared with three soldiers in induced comas, and the corpse of a Danish soldier.

“It hit me then that this flight was one of many,” he told them, in a video that I watched later online, “carrying home men and women whose lives would be changed forever, and some who had made the ultimate sacrifice. From that moment I knew I had a responsibility to help all veterans… to lead healthy and dignified lives after service.”

It was weird watching Harry do his job. Sometimes I forgot that he, too, had a job that required him to speak in public and travel a lot, but when I watched him make speeches about things like that, that he was so passionate about, it really moved me. It moved me to see him in his element, even though he insisted he was so bad at public speaking – he wasn’t. He read his speeches, of course, but with care and dedication. You could see it mattered to him.

There was something else that hit me: Harry was an adult. And I understand how weird it is to have just now realized it, but in the midst of our alcohol induced friendship, crazy relationship, and international sex adventures, sometimes it was easy to forget he was a thirty-one-years-old man with an actual job that he liked and adult responsibilities that he was really good at.
Really, come to think about it, the one adult responsibility Harry didn’t handle very well was me.

But he stood in that gym, with his fancy beard and equally fancy suit, surrounded by wounded war veterans, just steps away from the first and second ladies of the United States, speaking with such confidence about the project that he started. About this one thing he truly believed in, the games, that he poured his heart and soul into, and sure enough, there it was: Harry was no boy. He was a man.

While I gave late night show funny interviews about my mishaps in the show business to try and appear ‘approachable’ or ‘relatable’, he just smiled and spoke with his heart, and that was it. You could tell everyone in the room was hooked.

Later that night, I was wearing a knee length, blue and black, tube dress and black Louboutin heels when I stepped out of a town car that had picked me and Eddy at a private airport in Washington, DC. Harry had sent a jet to pick me up – I could only be with him for a few hours, but we just couldn’t waste an opportunity to see each other as we were in the same country.

It wasn’t like nobody expected us to be together – it was all the press could talk about: ‘will we see pictures of them together in this trip?!’

But the trip was no romantic getaway, and we weren’t about to have date night either. Harry was hosting a board meeting for the Invictus stakeholders at the British Ambassador’s residence in Washington.

He made it pretty clear it was a work thing when he invited me, and I made it pretty clear I didn’t mind. So I showed up in my mature dress and expensive jewelry and, after giving him a long time coming tight hug, helped him dazzle his investors with my endearing personality.

I enjoyed having his hand in the small of my back, in the privacy of a kind of place we knew the press wouldn’t get a hold of us, and hearing him introduce me to people as:

“My girlfriend, Jenifer Silva. She’s a Goodwill Ambassador for the United Nations.”

I enjoyed the delighted look on their faces, and Harry’s proud smile while I shifted the conversation easily into how exciting and successful the games were surely going to be.

No one asked rude or intrusive questions about Harry and me, no one tried to profit from us. That night, we were just a normal couple: dressed in designer clothes, hosting a dinner party in the British Ambassador’s house asking for more donations for a worthy cause.

“You were amazing!” Harry smiled, bringing a bottle of champagne with him into the Ambassador’s library, where I was resting with my feet up a table after most of the guests had left. “Three of our backers actually came to tell me they wanted to donate more money for the games after talking to you!” He sighed, sitting by my side on the couch. “What did you tell them?”

“I promised them sexual favors, of course.” I joked. “How else would I do it?”

He laughed, pouring us some champagne. “I hate that you can’t stay.”

I gave him a sad smile – I had to leave for the airport to go back to Los Angeles in half an hour. “Me too… at least we got to see each other.”

He smiled, and I leaned in to kiss him, feeling his stubble against my skin as our tongues danced together.
“You’re amazing.” I said, with a smile, without moving my forehead from his. “I don’t get to say it very often, because you’re not in… movies, or whatever… But you are. You’re amazing and you’re doing amazing things.”

He smiled, and I saw his cheeks getting slightly redder as he looked down to his glass, embarrassed.

“I’m serious, Mr. Prince.” I told him. “You inspire me.”

“To wear more blue, maybe?” He joked, dismissively. We were in matching blue outfits that night, something everyone seemed to want to comment on.

“You can joke all you want.” I went on. “But I’m serious. You inspire me to… do better. To be better.”

He leaned in this time, closing the distance between us. We knew we had to enjoy it – the next we’d see each other would be a whole month from then.

But Harry couldn’t be there all the time, so even though he inspired me to be better and I tried my hardest to, I had to do it alone.

It escalated slowly, like a snowball going downhill. All I know is one day I’m tweeting my opinions on the racial bias of police officers in America and the next I’m writing in-demand articles for Buzzfeed News, Huffington Post and, on a more serious note, the Times.

So that’s how I ended up one day at the U.N. headquarters, wearing a yellow Stephane Rolland dress, about to speak at the General Assembly as their Goodwill Ambassador in front of a crowd of presidents, dignitaries and overall important people about pretty much all that was wrong with the world.

I wish that was an oversimplification of what my speech was about, but it truly wasn’t. As the launch of UN’s Human Rights campaign, the speech served to highlight the problems we intended to address in the future partnership, so I pretty much talked about a range of issues from the migrant crisis in Europe, to racism and the constant persecution of women’s rights. I gave data, cited real people and real cases and talked about how we were worsening the issues by not knowing how to deal with them.

I finished talking by saying I shouldn’t have to fear for my life or integrity by using my voice to try and improve people’s lives, as I knew I had to since hacking threats happened after every single women tried to speak out about issues – like Emma Watson, the Goodwill Ambassador for Women Issues.

I quoted a Brazilian singer who once replied to an angry misogynistic follower by giving him a pretty sassy response:

“There’s a slang in my country that we use then we mean to tell people they may whine as much as they’d like, but it’ll be to no effect.” I explained. “We say ‘crying is free’. So, to the perpetrators and causes of the issues we intend to fight, that’s what I say today. That’s what I say to the hackers or haters who will try to scare me into silence, as I know they will, as they already have since I started speaking my mind. Who will tell me to go back into the kitchen. And I tell you that I will not go back into the kitchen. And black people will not go back into the slave ships. And the LGBT people will not go back into the closet. Crying is free, ladies and gentlemen, and so are we.”

I wish I could take credit for the brilliant line, but even though I didn’t even try to, it was assumed
it was mine anyway. At this point in my life, I was used to going viral, but even I wasn’t ready for the turmoil that followed, with my speech making headlines everywhere.

So we took advantage of it and created an online campaign: #IAmFree. I shared a photo on Instagram with the hashtag, sharing a story of overcoming xenophobic prejudices to be able to fully develop in the country and pursue my goals in life, and at our invitation many friends from the industry – actors, singers and such – shared their own battles they had to overcome to be free.

Then I designed three models of tee shirts with the words ‘Crying is free, and so are we!’ on them, one with a take on the feminism symbol, the other on the fight against racism symbol (the fist upwards) and the last with an LGBT thematic. All of the proceedings went into charities we chose, our partners in the campaign, who aided people on those demographics. They sold out pretty fast, to much of my pride.

Even though I had acknowledged I knew it would happen, I also wasn’t fully ready for when a 4chan hacking group threatened to release nude pictures of me online – as if they had any – and, a little more unusual, my bank statements. That’s when they leaked the information I was going to write a book about my life – which wasn’t necessarily bad, just a bit precipitated, as I didn’t feel like telling people yet. Or like reading bullshit stories on tabloids with speculation on how much they were paying me for it.

I wasn’t ready for the countless interviews about the speech, and the overwhelming wave of either support or hate about it, which only escalated quicker as the attacks in France happened and the war on immigrants imploded. But as November rolled over, I pushed all of this fucking mess to the back of my mind. I packed all of my bikinis, put Vodka on her carrier bag and got into a plane on my way to Abu Dhabi.

After my very serious and adult invitation for my friends to join us there (a text message that read: ‘yo abu dabbibithces whos inn??????///’) we closed the group in fifteen people: Taylor was in, with her boyfriend Adam, also Kit and Bee, and Richard and Jenna. There was also five protection officers (three for Harry, and one for me and Taylor each). Alli couldn’t get out of class to go, since thanksgiving was not really a holyday in France, and Selena had plans with her family.

And then, there was the part of the guest list that Harry was little to not at all excited about: Tyler.

“I don’t think it is unreasonable to question the necessity of inviting your ex to go away with us!” he complained.

“He’s not my ex, you know that.” I replied. “Besides, I have plans!”

My plans were simple: Tyler was single. Anna (Kendrick) was single. We were all friends since we worked with Anna for Heathers. They both continued on the cast after I left and had grown very much close since. They had thanksgiving off, so I called them to come with us, determined to play cupid and have them be together.

They questioned the style of the holyday, of course.

“Isn’t it gonna be weird?” Asked Anna. “A bunch of couples, and then the two of us?”

“No! Don’t worry about it!” I told her. “We’re all friends, it’s cool!”

And then there was Ophelia. I called to invite her for the trip knowing that as an Australian, she would neither be celebrating thanksgiving nor have time to make the long flight back home. The problem was that after she accepted the invitation, her next line was this:
“So, can I bring someone?”

“Sure thing!” I smiled. “Who’ you bringing?”

“Well, I’m glad you asked, actually. There’s something I’ve been meaning to tell you…”

“Okay?”

“I’m dating.” She said, excitedly. “Me and- me and Oscar are dating!”

I don’t know why I was so surprised, honestly. Especially after the way she looked when she talked about him. And, most worryingly, the way he looked at her at the Emmy’s. In my mind I quickly ran over all the things I should have said and explained, all the things I should have warned her about.

“Ophelia,” I said, in a sigh, “I thought we talked about this…”

“You told me to be with him if I had feelings, not if he just made me feel good about myself. Jen. I have feelings for him.”

“Ophelia, you’re eighteen!” I snapped. “You barely know what feelings are!”

She scoffed. “You did not just said that.”

“He’s thirty-four!”

“You really did not just said that.” She hissed. “Do I have to remind you of the guys you dated?!”

“NO!” I belted. “Which is the point! I remember it a bit too well, O. And I don’t want to see you go through that!”

“Oh, my God, Jen-“ She sighed. “I thought you’d be happy for me!”

“Happy for you?!” I scoffed. “I’m worried about you!”

“This is really none of your business!”

“I’m trying to protect you, Ophelia!”

“I don’t need you to protect me!”

“Well, clearly you do,” I said.

“You’re not my mother, you’re not my sister!” She shouted. “And you have no right to make me feel guilty about something that ultimately has nothing to do with you!”

Then she hanged up on me.

I texted her a few times, urging her to think this through, but she never got back to me. I didn’t call. And she didn’t call me. And at the end of the day, it only made me feel guiltier.

Because I had my four days off every month, and in that particular month there was a four days holyday, I decided to take my days right before thanksgiving and so I had a full eight days to be with Harry.

We arrived at the Monte Carlo Beach Club on a Monday, it was located on a private beach on
Saadiyat Island on Abu Dhabi. The other guests, for either work reasons or others, were arriving on Thursday, so Harry and I had four days just for ourselves, which we enjoyed unapologetically.

The Beach Club was not exactly a hotel. It was a one-store building with ridiculously high ceilings and the kind of architecture that made you wonder about the benefits and damages of capitalism. The beach where it was located was completely closed for outsiders, so even if the paparazzi managed to find us, we knew they wouldn’t be able to afford their way in. The place had two restaurants, one breakfast room, three bars, a gulf course and a big pool with group lounging areas around. Each with two double mattresses on a wooden structure with a fabric ceiling for shading. There were more beach chairs around the pool area, adorned with an uncanny number of palm trees, and a number more by the beach, where you could also find the cabanas, the only option for overnight stay at the club, with all the commodities from a hotel and the view of the sea.

We took separate flights, because the logistics were just easier, so when I arrived Harry was already in our Cabana.

I barely had time to close the door before his arms were on a close grip around me. We slammed the door after us and he made sure the Michael Kors pink floral skirt I was wearing went exactly where it had to: the floor. Kissing the parts of me that had been tingling just with the thought of him over the last month, his stubble sending chills all over me as he kissed my neck, pulling my head back by the grip his fingers had on my hair. I felt my legs weaken and tingle, and he crushed me against the bed faster than any of us thought was possible, making sure his lips never left me in the process.

My hands gripping his hair, I wrapped my legs around his, dropping my shoes on the floor. His hand reached under my underwear to hold my behind. I felt my nipples harden under the white crop top at having him so close to me after so long.

The word engraved on my mind: saudade.

His smell, the whiskey and male cologne, the lavender shampoo, that I had missed so bad.

I pulled his shirt up, his arms left me just long enough so that he could stand on his knees to throw it on the floor. He stopped himself before leaning back to me, smiling at me in my underwear and white crop top. His hands caressed my thighs around his hips and his eyes followed every inch of my body.

“Hi.” He smiled, and I giggled, realizing we had done all that and only now talked to each other. I bit my lips, unregretful.

“Hi.” I replied, sitting up to run my hands up his torso, to his chest and back down, letting my long nails scratch his skin every so slightly.

His head fell to my neck. “How was your flight?” He asked, in a whisper, striking my skin with his lips.

“A nightmare.” I replied, feeling his hands raising my crop top. “Drunk dude across the aisle kept hitting on me.” I raised my arms so he could pull my top out.

“I can’t blame him.” He said, staring at my breasts while his hands cupped my hardened nipples making me sigh in delight.

“Yours?” I attempted to ask, conversationally though my voice was no more than a whisper.

“Private.”
“Snob.” I teased.

I reached for his zipper, to open his jeans, and he stood up quickly to take them out, leaving me sitting with my legs opened. I stared at his erection biting a lip while I took my underwear off. His eyes hadn’t left mine when I laid back down and reach between my legs with my hands, feeling my own wet desire. I saw him gulp, his eyes getting darker, more animal, while he watched me.

He kneeled on the bed again and I wrapped my legs around his waist. His lips were noisy while he left a trail of kisses around my breasts, circling my nipples with his tongue as I felt my breath get heavier. His other hand reached down to massage me, gently circling my clit excruciatingly slowly. His lips went up my neck until my chin. His cock rubbed against my tingling labia and I tightened my hug around him, forcing him to crush himself against me. I glued our mouths together, letting his tongue fill mine as my hips danced on his, his hands unrestful on me, increasingly faster around my clit.

Finally, I heard his low moan as he entered me. My body made space for him and he filled me in a slow move. I felt my body light up and he begun to move out and in again. His thumb was still on my clit, his lips frozen on mine as none of us wanted to move. I thrust my hips up, bringing him in with my legs around him, the loud sound of my breath quickly becoming incomprehensible moans. He slammed himself against me, obeying when I begged for us to go faster.

His free hand held a grip of both of mine, holding them above my head as it became harder to recognize my weak, shaky voice as I cried out his name. I felt his smile against my skin, when his body hardened, going faster than any of us thought was possible. I felt him strike me and my legs numb in pleasure as the world stopped spinning for a moment when my voice failed as I reached climax before him.

His hand left my hands go and the other left my crotch to hold my bum, pulling me up. I let out a heavy breath I didn’t know I was holding, feeling his body still stiff around me as he thrust himself on me. I was still sensitive between my legs, and his moves sent new waves of pleasure down my legs. I moved my hips up and down again, hearing his response on a breathy suffering moan on my ear, his stumble striking my neck. I cried out, scratching his back, feeling myself coming again when he got faster.

“I can’t-” I said, feeling my clit throbbing with pleasure. “I, I- Harry!”

His hand caressed me again as he brought his thumb back to my clit. I bit my lips strongly, trying not to scream. He got faster, his moans got lower against my ear, and I felt the air escape when we came together.

We froze in place. I ran my hands up and down his back, trying to soothe the marks I might have left – again. My legs still had eventual spasms around him. He kissed my neck, slowly making his way to my lips. We let out a heavy sigh together, our breaths mingling in one another as we smiled.

Then I untangled my legs from him, and he laid beside me, his chest up and down dramatically as we calmed down together. I turned to the side and he opened an arm to hold my shoulders. I laid on his chest, laying a hand on his torso, and we drifted on to sleep - his heartbeat on my ear and a smile on our lips.

When we woke up, we dressed up and had dinner. We got drinks and walked along the beach, our feet on the water, holding hands in the big, wild, open, enjoying the lack of paparazzi and the necessity to stay away so the pictures would be worth less. Catching up on whatever had happened over the last month – retelling each other things we already had talked about over the phone, because somehow it felt more real to talk about it again in person.
On the next day we slept the jet lag off, woke up for lunch with the guys, and had one too many margaritas before going to soak up under the sun in the beach chairs by the shore.

On the third day, we played golf, and I had fun confusing Harry with how much I actually knew about it (just one of the things Richard thought I needed to know). We got in the car and drove to the city by night, to have dinner in the more urban setting, getting to know a bit more of the place.

On the fourth, I was lounging in the bed by the pool while Harry swam with Louis. Suddenly, I heard the noise of water when he emerged in a jump to climb into the little wooden deck.

“You’re gonna get red…” I warned him, resting my head over my arm and lowering my sunglasses to appreciate the sigh of his naked torso.

“At least it’ll match my hair.” He joked. “Why are you staring at me like that?”

“Just enjoying the view.” I winked.

“Don’t objectify me, Silva.” He teased, before coming closer to shake his hair so the water would drip on top of me.

I closed my eyes in the scare, but didn’t move. “I’d complain, but it’s actually very refreshing.”

“Yeah?” He grinned, playful. “Is this refreshing?”

He kneeled in the mattress and laid on top of me, the dripping water from his wet body cooling me from the heat. I smiled at his face up close when he supported himself on his elbows so his nose was touching mine, our legs intertwined.

“Yes, actually.” I replied, raising a knee by his side, and running a hand up his back. “That’s very refreshing. Thank you, Mr. Prince.”

He smiled leaning in to the only inch that separated us to place his lips very delicately on mine – though he didn’t move. He rubbed our lips together, sensually, for a long time, making me smile, until I finally decided to kiss him myself.

I pressed him harder on me during the kiss, and he impelled his crotch against mine.

“Now is actually getting hotter.” I teased, feeling his bulge.

“Yeah?” He asked, playful, leaning back, making me lean after him to keep our lips together. “We’re just…” He got up, I did too, kissing him again, “gonna have to…” I kissed him, and he wrapped his arms around my waist, lifting me up, “do something…” he walked us around, letting me kiss him deeper this time, “…about that.”

Then he jumped into the pool.

“You dick!” I slapped his chest when we emerged, laughing.

“Now you’re refreshed!” He argued.

But his body was still glued to mine, his well-defined muscles rubbing against my exposed skin in my Dolce and Gabbana bikini, and so nothing was really too fresh as mostly I just felt really hot. I couldn’t touch the floor, so he held me up with his arms around my waist. He walked us to the edge of the pool, spinning us around as he did, and leaned his body against mine.

“I’m really happy that we’re here.” I said, smiling, leaning in to touch his lips with mine.
Our tongues met when he hugged me tighter, and I raised my legs to wrap them around his waist, forcing his hips stronger into mine.

“I’m really happy that there’s no paparazzi around and we get to do this out in the open.” He whispered, tracing my cheek with his lips until my earlobe. “And that is the middle of the week so there aren’t many guests staying here as well…”

He gently nibbled with my earlobe, before kissing my neck.

“I’m happy that by the lack of paparazzi I don’t have to keep on covering my neck with makeup…”

He smiled, raising his head to look at me. “I’m happy about that too… Both because I don’t need to wear shirts buttoned up all the way and because I like to see my marks on your neck.”

I giggled, and he nipped my lower lip without closing his eyes, looking at me. “Like a dog peeimg to mark territory?” I asked, teasingly.

“No. Just as a reminder of what we were doing when I gave you them.” He smiled, before kissing me again.

I thrust my hips forward against his crotch, and felt against my skin more than I heard a small sigh leave his nose. My legs pressed harder against his butt, and I felt him getting harder as his hands traveled rapidly around my body, and fiddling under my bikini bottoms.

He leaned away. “Let’s go back to the room.”

“Or…” I smiled, teasingly, rubbing my crotch against his bulge. “Let’s stay.”

He smiled before touching me ear with his lips to whisper. “Don’t think for a second I’d have any problem doing you right here.”

I smiled, biting a lip.

“I don’t.” I assured, remembering we had technically done that once in the pool in Corsica. “But there are still people around… Not many, but a couple…”

“I don’t care.” He said, biting my neck, making me feel tingly.

“The ocean is a lot more private, in a way…” I suggested.

He looked at me, trying to judge if I meant it, so I just smiled playfully.

“Don’t try me, Silva.” He warned, before joining our lips again in another deep kiss. “I might just….” He paused, looking away. “I might just take you up on that.”

“I’m hoping you wil-“

Then, someone above me touched my shoulders from behind, in the ground outside of the pool.

“JENIFER CAN I HAVE A PICTURE!” I heard, sudden, from behind me, and screamed moving away from the edge of the pool as Harry laughed.

Taylor was kneeling, laughing her soundless laugh in the little wooden deck where she had just scared me shitless.

“What the fuck?!” I laughed.
“We were all the way over there when we walked outside from the restaurant,” she started, “and I said to these guys, how much do you want to bet that they are that couple making out in the pool like they’re in a porno?” She turned to look back, besides the beds, where the others were walking in now. “What did I tell you?”

“I thought you were only getting here tomorrow!” I said, as I swam back to where she was.

“We managed to leave a few hours earlier…” She said. “J, you remember Adam. And that’s Harry.”

Harry smiled at them, and then Tay’s tall, skinny, blonde boyfriend very solemnly bowed his head and whispered a quick ‘Your Royal Highness’.

“Oh, that’s not- you don’t have- just call me Harry.” He said, dismissively, and I looked at Taylor with a grin in my lips, who were biting her own to stop herself from laughing.

“Oh, nice,” Adam said, looking back at his girlfriend, “because someone said I should probably bow.”

Taylor started laughing now, with Anna and Tyler joining her having finally reached us.

“Okay, but can you blame me? It was so easy!” She justified, still laughing.

“I’m British, Taylor, we don’t joke about these things!” He said, and I realized, with some delay, his Scottish accent.

“Hey, babe.” Anna greeted, smiling.

“Heeey, babe!” I said, starting to swim around to the small stairwell out.

“Heeey, babes.” Tyler said, sarcastic.

“I’d hug you guys, but I’m all wet.” I said, grabbing a towel.

“This place is amazing…” Taylor said, looking out to the sea a few miles ahead of the pool, before looking back and finding Adam shirtless, “…and you already have your shirt off.”

“It’s too hot!”

“Yeah, let’s get to this pool already!” Ty agreed.

“Are you guys all checked in?” I asked.

“Yeah, though my reservation was canceled somehow.” Anna replied.

Harry cleaned his throat awkwardly, giving me a look before jumping out of the water up to the ground, but I ignored him.

“No!” I said, “now what?!”

“Oh, we fixed it.” She said, dismissively. “I’m bunking with Ty. The concierge said there’s a couch in the bungalows, right?”

“There is!” I told her. “Super comfy, too!”

“Yeah, we’ll just take turns sleeping in the bed. Should be fine.” Ty added.
“Apparently they only have, like, eight bungalows and no rooms!” She complained.

“That’s weird!”

Thing is, I already knew all of that. I had made sure our group was big enough exactly so that one of us – Anna! - would be left out. I did this counting on Tyler’s infinite kindness knowing that he would inevitably offer to share his cabana. My job now was practically done, as I knew from personal experience it was very hard to share a room with someone and not develop at least some kind of crush on them.

“Let’s go change to come back to the pool!” Adam suggested, so we grabbed our towels and followed them to where they were staying, chatting in the way.

“Hey, is it true they’re paying you ten million dollars for a book about your life?” Tyler asked.

“For now, yes, but it can change once the final product is done.”

“Why?” Asked Anna.

“They’re afraid because I refused to work with a ghost writer, so they don’t know how much I’m gonna write or what exactly, so they said they wanted to reserve themselves the right to negotiate down once they know what exactly is it that they’re buying…”

“Sounds strange Richard would let that happen.” Tay commented.

“Oh, he made sure that we can always negotiate up as well.” I explained.

“I’ve been meaning to tell you,” Anna smiled, “boss job on the UN speech!”

Tyler and Taylor agreed immediately.

“Crying is free!” Taylor quoted, and Anna joined her, “And so are we!”

“Thank you!” I smiled. “I was so nervous!”

“I still can’t believe the freaking U.N. made you their ambassador!” Tyler said. “Do they know about that time you were so drunk at Ashley Benson’s birthday party you puked in a decorative koi pond?!”

“Shut up!” I told him, laughing.

“Hey, are you really not going to walk the Victoria’s Secret this year?” Tay asked.

“No, sadly.” I sighed. “No time. Work is consuming all of my hours. And I’m barely even having fun anymore with all the tension…”

“Talking about tension, did you hear about Ophelia?” She asked, letting go of Adam’s hand to walk closer to me as we walked down the wood sidewalk to the beach.

“I did!” I expressed. “I invited her, but she wanted to bring him! What are we gonna do about that?!”

“I’m not sure there’s much we can do.” She shrugged. “I’m worried, but she is eighteen.”

“Are you serious?!”
“J, she’s not gonna listen.” She said. “You remember how you were when I told you David was a bad idea…”

“Yeah, and you were right. We can’t let her go down the same path!”

“I can’t help but feel you two might be overreacting to this…” Harry mumbled, and I rolled my eyes.

“Harry thinks Oscar might just be a nice guy!” I made the quotation marks in the air with my hands.

“Well, I mean, he might.” Tay pondered. “Unlikely, but hopefully he is. The point is she won’t listen to us. Just like I didn’t when it was me. Just like you didn’t when it was you. We’ll just have to be there for her if it goes badly.”

I made a pout, making a correction I didn’t want to have to.

“You mean when. When it inevitably goes badly.”

Chapter End Notes

Fun fact: ‘crying is free’ is definitely a real brazilian slang - expect it sounds funnier here. And there is indeed a brazilian singer who once said the line ‘I will not go back into the kitchen, and the gay people will not go back into the closet, and the black people will not go back into the slave ships; crying is free and so are we’. I MEAN HOW GREAT IS THAT LINE?! IT DESERVES TO BE IN A U.N. GENERAL ASSEMBLY SPEECH!
I’m so proud Jen is rising up and taking on political ambitions to try and help the world, how cute is that? <3

I just wanna say that I wrote this chapter almost a month ago, which is why more current events - like France - aren’t much mentioned. From here on, I’m really making up the future as I go.
Never Have I Ever

Chapter Summary

Jen, Harry and friends enjoy beach fun on Abu Dhabi. They play a dangerous game of Never Have I Ever and someone gets too drunk.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Abu Dhabi was hot, dry and absolutely beautiful – the little part of it that we actually knew. But that little part was good enough for all of us.

The private beach was long, clean, with white sand and crystal, greenish blue, vast waters. The sky was blue and cloudless and the smell of salt and sun block seemed to fill the world. The best part? No paparazzi. Not a single one. Not even far away with big camera lenses.

The beach club we were in only had a few cabanas for overnight stay, which our group filled completely, so any other guests around – the very few there in the middle of November – only arrived from mid-morning in, or even just for meals or to use the golf club. We had the luxurious lounging areas by the big pool and the chairs by the beach almost entirely just for us.

Taylor, her boyfriend Adam – also known as Calvin Harris -, Tyler and Anna arrived on Thursday morning. The brit part of our group – Kit, Bee, Jenna Coleman and Richard Madden – arrived that night. They were too tired and jet legged for any socializing, so we just said hello before they went to bed, deciding to catch up the next morning.

The breakfast restaurant at the Monte Carlo was composed of gray square tables and big chairs mostly outside, so we asked for a group table and ate together excitedly, catching up, getting to know each other and just generally laughing at one another.

“I heard they’re gonna make Heathers into a movie!” Bee said, excitedly, eating cheerios, “Will you be in it?”

I finished chewing my watermelon slowly, enjoying the look of suspense in her eyes.

“I can’t legally comment on that.” I told her, winking. She looked confused as Tyler laughed nearby.

“Well, are you on it?” she asked him, who took a deep breath before he took a big bite of his toast, starting to chew very slowly as he seemed to think of an answer.

Bee threw her hands in the air in frustration.

“I can translate them, I speak lawyer.” Said Richard, looking at her. “If they can’t talk, it means they have signed a contract. If there’s a contract, it means they’re in it.”

Bee smiled, happily, and I rolled my eyes at Richard. He was right, of course. Heathers was gonna be a movie musical and we would starting shooting in March, so the movie was already in pre-production. I was cast not long before we went to Abu Dhabi, but I knew the movie was happening
ever since I had left Broadway, as the director had let me know.

“You’re starting early…” Jenna commented, looking at the Piña Colada on my hand.

“I’m on vacation.” I justified, smiling.

“Not being on vacation never really stopped you before.” Tyler joked, and I gave him my tongue.

I tried to take everything he said on a lighter tone that trip, but I had this weird feeling on the pit of my stomach his snarky remarks were meant more aggressively than jokingly.

After breakfast, we decided to head down to the beach, so I let Harry walk ahead with Richard – talking about rugby – and stood behind to talk to Beezus.

“Hey. So. Sorry if this is super idiotic, but I honestly have no idea.” I started. “Can you, like, swim? With the…? You know.” I pointed at her oxygen tank, which that morning she carried on a leather mini backpack behind her back.

She smiled. “Yeah. Well, I take it out to go to the water, but keep it on when in the sand.” I nodded. “I don’t, like, instantly die without it or anything.”

“Good!” I smiled. “Sorry.”

“It’s fine…”

“Are you excited? For the beach?” I asked. “Isn’t it as beautiful as we thought it would be?”

“It is…” She said. “I’m happy to be here. A little overwhelmed, but happy.”

“Why overwhelmed?”

“Well…” She sighed. “It’s just that… I’m, you know… petit. And I look at you and Taylor and you’re like supermodels.”

“That’s ridiculous!” I smiled. “You’re beautiful!”

“Well… I feel really weird in this.” She pointed at her one-piece swimsuit.

“You don’t like bikinis?”

“I do, it’s just… it didn’t feel, I don’t know. They didn’t seem good enough.”

I stopped walking to look at her. “Do you want one borrowed? I have, like, tons.”

I took my fake job as her ‘fairy godmother’ very seriously – probably more seriously than I should – so when my mission became finding her a two-piece she would like and feel amazing in, I knew that was my bippity-boppity-boo moment. As a lover of fashion, I accepted that mission wholeheartedly.

Because I had had such an intense, stressful, hate-filled month, I had shamelessly over packed for Abu Dhabi, so I had not only my usual bikinis, but a lot more I bought the week before. This meant that I dropped a good twenty-five options for Bee to choose from in my bed that day.

She stared at them with her mouth dropped opened, a little shine of wonder in her eyes.

“Okay, so you’re quite petite.” I started, “I’d recommend these.”
“They’re… tiny.” She commented, blushing looking at a particularly small bikini bottom.

“Yes.” I agreed. “Too large will hide your body and make you look smaller, we want you to look larger. So anything strappy is good, as it’ll elongate you. And if you get one that shows your butt cheeks, it’ll make your butt look larger. Do you like prints? Colors? Because they would make your boobs seem bigger…”

“Uh…” She sighed. “I kind of prefer plain colors.”

“Okay, that’s fine.” I said, realizing a flattering two-piece would be useless if she didn’t feel comfortable and confident. “Then not these…” I took some bikinis away. “Alright, so I’d say my recommendations would be this. And this. Maybe this one? Why don’t you try it?”

Bee tried on a colorful 3D print one, that I thought made her boobs look bigger, but she thought the modern design looked like underwear, so she tried the galaxy print one, that I thought was too dark and simple.

She stepped out from the bathroom in a hot pink push up one and she was already pouting.

“It’s too…” She started, staring at the full body mirror, “Legally Blonde?”

“Oh?” I gave her a look. “Excuse me? I was in Legally Blonde The Musical, you know?”

Her cheeks blushed. “Of course. Yes. It’s a great movie. And musical! I just… am not so…? You know, out there?”

I smiled at her embarrassment, “Okay. Well, we’ll find something.” She turned to stare in the mirror again. “How are things going? With Kit, I mean. We didn’t exactly had much time to girl-talk last month as the boys were around all the time…”

She smiled. “Yeah. We should go out for coffee next time you’re in London. Though coffee is a strong word, the brits don’t put as much passion into their coffee as they do into tea.”

I laughed. “Are you adapting well? To life as a celebrity’s girlfriend?”

I realized, only now, Beezus was really shy. Much like Kate when she was still dating Will, I imagined Bee couldn’t be having the best time having her personal life thrown to the public for profit.

“Well…” She sighed, biting her lip, “The paparazzi are weird. It feels weird that people want to take pictures of us just, you know… leaving the house. Or arriving at a hotel. Like, I get the reason for red carpet pictures. But what is so great about seeing two people walking, you know?”

I smiled. “Trust me, I know.”

She giggled. “Of course. And, uh… I don’t know. I like wearing pretty dresses and traveling with him…” she turned to walk back to where I was, by the bed checking out more bikinis. “It bugs me how girls just throw themselves at him, though. And I have to sit back and watch like it doesn’t make me feel like I’m invisible.”

I slowly took my eyes from the two-pieces to look at her, realizing a deeper problem here. “Yeah… that can’t be easy… Does that happen a lot?”

“You’d be surprised.” She mumbled, picking an orange piece before looking at me. “Or maybe not, actually.” She laughed. “I just try to focus on how lucky I am, you know? I mean, all those
girls, those tall, attractive girls, even a lot of famous girls… and he chose me.” She smiled.

“Beezus…” I started, realizing how problematic her comforting thought actually was. “I hope you know that, though I do think it’s important to remember that Kit chose you and therefore you should not worry about those other girls, you are amazing.” She looked down at her hands, hiding a smile. “You are pretty, smart, witty, and adorable. And Kit would be idiotic not to know it.”

“Thank you.” She smiled.

“I know it’s hard. Dating men everyone knows… I mean, Harry was elected best facial hair, because apparently that’s a thing, and my twitter mentions flooded with people talking about us. About him like he’s public property, you know? Completely disrespectful.”

“Yes!” She agreed, enthusiastically. “I mean, I like when people appreciate him, because I agree, he’s hot-“

“Exactly!” I agreed.

“But is like they don’t see that we are actual people.”

“Yes.” I nodded. “But we need to just trust that both Kit and Harry are adults who made a commitment of being in a monogamous relationship with us and that they will know how to handle themselves to respect that.” I sighed. “I mean, sure, there’s always the possibility they might end up being dicks who cheat on us. But we know them. We know what kind of men they are, and we know they wouldn’t. Right?”

“Right.” She nodded.

“So, we just have to trust.” I shrugged. “I guess that’s love right there. Giving someone the power to hurt you and just hoping they won’t.”

She sighed. “That’s deep.”

I giggled, before turning to her and holding her shoulders so she’d look at me. “But it’s even more important to find confidence in the fact that he is just as lucky to have you as you, him.” I told her, serious.

She nodded. “Okay.”

“Good.” I smiled, and turned to the bikinis again.

“That one is cute.” She said, picking a pink, crochet one, with thin straps around the waist.

“That is perfect!” I said. “The thick material will make your boobs look bigger and the little bottom will do the same for your butt.”

She tried it on, and looked at the mirror for a long time before smiling at me.

“I kind of like it.” She said. “It makes me feel naked, but I like it, in a weird way.”

“You look great!” I said. “Remember, it’s all in the confidence. Always walk like you know what you’re doing. Like you know you’re the best thing around.”

“What if I don’t?” She asked, as we grabbed our things to head back to the beach to meet the others.
“Fake it until you make it, kiddo.” I told her.

“You’re really good at all this stuff.” She commented. “Love advice, fashion advice, body confidence and stuff… You should write a book.”

I smiled.

When we reached the others by the beach, I ran up to Harry, who stood with his feet in the water talking to Kit.

I wrapped my arms around his waist by the back and he looked at me, smiling.

“Where’s Beezus?” Kit asked, and I pointed at her in the sand. Kit got really serious for a moment, his dark eyes getting darker as he stared at her in lust. I fought a smile of pride.

“What is she wearing?” He asked.

“A bikini I lent her.”

“Thank you.” He said, soft, still not moving.

“You look nice yourself.” Harry commented, pulling me by the hand to stand in front of him.

“Thank you.” I smiled, spinning, showing off my bikini. “Do you like it?”

He grabbed my hips, quickly pulling me into a hug.

“It’ll do.” He teased, before leaning in to speak in my ear. “We never finished that conversation about the privacy of the sea, did we?”

Kit gave us an uncomfortable look. “Well, see you guys later.” He said, taking off to go find his girlfriend.

I bit my lip, smiley, before pushing Harry away and walking back blindly into the sea, giving Harry some meaningful looks.

He let me get far before running after me so suddenly I yelled, laughing. He chased me into the sea until the water was on my thighs, when he grabbed me and dove us both into it. We laughed, emerging, and kept walking until the water was over my belly button, when I turned to splash him in the face.

He smiled. “You do not want to start this war, Silva.” He warned, sustaining an intense look for a long pause before throwing so much water in me I dove in again just to escape.

I swam to him, pinching his legs and groping his dick before emerging right in front of him, who wrapped me in his arms again, locking mine down as they were.

“My arm is stuck,” I said, running a hand over his crotch above his shorts, “I guess I’ll just have to keep it here.”

He smiled, leaning down to kiss me strongly.

He moved his arms to grab my buttocks and brought me up to sit on his lap, wrapping my legs around him.

I held his neck, and ran my hands through his wet hair.
“You know what this reminds me off?” I asked. “The pier.”

“On your parents’ house?” I nodded, making him smile. “Yeah. That was a good day.”

I touched his forehead with mine, watching the way his beard shone under the sun with water dripping from it.

“I should have kissed you.” He added, staring at me with his piercing blue eyes.

I remembered that day, and how desperately I had wanted to escape my own demons right before he jumped into the water with me in his arms. When we emerged, his eyes had been so blue on mine and his muscles so strongly attached around me it had been hard to remember what I had been just worried about. I had felt our legs intertwining under water, and how he stared at my lips for a long time making my skin burn.

I leaned down and kissed him, like I should have done in the pier so long ago, with our lips dancing together and my tongue exploring his. I felt my skin burn just as that day despite the cold water.

“Hey!” Taylor shouted, closely. We broke away and I noticed she and Bee were walking into the water not far from us. “This is still a child-friendly beach, you guys!” She teased. “Let’s keep it under PG!”

We smiled, and I unhooked my legs from him. “We’ll come back tonight,” I promised Harry, in whisper, “when everyone’s gone to bed.”

He winked, unwrapping his arms from me.

We swam with the girls for a while, and I taught Harry a trick so we could impress them. He was to hold my feet and basically impulse me up and backwards, so I could try and do a back flip in the air before falling back into the water.

Took us a couple of tries, but we did it. Then, much like the kids in the polo game, Taylor decided it was her turn.

“It’s all in the arms!” I told her. “You have to bend your knees, and then throw your arms back as strongly as you can and pull your knees back, too.”

Harry turned to look at Bee, annoyed. “It’s just a jump.” He said, pointing at us.

“Excuse me, I’d like to see you do it.” I told him.

“Oh, uh. No.” He shrugged. “I’m the muscle.”

We laughed.

“Yeah, I thought so.”

So he threw Taylor in the air, though she ended up falling flat in the water, with a splash, making us laugh. Then we insisted it was Bee’s turn.

“Oh, no thank you!” She smiled, declining. “My lungs are having enough excitement for one day.”

It was hard arguing with that, so we just walked back into the sand to be with the others.

Jenna was laying on a towel with Richard by her side; Adam and Kit were sitting in the beach chairs set up in pairs between sun umbrellas. Tyler and Anna were running nearby, as he tried to hit
her with a volleyball as she ran away laughing - some weird catch game that looked more cute than fun.

I smiled; My plan was working perfectly.

I found my bag and we set out our own towels by the others; Harry sat behind me and I laid on him for support between his legs, after bathing him in sun block FPS 50. When I sat, he sprayed me, massaging my back a little too slowly.

I thought we were being a little too handsy, but then Harry pinched me to look right.

“Come up for air you two!” he called, smiling at Bee and Kit who had been shamelessly making out in their own beach chair.

Beezus blushed furiously while she put her cannula back on.

“Oh, so now you need help breathing, huh?” I joked, making them laugh while I watched her cheeks get even redder.

A club waiter came around with drinks for us, and I happily grabbed my margarita.

Taylor and Adam had been having their own conversation on their side, and suddenly they decided to bring a topic into the group, just as Anna and Ty came back around to sit by us.

“Who do you guys think will be the first couple out of all of us to get married?” asked Taylor, curiously.

I felt the topic was maybe a little much, but in a split second I had a very clear answer in mind, so I just pointed at Beezus and Kit – as did everyone else.

Beezus seemed shocked. “What?”

“Look at you two!” said Richard, pointedly, “You’ve been dating for over a year now and you’re still so wrapped up in one another.”

I saw her cheeks getting some color again.

“I think the fact that he can still make you blush is adorable.” I said, sipping my drink.

“You think everything she does is adorable.” Kit replied, to which I merely shrugged, unapologetically.

“You’re no better.” Jenna accused.

“Me?” he demanded.

“You practically molest her every chance you get.” She returned, making us chuckle.

“I will not apologize for having a hot girlfriend.” He said, smartly, “And Jen and Harry make-out way more than we do.”

“Point.” Bee agreed, and we felt everyone’s eyes on us. Harry’s arms were wrapped around my bare stomach.

“I will not apologize for having a hot boyfriend.” I grinned, shrugging. I avoided Tyler’s look, wondering if we had been a little too out there with our relationship.
“But when they do it, its dry humping,” said Taylor, “you two are just so cute about it all.”

Harry and I immediately raised our hands in outraged protest.

“Excuse me!”

“We are very classy!”

Adam ignored us. “Yeah, you two will definitely be the first of us to get married.”

“You guys are crazy.” Bee dismissed.

“Forget about marriage,” said Richard, “who is going to have the most kids?”

“Jen.” Everyone said together.

I felt my face freeze in shock at the sound of my name, and may or may not have choked half of my drink back. Harry was merely laughing behind me.

“Seriously?” I demanded.

“You always talk about the picket fence and the five kids you wanna have…” Taylor pondered.

“I never- I don’t-“ I took in a deep breath. “I never actually said five.”

They giggled.

“I can totally see you with a mini-van, all soccer mom, pushing your half-Brazilian cute babies around.” Said Adam.

“Just think of those babies, though.” Anna said. “Cute little ginger babies with golden brown eyes…”

“Okay!” I protested, but Harry was still smiling.

Then the subject became who would be the king and queen of prom if we were all together in a high school (Adam and Taylor, who are the poster children of popular clicks), and who would die first in a horror movie.

“Me, for obvious reasons.” Said Bee, knocking on her oxygen tank. “I couldn’t run for my life, literally.”

“I’d carry you.” Kit added.

We began to mock his over-romantic answer with ‘ugh’s when Bee herself replied.

“We’d still be an easy target!”

“Adam would literally just complain so much the murderer would give up and leave.” Taylor joked, making us laugh, and her boyfriend roll his eyes.

“I’m Scottish.” He argued. “Complaining is seventy percent of my personality!”

“Tyler is that dude who never believes there’s something spooky going on.” Anna chipped in, looking really cool in her black and white stripped bikini, laying a few feet from us, sharing a towel with Tyler. Than she mimicked his voice, “There’s no such things as demons, guys. Don’t be
childish, Josh, it’s probably just the wind. Boom! Dead.”

We giggled.

“You would just try to kill the murderer with sarcasm, wouldn’t you?” He asked her, who merely smiled.

“Oh, I have one!” Jenna raised her arm, excitedly. “Jen and Harry are that couple who’s always having sex at really inappropriate times and, or places and get a really stupid death.”

They all laughed, but we were left mildly offended again.

“I ran a marathon once!” I complained, fighting a smile. “I can run from a monster!”

“I was in the war!” Harry returned, outraged but almost laughing, making us laugh with him.

The conversations went on like that, and so the day passed and we barely saw it.

By night, we went and showered and met at the restaurant for dinner, where we sat down long after the food was done just drinking and talking, before we moved from the tables to the lounging area by the pool and sat on the big, comfy couches in a circle.

Richard decided to order a bunch of shots of tequila, telling the waiter to leave the bottles, and quickly suggested we play never-have-I-ever.

“That game is dangerous!” Tay complained.

“Yeah, but it’s the easiest way of getting to know people!” Rich argued.

I sat with Harry’s arms around me, with Tyler sitting exactly across from us. We all took a shot before we started, to get it going, and to think of something.

“I’ll start!” Said Beezus, raising some eyebrows. “Never have I ever… dated someone in a reality show.”

She gave me a sharp look, that I returned with a smile.

“Okay… Listen, he wasn’t technically in a reality show!”

“Who?!” Asked Anna.

“Jen dated Brody Jenner.” Tyler told her.

“Barely,” I explained, knowing her reality-loving self would freak out. “For like, just a couple of months.”

“It was enough to get her on Keeping Up With The Kardashians!” Bee told her and they exchanged excited squeals.

“Okay, but then again, he wasn’t technically on that-“

“Just drink!” Kit shouted.

“Drink, drink, drink!” They chanted.

“Wasn’t he on The Hills for a long time?” Tay asked.
“Damn it, Taylor.” I said, before taking my shot, to which they cheered.

We played a number of rounds, from basic to expert levels, and everyone started to get their own kind of little tipsy.

“Never have I ever done drugs!” Taylor said, with a smile, and we all, but her, took a shot.

“Really?” Kit asked, interested, giving Bee a funny look.

“Never have I ever…” started Adam. “Dated an actress and or actor.” He smiled, smug, and we all complained as we took a shot.

“Never have I ever dated a musician.” Returned Jenna, and he drank this time, as did Tay, Anna and me.

“I don’t think musical theater counts, love.” Harry teased, and I saw at the corner of my eyes Tyler give him a sharp look.

“I dated a musician in college!” I reminded him, drinking.

“Never have I ever had a threesome.” Said Beezus, on her turn.

Adam got his glass to drink, as did me and Harry. We looked at each other, eyebrows raised and playful grins on our lips.

“Really?!” we asked at the same time.

“I would love to hear that story…” I said, before downing the tequila.

“Never have I ever…” Kit took in a deep breath, with a worryingly smile on his face, “been caught in public wearing nothing but a coat.”

Everyone looked at him, confused.

“That was weirdly specific.” Tay noticed, and I stared at my hands. I saw Harry’s cheeks reddening.

“Okay, no one?” Richard asked, “My turn.”

“Wait!” Urged Kit. “Give it time…”

They looked around again, and I risked looking at Kit, who winked with a guilty-looking Beezus at his side.

“Goddamn it, Harington!” I shouted, before taking the shot as fast as I could.

“What?!” The group shouted, before breaking in laughter.

“I need to know that story!” Laughed Anna.

“Is there anything you two haven’t done?!” Adam asked.

It took the group only a conniving look to each other to decide to find out exactly what Harry and I had been up to, by asking specific questions just to watch what we did.

Jenna thought for a long time before speaking. “Never have I ever done it in public.”
Everyone looked at us, teasingly, to see who would drink. Then Anna got a glass.

“Don’t judge me.” She said, to our laughter.

“We’ll have to take care of that…” Kit told Bee when she didn’t drink, making her blush.

Harry leaned in to ask in a whisper on my ear.

“Does the pool in Corsica count?”

I smiled, blushing, before asking the group:

“Define public.”

They looked at us attentively, seeing where this was going.

“Somewhere outside where strangers could have very possibly seen you.” Taylor said.

Harry and I reached for a glass at the same time, drinking together, trying to keep our cheeks from blushing as the others teased us.

“Never have I ever slept with someone on the first date.” Beezus said, and I gladly took my shot, before whispering in Harry’s ear that technically we did it on the first date.

“Oh, that’s right.” He said, before drinking.

“Never have I ever done BDSM.” Taylor offered.

We sighed, together, remembering the handcuffs on the ship, and we took a shot. They laughed.

The tequila was over, so Richard called another waiter.

“I’m getting a headache.” Anna complained, of the level of alcohol in her system.

“I can do this all night.” Harry replied, with a grin.

“I’m sure you can.” Jenna said. “And I’m sure the list of things you would drink to would be very long.”

I picked the pillow behind my back and threw it at Kit, suddenly, right in his face.

“I can’t believe you outted me, Harington!” I told him, dramatic. “This was supposed to be our secret!”

“Hey, don’t hate the player!” He said, “Hate the game!”

“Okay, you wanna play a game?” I said, turning to my side to look at him right. “Hey, Richard.”

“Yeah?”

“You remember that party in Venice Beach, right?”

“Wait!” Kit protested.

“When we were doing promo for Thrones in L.A.? Kit was all smug and snobbish throwing his pretty hair around at people-“
“Oh, the twins!” Richard agreed, with a smile.

“Suddenly,” I tell the group, “there’s these blonde twin girls who are almost throwing themselves at him!”

“Listen,” Kit tried. Bee had a funny smile on her face watching his reaction.

“I’m talking hardcore fan girl, alright?” I continued. “At the level of wearing a really big cleavage and asking for an autograph on their boobs!”

Kit looked at Beezus. “They weren’t that pretty, really.”

“Please!” I said. “They were hot. Even I’d bang them!” Harry gave me a funny smile. “Then, they turn to Kit and go,” I made a really affected voice tone, “I bet it’s super uncomfortable having to sleep in hotel rooms all the time… you can come stay with us if you’d like.”

“Both of them?!” Asked Adam.

“Kit looks at them,” I continued, “paler than he already is, mouth dropped opened, he says…” I looked at the wall ahead like an idiot, mimicking Kit’s expression, “uuuuuuuhhhhhhhhh-“ they laughed, as I kept going for a long time.

“Okay, but listen,” He tried to say.

“Sssshhh!” the others said.

“Finally!” I said, shouting amongst the laughter now, “He finally coughs, after Richard slaps his shoulder, and goes… It’s okay. I like hotels. I like the little chocolate under my pillows.”

The group explodes in laughter, Bee included, while Kit buries his face between his knees.

“Aw, it’s okay, honey,” Said Beezus. “We all get nervous sometimes.”

“Listen, okay. Throw the first rock if you’ve never been a little overwhelmed by the opposite sex!” He defended himself.

“Alright, hand me a rock.” I said, making the others laugh.

“Oh, please.” Said Tyler.

“What?” I asked.

“Oh.” He laughed. “You don’t remember? That place in Soho, what was it? 2010? That male model guy, what’s-his-name. Jen’s weakness is male models.” He explained to the group, to the displeasure of Harry who clenched his jaw a little. “Wasn’t he in your video?” He asked Taylor.

She gave him a shocked look. “No!”

“Yes, I think that was him. Sean, is it?”

“What?!” She shouted, looking at me. “You banged Sean O’Pry? Why didn’t you tell me?! He’s like, the highest paid male model in the world!”

“…I don’t… I just…” I stuttered.

“We’re at this party, and Jenifer is hammered, as usual,” Tyler said, and I noticed he was the one a
little hammered. “This guy Sean comes up to talk to her and she forgets how to speak English!”

“That’s not how it happened!” I argued.

“She literally started speaking Portuguese to him!” Tyler said, and the others laughed. “And she’s shaking and the guy finally gives up and just asks if he could give her his number. So she hands him this pen, and next thing you know, Jen is waking up the morning after with a bunch of numbers on her face and the worlds ‘call me!’ in her forehead in waterproof eyeliner, which was the pen she gave him.”

They laughed.

“Why in your face?!” Richard asked.

“I don’t know, man…” I sighed.

“I do!” Tyler offered, “She tried to tell him to sign her boobs, but she was wearing this closed up shirt, so he couldn’t. So she just pointed to her head instead!” They laughed more.

“Wait, so you didn’t bang him?” Tay asked.

“Technically I did.” I said, and Harry gave me a weird look. “Like, the week after that.”

They applauded now.

“You have to have a lot of game to sleep with the guy after all of that.” Jenna said.

Anna scoffed. “Please, it’s a guy. If she has boobs and a vagina, that’s game enough.”

“He said he thought I was funny.” I remembered.

Rich laughed. “That means he thought you were hot.”

“That’s why he said he knew you when we were shooting…” Tay recalled.

“He did?!”

“Yeah, I just thought you knew him from your modeling days…”

“Okay, let’s get back to business.” Richard called, filling our glasses with more tequila.

“I have one!” Tyler said, a little too loudly. “Never have I ever slept with someone twice my age!” he laughed, inebriated – and alone.

I felt my own smile disappear from my lips. It wasn’t just the dare itself, but the fact I knew from the sharp look in his eyes, and the level of drunkenness in him – way unusual, since he usually was really good at holding his liquor – that he was purposely trying to be hurtful.

No one touched their glasses at this, until Taylor sighed before leaning in.

“Well…” She shrugged, drinking. “Not quite twice, but I’ll round up.”

I sighed, and made a move to get my glass, when I saw that Harry followed me to get his.

I looked at him in interest.

“Really?!” I asked, feeling my smile come back into place.
“I had a life before I knew you.” He teased, winking, making me giggle.

He was lying, of course, only drinking to make me feel less weird about it. And I liked it.

“Cheers!” We said, as we drank together, laughing.

“Never have I ever…” started Anna, before Tyler interrupted her.

“Never have I ever,” he said, dramatic, “slept with a best friend!”

Then he grabbed his glass, raised it up in a toast and gave me a sharp look before drinking.

Anna, Tay, Kit, Beezus and Richard reached for their glasses to drink, complaining about how either the idea of sleeping with a friend was a trap, or how unfair the line was, since that’s how they got together with their current significant others. I wasn’t sure if they were being polite enough to ignore the sharpness of Tyler’s words, if they honestly didn’t know that he was referring to us, or if they were just too drunk themselves to notice anything was wrong. I chose to believe the latter.

“We were best friends too before we got together.” Harry said, reassuringly, squeezing my shoulder warmly, and giving me a happy excuse to drink. We toasted before we did, smiling at each other.

Then, as Kit talked again, I decided it was time to fix the problem before it caused any more animosity.

“I think I’ll take Tyler back to his room.” I told Harry, in a whisper.

“Do you want me to do it?” I gave him a sarcastic look. “Right. Probably not a good idea.”

“I’ll be right back.” I said. “It’s not a big deal, he’s just drunk.”

Harry gave me a reassuring smile, though an uncomfortable one, and I got up, excusing myself from the game.

“Boo!” The group teased, together.

“Sorry, I’ll be right back. I just need to go take care of a special project.” I said, “Ty, you wanna help me?”

He looked at me. “Sure. Special project.” He got up. “Do I need tequila for this special project?”

“I think you’ve had enough tequila for tonight.” I said, and he walked with me.

He followed me out of the lounging area, and we took the wooden path to the beach part where the cabanas stayed.

As we walked, maybe the air and the exercise made him a little more sober, which was better.

“The concierge said there’s turtles here…” He mumbled as we walked. “Do you think we’ll get to see them before we leave?”

“Maybe.” I said. “Hopefully.”

“I like turtles.” He added, and I smiled. Not fully sober, then.

“Me too, buddy. And I like the sky tonight, too. Isn’t it pretty?”
We walked out of the pathway, into the sand and stopped just by the cabanas looking up.

“The stars are pretty.” He said, before looking at me. “…you’re pretty.”

I giggled, and turned to keep walking to his cabana.

Tyler held my arm, gently but strongly, and pulled me back so I’d turn to him.

Then he kissed me.

Chapter End Notes

Listen I know this is a crappy way to end it, but I PROMISE next chapter is worth it ok????

Oh, Tyler… Why? Why?! WHY?! Somebody needs to tell that man to let it fucking GO!!! Speaking of Tyler, important question: Would you be interested in reading a short, spin off story about him? If so, I’d be writing one with @teaenthusiast65 – to be posted after February or March. We would write flashbacks of when he met Jen, when they became friends and how he fell in love with her – also how everything went down when they slept together. This as also telling the story of how he finally meets someone who makes him let go of Jen.

This girl is called Stacey Cooper-Havensburg, she’s the daughter of retired 80s country singer Cathy Cooper with her musical producer Andrew Havensburg. Her parents want her to be a musician, and though she loves music and is quite talented, she doesn’t want to go into music if its just because of her parents’ influence, so she lies and tells them she’s not interested and creates a secret Youtube account where she posts song covers without showing her face. She’s just getting pretty internet-famous when she meets Tyler. They hate each other at first sight because she thinks he’s pretentious and that The Mediator is not that good, and he thinks she’s too entitled for someone who’s living off her mother’s fame, but quickly grow to know more about each other. He helps her stand up for her parents and she helps him forget Jen – in more ways than one, if you know what I mean ;) Would that be something you would like to read? Let me know!

Anyway. Thanks for reading, as always! Let me know what you think of this chapter, I always love reading your messages! Suggestions, thoughts, whatever =D Also, please like this chapter so I know you’re reading? Thank you so much and see you next week!
We Will Never Be Royals

There was a time in the past when Tyler Alvin was my best friend. There was a time I looked for him in a crowd of people to share a soundless joke, when I knew his routine, his movements, his thoughts without the need of one word. There was a time his smile calmed the turmoil of stress inside of me and his hand fit mine like the pieces in a perfect puzzle. There was a time in my life when nothing made sense, when breathing hurt and standing up was the biggest accomplishment I wanted to count on.

In that time, Tyler had the arms that kept my broken pieces together when he hugged me. In that time, we walked by the beach in the little town in northern California where we shot our show every day after work. He knew that if I went straight home I’d just hug my pillow and wonder how long would it take to feel okay again.

It was in one of those walks by the beach more than three years ago that Tyler held my arm and kissed me mid-laugh. Three years later, in late 2015, we were also walking by a beach – though in a different part of the world – when he, again, held my arm and kissed me.

In 2012, the touch of his lips on mine had sent a wave of warmth down my body that I hadn’t felt since David. It wasn’t the first time Tyler’s lips touched mine, nor the last, as we worked together. Our characters had kissed many times before and they still did many times after. But that was the first time his lips touched mine without a camera crew around and, without someone yelling ‘cut’, we just didn’t stop. His arms wrapped around my waist as I made the snap decision of not thinking about it. I ran my hand through his hair and told him to take me home and, like he always did, he pushed the pain away.

In 2015, his lips caused me shock. In fact, his lips caused me such shock I froze in place with my eyes opened staring at the way his eyes shut closed with the intensiveness of the act. I felt his arms tighten around me and his tongue fill my mouth before I even accepted the fact that it was happening.

I remembered the old days, when Tyler used to bring me such joy, and for a brief moment, his lips actually felt soft. My insides almost felt warm instead of twisted and nauseated. I almost remembered the best friend I used to love.

“What are you doing?!” I shouted, pushing him away. The whole thing couldn’t have lasted much more than five seconds.

“I…” He started. His arms let me go and I took a step back, but his hands still lingered on my arms, and he held my hands. “I…”

He seemed more sober now, though still very confused. He sighed, right before taking another step closer and trying to kiss me again.

“Tyler!” I shouted, stepping away again. “What is wrong with you?!”

“Hey!” Eddy called out, running towards us from nearby. “Do we have a problem here?”

“Jen, listen.” Tyler said. I raised a hand to signal to Eddy to stay where he was.

Tyler took another step on my direction and I took a step back. I saw the pain in his eyes when I walked away from him.
There was a long pause as he ran his hands through his hair and I looked around, distressed, trying to understand what I was supposed to do now.

We were alone in the beach, with Eddy not five feet from us, and the smell of salt reminded me of the fun day we had, making my heart hurt at the thought of how quickly everything fell apart.

“I’m… I just… I don’t-“ He sighed. He bit his lip, looking at the ground, shaking his head.

“Ty…” I started. “It’s been three years.”

He scoffed, bitterly, “You don’t think I know that?! You don’t think I know exactly how many days have gone by since we slept together?!”

“Tyler, please.”

“You don’t think I tried letting this go? You don’t think I tried moving on from you? You don’t think I want this to stop?!“ I felt my heart constrict and my eyes water. “Do you realize-“

He stopped, taking in a sharp breath.

“Do you think, what? That this is easy?” he went on. “Do you even know how hard it is for me to stand here, after I’ve dated girl after girl trying to tell myself every day that we are not meant to be, and just watch you make out with your boyfriend in front of everybody-!”

“Do you know how hard it is for me?” I shouted. “Do you think you’re the only one that was left heartbroken after everything went to shit with us?!” he scoffed again, angry. “No, you don’t. You were my best friend, Ty. Most days you were the only person who kept me sane!”

“Well, now you have someone else for that.” He ironized.

“Yes, I do! And thank God I do, because you left!” my voice broke as the tears streamed down my face. I took a deep breath, trying to make them stop, but my chest only hurt. “You left me and you basically accused me of ruining you, do you think that was good for me? Do you think I was okay with that? I lost my boyfriend and best friend in less than four months, do you have any idea how much I hated that?! So, yeah, it’s a good thing I found other people to rely on. And that I learned to rely on myself, because you weren’t there!”

He cleared a tear from his own eye, staring off into the sea.

“Why are you doing this to me?” I asked, in a whisper.

“I’m not- I don’t-“

“You know I have a boyfriend. You know I’m happy. Why…? Why are you trying to ruin this for me?”

“I’m not!” he took another step on my direction. I walked away again. “Jen, please, you have to understand. I don’t… I’m just trying to make sense of-“ he sighed, and paused for a long time. “I’m sorry. I am. I am going to… I’m gonna take a plane in the morning.”

I looked at him, realizing we were in the same place as three years before. He was running away from me.

“I’m sorry.” He repeated, before walking away to his cabana.

I stood with my feet on the water until he walked away. I wasn’t sure how long had passed after he
was into his own cabana. I wanted to move, to go back to the others, to go back to the game. But I just couldn’t move.

“Hey.” Eddy said, walking towards me. “You alright, kiddo?”

I felt my tears fall down my cheek again, and shook my head negatively. I felt his hand on my shoulder and turned back to lean my head on his chest. He held me awkwardly, but I appreciated the intention. Eddy let me cry on his chest for a little while, and then I dried my tears to try and act normal walking back.

We ran into the others making their way back to the cabanas before we were even in the wooden pathway. They had stopped to look at some turtle eggs someone had found, and I saw Richard step away suddenly, pulling Jenna with him in the direction of their cabana. She and Anna were laughing at him.

“Why are you afraid of turtles?” Anna asked.

“They have that shell! What are they hiding? I don’t trust that!”

They laughed walking towards the beach before they saw me.

“Hey, you! Is Tyler gonna survive?” Jenna joked.

“Yeah.” I tried a smile. “He should be fine in the morning… Is the game over?”

“We’re all super beat.” Anna told me. “We’ll play more tomorrow…”

“Goodnight, J!” Rich shouted, supporting himself with an arm around his girlfriend’s shoulders as they kept on walking.

The others bid me goodnight too, as they walked by with tipsy smiles on their faces, before Harry finally reached me.

“Are you okay?” He asked, looking concerned. I imagined even a little drunk he could notice if I had been crying. I yelled at myself in my head, ‘you have an Oscar, damn it! Do better!’

I nodded, trying to smile again. “Let’s go to bed!” I held his hand, walking back to our place.

He wrapped and arm around my waist, bringing me closer to whisper in my ear. “What about that night swim we talked about?”

“Maybe tomorrow.”

“Are you sure?” He teased, bringing me ever closer to kiss my neck.

I pushed him out. “Yeah, let’s just go to bed, I’m tired.” I tried to smile, but Harry didn’t buy it. He stopped walking.

“Are you okay?”

I looked at him, serious now. “Yes, Harry. I’m fine. You don’t have to think there’s something wrong with me every time I don’t want to do it!”

“I don’t.” He said. “But you look… pale.”

“I’m fine.” I turned around, and just continued to walk back to our cabana without him.
I got pretty close before I turned to look at him. I wanted to tell him about Tyler, I just didn’t feel like doing after we had been drinking. When I turned, Harry was talking to Eddy. I saw Eddy walk away and Harry look preoccupied as he came to me.

I knew as a professional Eddy wouldn’t say anything. But I also knew Harry was not stupid.

“What happened with Tyler?” He asked.

“He kissed me.”

I tried reading his expression, with no luck. He nodded, looking away. And with a clearer head, I now could tell what even I was feeling: pretty damn mad.

“I mean, can you believe him?!” I asked. “It’s been three fucking years and he just kissed me, out of nowhere! I’m here trying to set him up with one of my best friends, and he’s still on this-”

“Did you kiss him?”

I looked at him. “What?”

“Tyler.” He gulped. “He kissed you. Did you kiss him?”

“Are you serious?”

“Yes, Jenifer. I would like to, please, know if you kissed your ex-boyfriend tonight. I don’t think it’s an unreasonable question when you just told me that you did kiss.”

“He kissed me!”

“You already said that-“

“Because that’s what happened!”

“Jenifer, did you kiss him back?!”

“Are you serious?!” I shouted, “After everything I’ve been through you think I would just go and cheat on someone else?! Are you for real right now?! I walked away, past him, pulling my arm away when he tried to hold me.

“Where are you going?!”

“I’m gonna go sleep with Beezus! And you, you-“ I sighed, turning to look at him as I walked away. “You can go fuck yourself!”

Beezus was taking a shower when I knocked in her door, but Kit opened it for me.

“What’s going on?” she asked, after she was done, walking out of the bathroom in her pajamas.

“I’m really sorry about this,” I started, “but do you guys mind if I sleep here?”

“What happened?” Kit asked, worried.

“Harry happened.” I said. “I know I’m being such a third wheel, but I really don’t want to be in the same room as him right now.”

“It’s fine!” Bee said, exchanging a quick look with Kit, who was fast to agree.
“Thanks… I’ll just take the couch, I’ll be fine.”

I sat on the big couch on the cabana’s small living room right before the bedroom, and Beezus came to sit by me.

“You know what? Why don’t you girls take the bed?” Kit offered. “I’ll sleep on the couch.”

“No, please don’t worry.”

“I insist!” he said. “Besides, it’s not like we’ll be using the bed with you here, anyway.” He joked, and I smiled as Bee rolled her eyes.

“Did he do something?” she asked, concerned.

“No.” I answered. “Well, it’s complicated. He just implied something.”

“Does he know he implied something bad?” Kit asked.

“Tyler kissed me.” I told them.

“Oh, shit.” He let out.

“I thought that was over? I mean, it was such a long time ago, right? That you two…” Bee asked.

“Yeah.” I shrugged. “And Harry had the nerve of asking if I kissed him back.”

“Sounds like a logical question…” Kit started, immediately shutting up when we gave him a sharp look. “…or not.”

“I mean, I’ve been cheated on before!” I complained. “And it almost killed me, I can’t believe he would think I would do that to someone… to him!” I sighed. “I’m in love with him!”

Bee passed an arm around me, holding me tight.

“Well… he doesn’t… know that.” Kit mumbled. We looked at him. “I mean, he’s not a mind reader.”

“How do you know that?” I asked.

“…he told me.” I shared a long look with him, who seemed pretty guilty for having said that.

“Come on, don’t act like you guys don’t talk about us!”

“Talk what?” Bee asked. “What is he talking about?”

“I don’t…” I started. “I can’t say that I love him.”

“So…” Kit went on. “I mean, I just think is maybe a little understandable why he would wonder where your… heart lies. Suddenly there’s some other guy, who used to be your best friend and who you slept with once, who kisses you? I mean, he must be wondering if he isn’t the one third-wheeling someone else’s love story …”

I thought about it. It was so obvious to me that Tyler was just a friendship gone wrong, could Harry really be thinking that there was more to it?!

I sighed. “I do.”

“Then why don’t you-?”

“I’ve been through some shit, B.” I said. “You know that, I told you about it. And… I try to. I really, really do. I feel it! It’s right here… I have this burning in my chest, in my throat and I want him to know, but… it just won’t come out. Every time I try I remember the last times I said it and how fucked up all those other relationships ended, and I just can’t…” I heard my own voice break as I started crying again. “I can’t bear the thought that this relationship might end like those… not this one. Just not this one. I can’t have this relationship end like that. It’s why I tried to keep it casual for so long, it’s why I tried to take it slow. I just wanted it to be easy when it inevitably ended.”

Bee pulled me closer in a hug, and I rested my head on her shoulders for a while.

“If it helps, he does think you love him.” Kit added.

We heard a knock on the door, and I quickly dried my tears.

“I’ll take it.” Bee said, standing up and going to open it.

“Hey…” I heard Harry’s voice and ducked into the couch some more. “Is Jen there?”

I heard Bee close the door after her when she stepped out.

“You know what I think?” Kit asked, coming to sit by my side. “I think we all drank a little too much tonight, and I think tomorrow you guys are gonna talk, and everything will be fine.”

We let the silence fill the room for a long while.

“Is it though?” I asked. “Sometimes I feel like we’re just waiting for the moment we’re gonna break up.”

Kit nodded. “That’s a possibility… But, why would you?” I gave him a sharp look. “No, I know… media, career, royalty… But, I mean… are those things really an issue now? Or are you just worrying about problems that more than likely will still take a long time to take place?”

He had a point.

“Do you really think he thinks I have feelings for Tyler?”

He sighed.

“You know in movies how there’s the girl, and then there’s the male best friend, and there’s the boyfriend? And everyone is rooting for the best friend, because he’s in love with her and everyone thinks he’s right for her, even though she’s in love with and in a relationship with this other guy that didn’t do anything wrong?” I nodded. “And then there’s other movies where there’s the boyfriend and girlfriend trying to make it work, but they have to survive the male best friend who is determined to ruin them… Maybe Harry is just wondering what type of movie he’s in, you know? What character is he? Is he the love interest or the guy keeping the main couple apart?”

I covered my face with both hands. Could I really blame him for wondering?

The door opened, and we both looked back to find Bee walking in decisively towards me.

“Go.”
I eyed her in confusion. “I’m sorry?”

“Go talk to him!”

The truth is I would probably have argued if I hadn’t been wanting to go talk to Harry already, so instead I just got up and kissed Bee in her cheek before going outside.

Harry was sitting in the sand far ahead in the beach. I walked to him with my feet diving into the cold sand nicely.

I walked softly, slowly, hoping it’d give me time to decide what to say.

I sat by his side, the sea breeze blowing the smell of salt gently against our faces. I played with the sand with my feet.

“I know you didn’t kiss him back.”

I nodded. “Do you?”


“No, I’m not okay.” I sighed. “I just want him to be okay. And I want us to be okay. And I hate to think that he is something I can’t fix.”

He nodded, passing an arm around my shoulders and giving my arm a comforting squeeze. One touch, and he made me feel whole again.

“I’m sorry.” He repeated. I rested my head on his shoulder. “Should I go punch him in the face?” I giggled. “…I’m not really kidding.”

“No, Harry, don’t punch anyone.” I said, smiling.

“Okay.” He smiled. “But just because you asked.”

I giggled again, and he turned his head to look at me, resting his forehead on mine. We sighed, together, knowing things were okay. Knowing our relationship was messy, but we made it through one more day.

“Come on,” He said. “Let’s go to sleep.”

He got up, and offered a hand to pull me up, too. I held his hand in place so he wouldn’t walk and just stand in front of me for a little while.

“If we were a movie,” I started. “And I was the main character… I hope you know you’re not just… some guy whose only reason to be there is character development for me. Okay?” He seemed confused. “You’re not the guy I break up with in the end. Not for someone else, not for… whatever. Okay? You’re…” I paused, gulping, trying to believe my own words. “You’re the guy I end up with.”

Harry’s stare was intense, as he finally understood what I meant.

“Do you, though?” he asked, “Do we end up together?”

I sighed, giving him a sad smile. “I’ll sure try.”
He smiled, before kissing my forehead, longingly.

We intertwined our fingers before we started to walk back to our cabanas, in a slow pace, enjoying the fresh breeze and the salty smell in the air.

“Sorry I thought you kissed him back.” He said again, holding my hand tightly.

I looked at him, tall, with his broad shoulders under his buttoned up shirt with the sleeves rolled up and cargo shorts. His ginger hair was dark under the moon light, but his strong features were as kind as ever.

“I know the reason you were mad is because you wouldn’t do that.”

“Well, duh.” I pushed him, gently, playfully, and he smiled. “Why would I? I’m in love with you, jackass.”

There was a long moment in which the smile froze in my lips as I realized what I said. I tried to repeat the words in my head to make sure, but my thoughts were void and clear.

I stood, in shock, waiting for something, anything, to pop in my head. An explanation. An excuse. But all I felt was the burning warmth in my chest that I felt every time I looked at him.

Harry had frozen in place too, and he looked at me, very slowly. I kept waiting for my mouth to shout out an excuse. Did I say it without realizing it? Was I just too distracted?

Harry observed the color fade from my face.

“Do you want to take that back?” he asked, in a whisper.

I bit my lip, strongly, trying to keep the tears away. Would he really be so patient as to let me take it back?

I remembered, in a second, that I used to be scared that the next time I said it, I would be thinking about my past mistakes. I thought about it, realizing the moment the words had come out of my mouth I had had nothing in my thoughts other than Harry.

Harry and his hair, Harry and his big smile, Harry and his beard, Harry and his childish blue eyes, Harry and his understanding, and his voice, and his big hands on me, and his hug, and his warmth, and his arms around me. Harry and how he had managed to so gently carve his way into me.

I shook my head, negatively. I didn’t want to take it back for a simple reason: I was in love with him.

“So, you…” he started, his voice still as soft as a whisper, “…you…”

He wasn’t trying to make me say it, he was trying to understand as he looked at me carefully, as if he was scared I might break right in front of him - but I had never felt that strong.

“I love you.” I said.

My voice was also not much stronger than a whisper. It felt strange, letting go of my ultimate wall. I felt exposed and open and so scared I almost cried.

I saw a smile slowly carve room into his lips. He let go of my hand to cup my face between his hands, gently, placing our foreheads together.
“I love you, too.” He said, smiling. “I love you,” he kissed me, “I love you,” he kissed me, “I love you”. He kissed me again, and I felt my own lips turn into a smile. “I love you!”

I wrapped my arms around his waist, feeling my chest light, but filled with warmth. I felt my throat free, too, as I breathed easier, as if there was nothing in the way anymore. His arms hugged me by my waist, and he lifted me in a tight hug making me giggle as he deepened the kiss, making our lips dance together and my whole body light up as if I was on fire.

The fear disappeared so smoothly I barely felt it. Now all I felt was the smile on my lips and how much I wanted nothing more than for him to never let me go.

He started walking us blindly back to the cabana.

“We’re gonna fall!” I warned, mid-laugh. Mid-kiss.

“Maybe.” He smiled. “But we’ll fall together.”

---- ---- ----

“Okay, okay! I thought of another game!” Jenna said, excitedly, as we sat around the bonfire in couples, “Things you would do if you were a royal!” She smiled, and Harry chuckled.

“That sounds fun.” He said, tightening a hug around me.

The sun was setting to our left by the beach, and we sat in the couches at a different lounging area in the club. The waiters turned the fire on for us and we were enjoying the chilly breeze with our drinks in hand.

It was a Saturday night in Abu Dhabi. Tyler had taken off that morning, after breakfast, claiming to have a work emergency in the city. Everyone but us, Kit and Bee seemed pretty bummed to see him go, so I understood they both didn’t know what happened and also didn’t realize how harsh he was being the night before.

Anna came to talk to me – she had decided to go with him. He told her what happened and she wanted to make sure he was okay. I was starting to see there was nothing other than friendship amongst them.

Though I was sad at how things had transpired, and I understand how weird this sounds, at the same time I was excruciatingly happy.

When I slept with Harry the night before it had been urgent, intense, as if for the first time. It was as if he saw me for the first time and I was loving for the first time with all of my walls down.

It felt raw, scary and amazing. I felt his arms wrap around me as we drifted off into sleep, our shaky bodies falling into relaxation happily, I felt his breath on my neck and truly didn’t miss anything at all.

We spent that day barely getting our hands off each other. Even when we were just sunbathing by the beach, his hand never left my thigh. One touch, and he made me feel whole.

I was so happy, I raised my arm to try and take a picture of us, to save that feeling forever, but only
our lower halves could be seen, with the blue sky above and his hand on my leg.

I felt an aching to post it online, so I just went through the whole process and applied some filters, just to see how it would look. But then I liked it so much I really wanted to post it.

“To celebrate!” I justified, asking Harry if he would mind. “We should do something to mark the moment… And you can’t even see our faces!”

He sighed, with a smirk on his lips, staring at my overexcited expression for a long time. He raised a hand to fix a strand of my hair behind my ear.

“There’s barely anything I would say no to if you asked me with that look on your face.”

I smiled, thanking him with a big kiss, before pressing post. The caption read: ‘Everybody is waiting up to hear if I dare speak your name...’ – it was a line from Strange Love, by Halsey, and I felt it fitted the fact people would just assume it was him, though no one could really know.

With the click of a button, we went Instagram-official.

“I know what I’d do if I were a royal!” Taylor said, with a serious look on her eyes as if she had given the matter a lot of thought. “Rock fur. Because, let’s face it, no one without a royal rank has a good enough excuse.”

I scoffed. “Not with that attitude.”

“Alright, only person with actual prospects of ever being one, amaze us.” She ironized.

I felt my heart miss a beat at the uncomfortable subject. Did they know what me being a royal involved? Did they know how difficult it was for me and Harry to even try and talk about anything remotely in the future? How afraid we were that we wouldn’t last that long? Did they even know that we had just started accepting the fact that this relationship was a lot more serious than any of us had bargained for?

“Oh, I…” I stuttered. “I’m not gonna talk about this.” I smiled.

“Why not?” Jenna asked, as Richard made a chicken sound with his mouth.

“Er…” I sighed. “It’s disrespectful to my boyfriend.” I offered.

Harry laughed instantly, lightening the mood.

“Don’t hide behind me, I want to hear this!” he said.

“Oooooh!” the others teased.

“Come, on, Jenny! What would you do?!?” Adam asked.

“I would use what I assume it’s a very high ceiling room in the palace to make a ball pit.” Bee said.

We all looked at her with confused expressions in our faces for a long time before we finally started laughing.

“What?” She asked, innocently, “Should be fun.”

“I’d want the most obnoxious princess cut wedding dress.” Jenna returned.
“Come on, seriously?” Richard asked.

“Think about it.” She went on. “You can’t wear a big, princess dress on a simple, let’s say, beach wedding, so when else would you have the chance?”

“She has a point.” Tay agreed. “And any simple cut dress it’s the kind that you can wear in many other occasions, like black tie events and stuff.”

“I wanna wear a tiara.” Kit added.

We laughed again.

“I have the hair for it, it’s such a waste that it’s not socially acceptable for men to wear a tiara.”

“Tough to argue with that point.” I told him.

“I do mean no disrespect, but I don’t think there’s enough money you could pay me for it.” Adam said. “I mean, it’s totally crazy right? The media ridicule. The harassment? The whole country thinking they own you?”

It was.

“You’re the highest paid DJ in the world.” Taylor reminded him. “You already have to deal with that, anyway.”

He considered that. “Well… yeah.”

We chuckled.

“Harry?” I asked, feeling his beard in my shoulder as he rested his head there. “What about you?”

“What I would do if I were a royal?” He teased. “Oh, man. So many things… I’d go to Vegas.”

They laughed. “I’d just go to Vegas and party hard!”

“I mean… what would you do if you weren’t a royal?”

He took in a deep breath considering it, the others listened closely, attentively.

He smiled.

“I’d fall in love with an actress.”

I smiled largely, blushing, as the others teased him. Kit applauded the answer slowly and the others joined in, making us let out an embarrassed laugh.

“You already did, though.” I reminded, looking back at him.

“Exactly.” He said, his piercing blue eyes narrowed by his smile. “It was inevitable.”

---- ---- ----

“I have a question.” He said, later that night, while he laid in bed as I brushed my hair nearby.
“Shoot.”

“I don’t want you to worry about the… content of the question. I understand this is completely hypothetical.”

“Getting worried now.”

“Isn’t there really anything you’d like to do or have if you were hypothetically a royal in that fantasy, imaginary world the others were talking about earlier?”

I sighed, smiling. I decided to focus on the ‘hypothetical’ part and humor him, so I placed my hairbrush on my suitcase, and kneeled in the bed opposite him.

“Alright!” I said. “I accept this challenge.”

I took in a deep breath, solemn.

“If I were a royal…” I started, carefully, thinking very slowly, “I would… want…” I considered. “The princess wedding dress.”

He smiled, raising an eyebrow in interest. "Really?"

“As a fashion fan, I can appreciate a lot of wedding dress cuts, but the girls were right. You can wear a simple dress at any black tie event later on in life, and as a royal, I’m sure the opportunity would rise. However, a big-ass, fluffy, princess cut dress? When would you get the chance?” I reasoned. “So, yes. I want the big dress. Off-white. With all the beads and lace and a long cathedral veil…” I painted the picture in my head as he watched me, “and a tiara.”

He smiled larger, supporting his head in his hand, with the elbow on the mattress.

“And… maybe horses.”

“Horses?”

“Yes. I like horseback riding. And I like polo. I’m not good at it, but if I had a horse that I could use to practice, maybe I would be.”

“I could teach you.” He offered, reaching his hand to caress my knee. I smiled, intertwining my fingers to his.

“That’d be nice… You’re a good teacher.” I said. “… Oh! I want chandeliers!”

He let his head fall back in the mattress, laughing. “Of course you do! Pretty adorned ceilings as well?”

“Of course!” I said, playful, “In every room! Big, beautiful chandeliers in big beautifully adorned ceilings in every room! Not too big, maybe, proportionate to the size of the room. OH!” I jumped in the mattress, and he held his head up again, to watch me. “And fresh flowers every day!”

“What?!” He laughed.

“Like in the Queen Victoria!”

“Oh, that’s right.” He smiled, “Do you want personalized stationary as well?”

“Of course! All adults have them!” I joked, teasingly. “I bet royals do too!”
He gulped, a bit more serious, his cheeks turning red. “…we do, actually.”

I giggled.

“And I want!” I stood up in the mattress, enjoying the game more and more, “I want my garden, Mr. Prince!” I told him, jumping now. “I want a bigger garden with roses, sunflowers, and tulips! I want it on a design that is pretty and… and… a big dog house!”

“Vodka is little!”

“We’ll have more dogs!” I said, jumping more in the bed, making him chuckle. “Big dogs, medium sized dogs! Lots of cute dogs!”

Harry watched me attentively, with a sweet smile on his lips, as if I was the most interesting thing in the universe. It didn’t occur to me just how rare it was that I would talk about the possibilities of the future… even if hypothetically.

He watched me as if he could see our future in front of his eyes.

“And are we gonna have the five kids the others seem to think we will?” he asked.

“You bet we will!” I told him. “We’re rich and living in a big house with a cool garden and dogs? The kids deserve to be had! Besides, look at us.” I said, standing still with a serious look on my face. “They were right. Those kids would be cute… and we’d make dope parents.”

His smile grew on his lips.

“Yes, we would.” He said, sitting up on the bed now.

“And because we have the royal excuse, we can call them cool, traditional names without having people question it!”

“What do you mean?” he asked.

“You know, saying they’re old fashioned or whatever.”

“What would we call them?”

I smiled, biting a lip. “Raphaela.” I said. “And Theresa.”

“Raphaela?” He repeated, the name coming out of his lips as if he was meeting baby Raphaela for the first time. “Princess Raphaela…” he tried. “Raphaela… really?”

I giggled, “I like names that were supposed to be male, but given to girls.” He seemed intrigued. “It doesn’t work with English names, but Latin names are interesting like that. And it has to be a name that is easily pronounceable in both English and Brazilian Portuguese… Raphael, for instance, becomes Raphaela. Antonio, or Anthony, becomes Antonia. Oh, I love that one! Antonia… Eduardo becomes Eduarda. But that would be too hard to pronounce in English, so no. But Theresa is fun. It’s my grandmother’s name.”

“I thought that was Rosangela.”

“The other grandmother… Oh! I have an idea! Alexandra!”

“Alexandra… like our boat friend.” He smiled.
“I like her. And her name. We could call her Alex.”

“What if we have boys?” He wondered, still smiling, enjoying dream-world with shiny excitement.

I had the perfect boy name already, so I smiled when I told him.

“Vincent.”

He nodded, biting a lip.

“Oh, Eric!” I went on. “And Elliot!”

“James?” He suggested.


“I like it!” He agreed. “It’s my grandfather’s name. I like him… I have this feeling that he would really like you.”

When it came to his family, I wasn’t sure if that was a good thing or not.

“Victoria!” I said, loudly, suddenly, he raised his eyebrows in confusion. “It’s both a British name, traditional, and easily pronounceable in Portuguese!” I smiled, repeating the name with the way my family would say it. “Vitória.”

Harry smiled in slow motion, with such adoration in his eyes I almost looked away in embarrassment. But it was so addictive to look at that I couldn’t. I couldn’t bring myself to. So I just returned his look, and his smile, as he slid his hands up my legs to the crook of my knees and pulled me down so I’d kneel with each leg to one side of him, sitting in his lap.

“The girls would have your cute smile,” he started, lining my smiling lips with his delicate fingers before he kissed me lightly, “and your cute eyes…” I closed them, as he gently kissed my eyelids, “…and your cute nose…”

“And your cute hair.” I said, as he kissed my nose.

He smiled. “Fine. But the boys would have your hair, ’cause I’ll be the first to tell you how hard men have it to pull this color off.” I giggled, running my hands slowly through his shoulders to hug him.

“Okay.” I agreed, bringing my face closer to his and brushing our noses together in an eskimo kiss. “But they’d have your strong nose.”

He pulled back. “I hate my nose!”

“I love your nose!” I protested, “It’s strong. They should have your nose. And your strong, broad shoulders…” I ran my nails delicately down his naked shoulders again, adjusting myself in his lap, thrusting my hips on his crotch.

“You like my shoulders?” He asked, smiling, looking flattered.

“I very much like your shoulders.” I said, before kissing the crook of his neck, and leaving a trail of kisses down through his collar bone and shoulders.

“Remember that time you said I wasn’t really your type?” He asked.
“Not really.” I said, jokingly.

“Really?”

“I don’t remember that.”

“You said you didn’t see the hype about me.”

“No, doesn’t sound like me…”

He smiled and, holding a strong grip of my thighs, he threw me in the mattress under him. His lips found mine in eagerness, and I held him down against my body with my legs and my hands in his hair.

Then I pushed him away slightly, another idea on my head.

“I want a big bed!” I said. He bended his head slightly, confused, and I smiled. “Dossal bed! Big dossal bed so we can do this,” I pushed him stronger, making him lay in the mattress so I could be on top of him, “as many times as possible…” He smiled as I leaned down to kiss him, slowly reaching up my thighs. I pulled away slightly.

“Though now that I think about it,” I said, “I guess I can have that without necessarily being a royal-”

Impatient, he held a grip of my hair and pulled me down again to kiss me. I smiled in the kiss feeling my heart full.

He turned us in the mattress again, holding me down as he kissed me deeply.

He pulled away with a long sigh to look at me.

“I love you.” He said.

I felt my own lips stretch into a smile.

“I love you, too.”

I knew I could have most of what I wanted without being a royal, but in that moment, that didn’t matter much. There was, however, one important thing I wanted if I could be a royal.

I wanted the prince.
Chapter Summary

Jen is facing heavy backlash and struggles with the reason why. Harry spends New Year’s with her and her family in Brazil and gives her a Christmas present that makes up for all her pain.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“You’re making it really hard for me.” Harry said, with a cheeky grin on his cute, thin, pinkish lips.

I adjusted the bikini straps on my body, pumping my breasts up on the bra while giving him a teasing look.

“You’re the one who really likes the couch.”

“Correction, I don’t like the couch. I like not giving your family any more reason to dislike me than the ones they already have.”

When Harry had arrived in my hometown in Brazil two days before to spend New Year’s Eve with us, I had been quite surprised. Harry and I had made plans to see each other on the first week of January.

Coincidently, as it had happened the first time Harry met my family, this time, too, it was Livia, my sister in law, who called him without me knowing, and invited him to come and spend a week with us before we went away. Unlike what happened last time, however, this time Harry neglected to tell me about it. So one day I was helping my mother hang Christmas lights around the pier in our backyard and next thing I know Livia is handing me her phone saying ‘Surprise!’.

Turns out she had to tell me before Harry got there because my house in my hometown – where he had been hosted last time – was occupied. I had rented it out for the season, so I was staying in my old room in my parent’s house for the holidays and Harry – whom I had just found out was coming with his three protection officers – had nowhere to sleep. Livia’s plan was for them to stay in a hotel, but with the holiday craziness, they all forgot to make reservations beforehand and, since it was summer in one of the prettiest beach cities in the country, there was no vacancies anymore. That’s when my mother stepped in.

She was very welcoming of Harry and his entourage, but also very quick to make sure we all knew he would be sleeping in the couch – where it was easier for everyone to keep an eye on him.

My parent’s house had four bedrooms: one for them, one for me, one for Lucas – who was sleeping there with Livia and Arthur as their house was under construction. The fourth was a guest bedroom and Eddy had been sleeping there since he arrived – he spent Christmas with his own family, leaving me with a temporary replacement bodyguard until he met me there afterwards. We also had a small bungalow in the back, with only a small bedroom, bathroom and kitchen. It had one single bed and one couch, so my mother left Harry and the boys with the option of who would be there and who would sleep in the couch in our living room.
Harry was so desperate to be cordial he chose the least safe spot for us to make out. And now he had to suffer the consequences.

“Why are you so desperate to play good boyfriend?” I asked.

He smiled. “I wanna surround you with people who won’t stop gushing about how amazing I am, and how terrible of a decision it would be to let me go.”

We were at the beach, on the last day of the year of 2015. As it usually happened, Christmas had sucked. So I was particularly happy to have Harry there. As it was December 31st, the paparazzi had given us a break – turns out even heartless vultures have better things to do than spend the their New Year’s Eve following celebrities around all day. But we still had to deal with the prying eyes of tourist snapping pictures of us on their phones to post on twitter.

There was a new trend going around by this time of the year, one of the reasons Christmas had been the cherry on top of a large, sucky sunday; thinking I sucked. That’s right, kids, Jenifer Silva is an annoying, no-fun, know-it-all who thinks she’s too good for everyone else. Or that’s what most people online – and therefore most media outlets – seemed to think.

I called it ‘the hate wave’. It had very thinly started when I broke my own fandom’s heart by announcing I wasn’t dating Tyler, then it had evolved into a tsunami of destruction that saw any mention of my name as a reason to roll their eyes and complain. Even when I did good things!

I used to think that philanthropic work was the only thing you could do that could ruffle no feathers other than from the people who were the ones doing the evil things to the people who were getting help. Apparently not. Apparently there were many things you could do wrong when trying to get things right.

My efforts to help with my online campaign #IAmFree, though mostly successful, were perceived as superficial and blend. The sold out thematic tee shirts were seen as a way to try and profit from a cause – even though all the proceeds were donated to charity. And mostly, every single cause I was fighting for or merely defending was disagreeable. Women’s rights? I’m a ‘white feminist’. LGBT’s rights? I’m a cis-straight outsider who should give space to someone from the movement. Brazilian politics? American sell-out. American politics? Immigrant. There was no winning.

In a way, I missed the days I could tell the reason I was being hated. People hate me for dating Harry? Makes sense. Either jealousy or anger over it not being Tyler. People hated me for my politics? Okay. A lot of bigots didn’t want gay people or women to have rights. And a lot of xenophobes didn’t want a Brazilian telling them what they were doing wrong. And a lot of Brazilians didn’t want someone who didn’t even live there anymore to do the same. But now? There was no reason anymore.

There was no justification, there was no argument. I used to go into twitter when I had anything from five to half an hour to kill and just talk to my fans. Answer questions. Get to know them. Now my mentions on the platform were filled with things like ‘DIE SLUT’, ‘I HOPE YOU GET CANCER AND DIE’ and ‘YOU’RE SO UGLY AND ANNOYING JUST SHUP UP’. Not to mention the actual threats, people offering to kill me with their bare hands, and a lot of ego-hurt males offering to rape me if I didn’t shut up about my ‘feminazi bullshit’.

I hated it. I hated it so much my stomach hurt. I felt nauseated all the time. I had headaches just thinking about it. You would think the lack of arguments would make it easier to let it go, but on the contrary, all I could do was wonder what was it that I did that was so wrong that people felt the need to hate me so harshly.
They even found issues with my UN speech. Though I made it pretty clear that I was quoting the ‘crying is free and so are we’ line, there were articles about how I ‘stole’ the line from a Brazilian singer. People accused me of plagiarizing it so much the singer herself took to twitter to defend me.

Then there was another reason: If Tomorrow Comes. The fanbase grew considerably more and more each day – we were even dubbed ‘the new House of Cards’ -, with even SNL skits poking fun at my character in a flatteringly way and a lot of people calling her – who was famous for using trickery and con-artistry to steal priceless works or art and jewelry - ‘the new Chuck Norris’. Though our popularity and streaming numbers grew we reached the end of the book plotlines by season two, which was supposed to stream on the upcoming American summer. I had refused to sign a third season contract and risk giving the character an ending that wouldn’t be as interesting as the one the author originally intended, so the producers and directors – after months of trying to convince me – had to write a series finale for season two.

I was happy with my decision. They were not. So they escape-goated me. They gave an exclusive interview to Entertainment Weekly, they made sure to tell them that, though they wanted to keep on going with new seasons, a ‘creative difference’ had driven me to decide to ‘ending my partnership’ with the show, ‘making them’ end it. That’s right, they threw the blame on me.

You know who didn’t like that? The fans, who were quick to assume my ‘problem’ was related to money. I lost count on how many comments I read who said I was money hungry, and only didn’t want to continue because I made more on movies. Some people even made up that that was also why I had left The Mediator and Marvel. Which… it wasn’t? Not even close? I made a lot of money with If Tomorrow Comes, and they even gave me a pay raise for season two and doubled that when proposing season three! I just honestly didn’t think we’d be able to keep the quality. Sue me.

And then early December came. And you know what came with it? Grammy nominations. Heathers The Musical was nominated for a fucking Grammy Award for Best Musical Theater Album. As principal soloists, both Tyler and I were nominated, too. Which meant that if Heathers won, along with our musical producer and lyricist, we were gonna win a Grammy too!

When that nomination came out, I had been numb with shock. I kept trying to understand what was happening, telling myself it couldn’t be. But then Eric Wellington called to congratulate me, and our lyricist too. And Richard and Janine screamed on the phone with me, saying they should have never doubted my idea to go back to Broadway. Taylor and Selena congratulated us on Twitter. Harry sent me flowers. And then Tyler texted me – I think more than anyone else, that’s what made me believe. He had been radio silent since the drunk kiss on Abu Dhabi, but he texted me.

‘WHAT IS HAPPENING? ARE WE NOMINATED FOR A FUCKING GRAMMY?’

I saw my own shock in his words and, though things were still weird, we managed to bury it to celebrate.

And my happiness bubble was quickly burst when I checked the congratulations online. The fans – that we apparently still had – were trending a hashtag on twitter (#CongratsHeathers), and though it was nice seeing I still had people who liked me, it was impossible not reading the hate: ‘Jenifer Silva is nominated for a grammy? Why? Is she not satisfied on sucking on one career she has to suck on another?!’.

I tried to ignore it. I knew it would go away when we lost, Broadway albums have to be extremely good to win, and though we were – and also spent many weeks on top of the charts – I knew better than to let me expectations rise.
Taylor made me ignore it. She met me for dinner and made me post a celebratory video on Instagram ‘to rub it in the hater’s faces’.

“If you do lose, this will be the most you get to brag, so use it!” She said.

In the fifteen seconds it allowed us, we made a skit that started with me walking bossily straight into the camera. Taylor stopped me by calling my name, and I started singing dramatically, changing the words to one of my favorite solos on Heathers:

“I have no time to talk, I’m a Grammy nominee walking!” I shouted, before walking out leaving her hilarious shocked faced self behind.

And then Esquire and People magazines had both named me their ‘most beautiful woman’, respectively ‘of the year’ and ‘alive’ and a lot of people had their opinions about it. Sure, a lot were very accepting and congratulatory, but it felt like all I read online was how ‘overrated’ I was and what a shame it was to reward someone who so ‘shamelessly tried to erase their Latina heritage’. Can you actually believe that?!

Is it my fault my skin isn’t as dark as most Brazilians? Is it my fault my hair is naturally straight?!
No. At some point in my genealogic tree, one of my ancestors decided to fall in love with an indigenous girl, while on the other side of my family, my Italian-born migrant great-grandparents made no efforts to darken their light skin, so sue them for my genes!

Even my family seemed to be in on it. Sure, they didn’t hate me. But even when they said nice things it sounded like a blow to my self-esteem.

“Hey, most beautiful woman alive!” Called an uncle on the beach that December 31st. “Will you come and surf with us poor folk, or will you just stay there and tan like you’re better than everyone else?!”

He looked around, sharing the joke with the others, and they laughed.

“What did he say?” Harry asked.

“We’re going surfing.” I told him, as excited as I felt: not at all.

“Harry, do you-?!” My uncle attempted asking, in English, finishing the line by gesturing to the surfboards nearby.

“Nah, he’s too British!” My aunt joked.


“Kiss ass.” I mumbled, playfully.

So my uncle and father both gave Harry a half-an-hour masterclass on surfing, making him lay down on a board and pat the sand as if they were waves before pretending to climb on his feet and surf the nothingness.

“You’re gonna wanna leave those pricey sunglasses here if you like’em!” My dad told Harry before we took off to the sea.

“Aren’t you gonna lose your sunglasses if you wear them?” Harry asked me as he saw me walk to the water with my pink, cat-eye sunglasses on, matching my geometric yellow, pink and white
“Not if you know what you’re doing.” I gave him a wink.

Harry’s eyes hovered up and down my body slowly as we walked, while he bit his lip in lust.

“Don’t you prefer this to the harsh Bulgaria winter?!” he asked.

I smiled, letting the others walk out in front of us so only he would hear me. “At least in Bulgaria we got to have sex.”

“That is true.” He commented. “But I’d rather keep on trying to get back on your family’s good side.”

“Try away.” I told him, walking ahead in front of him and pulling my bottoms up, leaving my butt cheeks more uncovered. “But just remember you could be having all of this.”

“You’re really making my life miserable by looking this good.”

Smiling, we climbed on to our surfboards and dove into the waves.

I had a lot to laugh about that afternoon: one, at Harry’s utter lack of ability at surfing. Every time he tried to catch a wave, he almost drowned. Two, at Clark, Louis and Nathan’s worried expressions while they watched him from the shore. Hard to protect someone while they looked to be trying to kill themselves in the middle of the sea. And three, I forgot how much I liked surfing!

Harry had been in Brazil for two days and he already managed to turn my mood around.

It was few hours later when I sat in the dimly lit pier in my parent’s backyard, with my white, Versace dress with golden little starfish prints and white Carvela high-heel sandals, with my legs crossed over the edge and an eye on my phone.

“I have good news and bad news.” Harry started, walking over to me, in a white button down shirt tucked into his cream pants – wearing white ‘for peace’ was a Brazilian New Year’s tradition.

“The good news is my skin doesn’t hurt as much as I thought it would.”

“You’re welcome.” I smiled. “Though I don’t know why is it so hard for you to remember to put on sunblock.”

“I just prefer it when you do it.” He winked, sitting by my side.

“Perv.” I joked. “What is the bad news?”

He sighed. “Apparently, there were paparazzi on the beach today. They were just really good at hiding.”

“I know.” I showed him my phone.

A TMZ article read: “Prince Harry and Jenifer Silva Are Very Handsy On Beach Day In Brazil”. The pictures were of Harry and me hugging in the water, his hands on my butt cheeks, and my face on his neck.

There were more articles, with pictures of us playing with my two-year-old nephew Arthur on the water, and playing volleyball with my cousins – which Harry actually nailed.

He sighed, turning off my phone.
“We will not talk about it today.” He said. “It’s the last day of the year and we will only talk of good things!”

“I didn’t want to be the Grinch again, but I had to ask. “Like what?”

“Well, let’s start small. Like the fact that at least now the paparazzi have left us alone!” he gestured to the big lake ahead, which everyone in that part of town called a ‘beach’. “It’s the first time we get to actually sit here, because there is not one boat with paparazzi out there.”

I returned his smile, reluctantly, trying not to ruin New Year’s.

I watched the waves in the lake absentmindedly, the sound of my loud family back at the house, or at the barbecue grill at the back of the backyard filling the silence. I was aware of his unapologetic eyes on me, but didn’t look back as I suddenly felt like I was about to cry, and his kind blue eyes might just be the last straw.

“Also, better news is your family seems a lot more welcoming this time around!” He smiled, scooching over to sit closer to me.

He passed an arm around my waist to bring me closer, and I smiled a bit more honestly now.

“They are just that desperate to see me… settled.”

He shrugged. “I’ll take it.”

We giggled.

“They just generally think that a couple is more serious when they get back together after a break up.” I added. “And they don’t know our first year together wasn’t real, so… they seem to think now is the time to have ‘the talk’ with you.”

He looked at me. “What talk?”

I sighed. “You know… what are your intentions with my daughter? That kind of talk.” He nodded. “If they do, just… smile and say something bland.”

“I know exactly what I will tell your parents if they ask about my intentions with you.”

He stared at me again, and I had to look at him. The unapologetic smile on his lips made my stomach twist in a funny way and I couldn’t help my own smile. I had a feeling of what he meant, but I didn’t dare name it – even in my mind.

“Do you know what I will tell you parents?” he asked, still smiling, daringly.

I giggled, blushing. “I have an idea.”

Does he mean the ‘m’ word? Does he really?

“Good.” He added.

I couldn’t keep his eyes on mine anymore, so I looked away biting my lower lip.

“After Abu Dhabi…” I started, after some silence had gone by. “And what I said…”

“That you love me.”
I smiled. “Yes… but not just that, also… you know, when we were talking about what I would want and do if I were a royal…” I gulped. “I just think, maybe… this… us, we might wanna slow down a bit.”

He nodded, serious.

“I just feel like everything suddenly escalated really fast, and maybe we should just slow down.”

He looked at the horizon ahead, before taking in a deep breath and looking at me.

“No.” He said. “I don’t think so. I don’t think we have to.”

“But…”

“I like the pace we’re going.” He smiled at the confusion on my face. “Jen, we’ve been together for a year and three months! Exclusively, we’ve been together for a year and a month. And we’ve been dating officially for seven months!”

I smiled, just now realizing we had been together for a whole year. I had never had a longer, healthier, better relationship in my life!

“So, no. I don’t think we should slow down. I think this pace is good.” He smiled, “I think I love you. And I think you love me. And I think I wanna spend the rest of my life with you.”

I let out a shocked, nervous laugh, looking at him, who still smiled at me.

“What?!”

“Breathe, Jenifer, I’m not proposing or anything.” He joked. The mere mention of the ‘P’ word was enough to make my nervousness rise even more. “I’m just letting you know, as I will let your parents know if they ask, that I know exactly where we’re going. I don’t know exactly how we’re gonna get there, yet. But I know I want us to. I wanna find a way.”

I felt my chest hurt and let in a deep breath that I didn’t know I was holding out.

“And maybe you’re not there yet. But maybe you will…” He smiled. “I’m hoping you will.”

I smiled, finally, feeling a warmth take over my insides that I just couldn’t explain. He had so much that the old-me would have so many issues with. But did now-me have those same issues? I barely knew what to focus on first.

All I knew was…no, I didn’t feel like throwing up. I didn’t feel like breaking up with him instantly and I didn’t feel like running away for my life. On the contrary, it felt like my life was right there. Right in front of me.

“Does this make you uncomfortable?” He asked. “My blatant refusal to hide how I feel for you?”

I smiled largely now, giggling nervously, looking away. The answer was yes. All I knew was to completely ignore the word ‘future’ and anything remotely related to it – I had thought it was the only way we could survive in this relationship. Surely, there was no way we could have a future, right? Could we?

“Did I tell you what my grandmother said at our Christmas party?” Harry asked, realizing I was too deep into my own mind to give him an answer.

I looked at him. “No.”
“Well, it was at lunch, on December 25th. I was talking to my grandfather about the Invictus Games in Florida next year, when out of nowhere he asks, what about your girlfriend, Harry? Will she be there?”

I smiled; not even I knew the answer to that.

“What did you say?”

“I didn’t say anything. My grandmother overheard and said, of course she will, she’s his girlfriend. You two are very committed aren’t you, Harry?”

I smiled bigger now, biting my lip to try and mask it.

“What did you say?”

“Yes, we are, granny,” He smiled. “Yes, we are.”

“What did she say?!”

“She said, good, honey. And let it go.”

“I’d have thought they would be a little more worried now, thinking we’re more serious than before.”

“Oh, they are.” He nodded, enthusiastically. “They’re just better at pretending they aren’t to try and avoid getting me as mad as I was back then.”

“You were mad back then?”

“I was angrily defending us. And I’m ready to do it again, if need be.”

I smiled again. “What did they say when they found out about us? I know your father was passive-aggressively against it, and Kate and Will were a little excited. But what about the others? Did anyone give you a hard time?”

“Grandpa thinks I’m finally fitting into my hell-raiser shoes. He says he hopes I’ll end up marrying you, he can’t wait to see you ruffle some feathers as a royal.”

I chuckled, trying to dismiss the knot on my stomach at the ‘M’ word (marriage).

“Aunt Anne gave me a little speech about making responsible choices and choosing someone who will fit in, Zara seemed to agree, though Peter and Autumn defended you effusively.”

I remembered the unkind smile his cousin Zara had given me when Kate introduced us at polo. So I was right, she didn’t like me.

“What about Eugenie?” I asked. “We hit it off when we had lunch with Liz and Guy, but she didn’t seem very enthusiastic about us.”

“Oh, yeah, she was on Aunt Anne’s side. Not trying to tell me what to do or anything, just…” He paused, thinking about it. “…just voicing her opinion that it wouldn’t work.”

I had expected nothing less.

“But her sister, Bea, just sounded excited to have a celebrity in the family one day.” He went on.
“That’s the ginger girl, right?”

“Yeah. She says she’d love to bounce some fashion ideas off of you.”

I smiled. “Cool.”

I had asked for us to slow down, but somehow we were just talking more about a future together.

“Grandma said something interesting, though.” He added. “She was very quiet when she first heard we were back together, trying to let me live my life, I guess… but last month she heard about your speech at the U.N. General Assembly and asked for one of her aides to get her the video so she could watch it.”

“Wait.” I brought a leg up, to sit in a half-indian position facing him. “Are you telling me The fucking Queen of England watched my U.N. speech!?”

“It’s actually the Queen of the United Kingdom, but, yeah.” He smiled. “The Queen of the United Kingdom, whom I call granny, watched your U.N. speech and she was quite a fan.”

“You’re lying!” I smiled.

He chuckled. ‘I’m not! I swear! I saw her for the Christmas lunch for extended family in Buckingham at the beginning of December, and she came to talk to me about it. She said, do pass on to Ms. Silva how impressed I was at her speech at the United Nations General Assembly-’”

“You’re lying!” I repeated, interrupting him with my laughter.

“I’m not!” he said, serious, “I promise! She said she hopes she gets the chance to talk to you about it, and that you seem to have good ideas.”

He smiled at me, all smug, waiting for a reaction.

“Okay. That’s…” I sighed, smiling. “Quite amazing.”

“I told you…” He let his hand rest on my knee. “You’re killing it!”

I sighed, staring at my own hands adjusting the bar of my dress to cover me even though I was not sitting in a very ladylike way. Harry stared ahead at the water, the moonlight reflecting quite beautifully in his tiny blue eyes.

“Pity not many people agree with you or your grandmother.” I mumbled, on what I thought was a very laid-back, casual tone.

Maybe not, since Harry eyed me worried.

“A lot of people do.” He said. I nodded. “The ones who aren’t no-life jerks who only live for finding things to be mad about.”

I stared at my hands again, trying desperately to think of something else to say that would change the subject. I felt a knot on my throat that was harder and harder to ignore, but I tried to. This was the first time we were together since Abu Dhabi and it was the last day of the year, I didn’t want to bring down the mood, but I just couldn’t get the hate wave off of my mind.

“Jen…” He started, bringing his own knee up the pier to sit on his side facing me. “You… you know you’re not doing anything wrong, right?”
Still looking down, I nodded rapidly, trying to get him to change the subject now.

Harry held my hands, and his warm skin on mine made me feel a little better. But then he leaned in to rest his forehead on mine, and the kind gesture made my heart break completely.

“Hey… hey, hey!” He said, comforting, when my first cry broke out as the tears streamed down my face. I took a hand from his to cover my mouth and try to be downplay what was happening, but it was too late.

My head fell to his shoulder, and his arms wrapped me in a hug as I cried more openly, realizing there was no hiding it now.

Harry let me cry on his white shirt for a while, hugging me tighter and whispering soft ‘it’s okay’s from time to time. I breathed in his smell, as all my walls from the last few months of trying to be strong tumbled down.

“It f-feels like I’m doing som-something very wrong.” I said after a while, amidst hiccups, my broken voice muffled by his strong shoulder.

His hands caressed my back strongly, comforting. “You’re not. Jen, you’re doing everything right.”

I sat up, taking my face from his embrace and drying my cheeks the palms of my hands. “Then why does everybody hate me?!!”

I saw the pain in his expression, as he struggled for an answer.

“You know there isn’t a reason.” He said. “You told Beezus yourself on our double date. Sometimes it just happens. People just pick someone new to hate. It was you this time, but you’re not actually doing anything wrong.”

I laid down on his shoulder again, and his arm wrapped around me.

“Their hate speaks more about them than it does about you.” He said, patting my back gently. “You’re just doing your job, and helping people.”

“I hate having my words misunderstood and misinterpreted…” I cried out. “It feels like the whole intention of helping is pointless-”

“It’s not! It’s not, I promise you this. It’s not.”

He sighed, placing a kiss on my cheek. He let me cry on his shoulder some more.

“You know…” he started. “My mother used to say that people sometimes find it easier to ease their conscience by attacking people who try to help than by actually doing something to help.”

I sat back up, taking in a deep breath.

“It’s just mob mentality at its best. It’s as personal as having picked your name on a spinning wheel…” He went on, raising his hands to dry my cheeks with a loving look on his eyes. “They’ll let it go soon enough.”

I sighed, calming my trembling breath and nodding so he knew I felt better. He smiled, and I mimicked, slightly.

“And even if they don’t…” He added. “I’ll still be here. Just as proud to be Jenifer Silva’s boyfriend.”
I smiled more honestly now, feeling my pieces glue themselves back together.

I hugged him again, smelling his scent, allowing it to fill me up with peace.

I never hated the long distance so much – the thought we only had another eleven days together before he had to go back to London and I had to go to Los Angeles for the People’s Choice Awards. I’d then go to New York, where I’d be working full time at the U.N. headquarters to draw a plan of work. I hated knowing exactly how many days we had, exactly when we’d be saying goodbye. I hated knowing we wouldn’t see each other again until the end of February. I hated we had to go one or two months without each other every time.

When I sighed heavily on his shoulder, I knew in the bottom of my heart I somewhat hated the thought of going back to work. Not the U.N. work, that actually sounded exciting and new, and useful. But as of March I’d be going into set to shoot Heathers (the movie musical), and I resented the thought of spending three months on a set, working ungodly hours to do the kind of work that people would only hate me for.

As his hands caressed my back, I closed my eyes in comfort, knowing I hated that I still had to attend a few award ceremonies, even though I wasn’t nominated. I hated that Richard had made me accept to present some of those awards so I could remain ‘relevant’ - I hated that word more than anything.

I hated that Ophelia was still not picking up my calls, I hated the thought that she hated me. I hated to think she might have been suffering and I couldn’t do anything to help her.

As I let myself go from Harry’s embrace, I knew I hated this industry. I hated what they had done to me, and what I knew they were going to do to her. I hated all of it so much it only made me hang on to what was right in front of me even tighter.

I smiled now, at Harry’s blue eyes, happy that through the turmoil, I still had a boyfriend who was proud of me even when I wasn’t. That I had a family so happy and loud that felt a little much. Happy I could wear a light dress for a warm, beach-y New Year’s Eve with the ones that I loved.

“I think this might be a good time to give you your Christmas present.”

I let out a deep breath, letting go of the sad moment to smile at him.

“You mean besides my pretty flowers?”

He had sent me a pretty huge bouquet on December 25th. I had sent him a black and gold Rolex watch with a tinier watch inside – the big one was set on his timezone, the small was on mine.

“Flowers are a compliment, not a gift. We’ve talked about this.” I giggled. “No, your present is something… else.” He looked nervously around. “It’s not perfect, but I hope you’ll take my time and intentions into consideration.”

He sat up straighter, taking in some deep breaths looking to be preparing for something.

I smiled at his nervousness. “Well? What is it??”

“Calm down, Silva. I have to prepare!”

He took in another deep breath, looking away, soundlessly mouthing something as if practicing, before laughing slightly. Than he looked at me intensively, as I filled with questions.
“Isso é o seu presente.” He said, in Portuguese, with a heavy British accent. “Feliz Natal, Jenny.”

‘This is your gift. Merry Christmas, Jenny.’

My mouth dropped opened, and I felt my whole face twist in shock.

“Wait… what?!”


If it was possible, my mouth dropped even more open. Harry broke out in laughter at the utter shock on my face.

“Oh, my God! Oh. My. God!”

He laughed. “Eu queria-“

“Wait!” I begged. “This is too weird! Wait!”

“Eu queria te fazer uma surpresa.” ‘I wanted to surprise you.’

“I said wait!” I laughed. “Oh, my God! Oh, my God…” I repeated, feeling my blood rushing to my face that I covered with my hands at the sound of his deep voice attempting to communicate in my language. His accent was strong and sweet but his words were mostly right.

“Olha pra mim.” He asked, smiling. ‘Look at me.’

I uncovered my eyes slightly, and looked at him, feeling annoying tears filling my eyes.

“Eu queria que você soubesse-“ ‘I wanted you to know…’

“Oh, my God!” I interrupted again, laughing delighted. “This is so weird! You sound so cute!” I squealed.

Harry laughed. “Você não me deixa falar!” ‘You don’t let me speak!’

I laughed louder, “This is too weird! What are you doing?! How are you doing this?!”

“Eu… não vou falar… se não em português!” He complained. ‘I won’t speak if not in Portuguese!’. “Eu gastei… gastei?” he asked, confirming the word, and I nodded, in shock. Each word out of this mouth was shocking to me. “Eu gastei muito tempo por você não… me deixar falar em português!”

‘I spent too much time for you not for let me speak in Portuguese!’

I laughed, loudly, throwing my head back at how weird and awesome it felt at the same time.


“Português, Jenifer.” He complained, smiling, and I laughed some more.

I took a deep breath. “It feels too weird!”

He shrugged, not saying another word.

For most of my life, English and Portuguese had been the biggest barrier between my two worlds:

Harry was English. He was a tourist in my hometown, he needed translation and explanations and though I didn’t mind it, it had always felt like I had to be two different people with him. One who spoke English and talked about Hollywood and paparazzi, and another who spoke Portuguese and explained about traditions and family history.

Now he was asking me to mix the two Jenifers, to shake up and mix my two worlds and I had been told for so long that I had to keep those worlds separated that I didn’t know how to deal with this. No one from one of my worlds had ever tried so hard to understand the other, to be a part of it. They just asked whatever they were curious about and moved on, asking me to keep up. To translate. To explain. To cut and erase parts of myself to fit into what they could understand. Always making me feel like such a strange and exotic figure for having both worlds in me, like they could never fit together in someone else. Like it would be too weird.

Harry was taking Portuguese lessons. He was trying. Harry was bringing himself into my world, shifting a part of his life to fit into mine. I didn’t even try to hide the tears anymore, because they now felt very much justified.

“How?”, I asked. “When did this happen?”

Smiling, he raised a hand to dry the tears streaming down my cheeks.

He took a deep breath before speaking again, and I knew the mess he must have been feeling. The uneasiness of trying to talk in a language that didn’t feel yours. I knew it because that was my life. And he was really trying to bring himself into it.

“I hired a teacher,” he told me, before giving me a confused look. “Is it a guy or a girl?” I asked.

“Guy.”

“You were right the first time.” I smiled. “Um professor.”

“Por que vocês tem tudo…” he struggled. I recognized the look of the struggle on his eyes, I recognized it so much that I felt more tears streaming down my face. “Com… homem ou mulher? Coisas não são- não tem sexo! É muito… difícil!”

We laughed together. He had said: ‘Why do you have everything with man and women?’, meaning, why does Portuguese have so many gendered words?

‘Things don’t have gender! It’s too difficult!’, he said.

“Pois é!” I agreed. “Português é uma bagunça!” ‘Portuguese is a mess!’

“Então…” ‘So…’, he went on. “Rogerio, meu professor, me dá aula toda semana em Kensington. E eu faço algumas exercícios online.”

‘So, Rogerio, my teacher, teaches me in Kensington every week, and I do some exercises online.’

I smiled, laughing again like a little girl, still feeling tears stream down my face.
Harry had a big, smug smile on his lips as he watched me freak out, entertained. The wrinkly corners of his eyes were never so beautiful.

“Surpresa.” He said. ‘Surprise.’


“Eu queria que você soubesse…” he went on, every mispronounced, heavily accented, beautiful word out of his mouth made me more shocked. He looked me in the eyes, intense. “…sem nenhum problema de comunicação, ou de má tradução… que eu te amo.”

‘I wanted you to know, without any miscommunication or mistranslation, that I love you.’

I cried out, unapologetic now. Harry kissed my wet cheek for a long time, and hugged me strongly.

I had spent too long having a problem with the words ‘I love you’ before he had made me overcome it. It had felt freeing to say them for the first time, the very month before, realizing I was stronger now. I was better. I was ready.

And then he did that. He looked at me, locking his blue eyes on mine, his beard covered lips opened in a smile, and said ‘eu te amo’. Not ‘I love you’, mind you. Eu te amo. His lips hissing the sound of ‘ssss’ on the ‘te’, souding like he said ‘sh’. So British. Forcing the ‘a’ in ‘amo’, just a hint of confusion on his eyes as he spoke, wondering if he was saying it right. If I got it. Just the slight questioning feeling I had in the back of my mind every time I said anything in English – the type of thing you learn to ignore after speaking a second language for long enough.

The words that he had gone out of his way to learn, the ones that had a meaning he could only try to understand, felt raw to me. They felt real. They felt like cotton on my ears, like laying my head on my own pillow, on my own bed, after a long trip.

Eu te amo. I love you – the kind of ‘I love you’ that sounded truer to me.

“Eu também te amo.” I said, with a smile, the words leaving my lips easily now, carrying their own weight in a language that felt natural.

‘I love you, too’.

Chapter End Notes

Fun fact: I cried writing this chapter! The thought of Jen having to spend most of her life speaking a language she doesn’t identify with and suddenly having someone learn hers, it just felt so amazing!

Thank you so much for reading, I hope you liked it! Let me know? Send me your thoughts or suggestions, I love to hear from you! See you next chapter!
The Lucky One

Chapter Summary

Jen makes peace with friends she had lost and loses a bet to Harry.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

As most of my years, 2016 also began with an award season. That one just felt particularly negative because it was so different than others: Because I had spent the year before doing Broadway and a TV show, I wasn’t nominated for the movie awards. That was understandable, but what wasn’t was how much criticism I was still receiving. So, because of those two details, I was determined to avoid award season at all costs.

Three things didn’t work on my favor: one, even though I hadn’t done any movies, I was still nominated for two awards – a Grammy and a People’s Choice. Two, because I was still famous, despite being hated – maybe even more so – the award shows organizers wanted me to announce categories and attend either way. And three, because of the business I was in, part of the job required me to remain relevant – which meant I had to be seen, which meant Janine and Richard made me go to these awards, and made me be seen.

I begged them to remember how much people hated me, arguing the People’s Choice was fan voted so I was obviously not going to win, and I didn’t feel like sitting through yet another award ceremony where I was a punchline for a monologue joke. But there are some battles that even Jenifer Silva can’t win – which was coincidently the theme of that night’s joke.

“Jenifer Silva is here tonight!” The host said the annoying line, and I smiled sympathetically knowing the cameras were focusing on me. “She had a busy last few months. She’s been writing essays for The Times, New York Post and a number of other newspapers about Brazilian and American politics, women’s rights and immigration, she’s been chosen as a Goodwill Ambassador for the U.N. and spoke at their General Assembly.”

He paused, for the loud applause that told me some people were at least positive about that.

“And on her newest crusade, she’s vowed to get Apple to fix iPhone’s crappy chargers and to get George R.R. Martin to bring Jon Snow back from the dead!” The audience laughed. “If she can’t help us, no one can!”

In other times in my life, a popular voted award was a sure thing for me, but even my own fandom seemed to hate me lately, so the entire night my mind resonated with the question, who would vote for me?

Janine made me go because ‘after the polemic decision of leaving If Tomorrow Comes after only two seasons, people needed to see I still supported the show’. Which, of course I did! I supported it so much I made the painful decision of leaving so it would end in a quality note!

So on that second weekend in January, the beginning of award season, I put on a dark green Yigal Azrouel dress that only barely covered my knees and had a fend mid-thigh, paired it with black and
white striped sandals and drop earrings and put on my brave face along with my dark red lipstick and marched into battle.

I made Selena come with me, both for support and because I missed her, and she at least was able to put a smile on my face on what would otherwise have been quite a crappy night.

That is, of course, until she stopped mid-sentence to point out Ophelia two rolls behind us.

“Oh, wow, she looks so pretty!”

I sighed, longingly, refusing to look back no matter how curious I was about what O was wearing.

Sel gave me a sharp look. “Are you guys still not talking?”

“She’s the one who never called me back.”

“Did you call her or is this since the fight about Oscar?”

“Since the fight... But I wasn’t wrong, Sel! If I call first it sounds like I’m apologizing, and I won’t apologize for looking out for her!” She sighed. “I mean... Do you think I was wrong?”

“No. But she wasn’t either... She is eighteen and, like it or not, despite problematic, they weren’t doing anything wrong... From what she says he is actually really sweet to her.”

“He is 34. She’s 18.”

“Yeah, but come on, who is this fight actually helping? If they do break up, if he does turn out to be a dick, she would never tell you so she doesn’t admit defeat, and then you won’t be there to help her...”

She was right, and I knew that. So I made plans to go talk to Ophelia as soon as the break was over. If I couldn’t stop her from being with Oscar, I wanted, at least, for her to trust me enough to tell me when things got bad.

Not to mention, I wanted to be careful not to resent her for things that were beyond her control, and if I’m being honest, there was another – unfair - reason I had grown to resent her for.

That reason was another side of the hate wave I had failed to predict: with the downfall of one Hollywood name, there was always the rise of another. When Jennifer Lawrence had her fall, there was me. Now as I had mine, there was Ophelia.

As the 2016 award season took off, Ophelia was being dubbed ‘the new Jenifer Silva!’, just as I had been ‘the new Jennifer Lawrence!’ Back then, I had only been excited about the huge compliment and had failed to see how Jen might have been feeling about it. About being considered ‘old’ merely a year after her big victory season.

I knew how I felt: pretty damn bad. I knew this was ridiculous – I wasn’t nominated for anything because I had left movies for Broadway and If Tomorrow Comes. So I couldn’t be nominated even if people didn’t hate me. Still, watching Ophelia’s name appear in every award nomination announcement brought back so many memories from my big victory season in 2014 that I felt my heart tight and painful. Were people forgetting me already?

Taylor has a song called The Lucky One, which she wrote about the rise and fall of Joni Mitchel. The lines kept coming back to me every time I read a mean article about me, or a praising one of Ophelia:
‘And they tell you that you’re lucky, but you’re so confused. ‘Cause you don’t feel pretty, you just feel used… And all the young things line up to take your place. Another name goes up in lights. You wonder if you’ll make it out alive.’

As the lights dimmed in my name and shone brighter in Ophelia’s, I wondered if that was the end for me. Am I irrelevant now? Is this how my good strike comes to an end? Jennifer Lawrence had managed to come back from her hate wave even stronger than before, but would that be possible for me?

Emma Watson smiled in the microphone as she took to the stage in the People’s Choice Awards ceremony. “And the nominees are…” She started, “Jenifer Silva, for If Tomorrow Comes.”

They flashed a clip of the show, a scene in which my character had a panic attack out of fear of another woman in the prison she went to unjustly, who was threatening her. I was so proud of that scene – of being able to portray well something I felt so close to my heart, that I suffered from so painfully.

The nominees’ names kept on being read, until the mechanical voice read Ophelia’s name.

“Ophelia Callis… for X-Man.”

They showed her clip, some post battle scene where her character was bruised and on the verge of tears trying to clean up the blood of a friend from her hands. I sighed.

‘God, she’s good’, I thought, with some pride filling my heart.

I still remembered Ophelia’s chubby thirteen-year-old face when we met five years before, asking me for advice on how to be a good actress and how to make speeches, standing happily in my shadow. Now she was nominated for everything I had once won and I could feel myself standing in hers.

I put my best polite smile on my lips as I knew the camera would pan on me – on all nominees – once they cut back from the clips.

“And the People’s Choice is…” Emma read, opening the envelope. “Ophelia Callis, X-Man!”

I smiled, applauding along Sel and standing up for Ophelia, whom we saw make her way all smiley through to the stage, her long hair waving behind her as the voiceover said, 'this is the first People’s Choice Award for Australian-born Ophelia Callis, who is also nominated tonight for Choice Movie Actress: Drama!'

I saw her awkwardly hug Emma Watson and approach the microphone, looking at the glass award in her arms with amazement. I knew what she was feeling. The People’s Choice was the first ceremony of the season and, though it is the most casual and less prestigious, when you are nominated for everything, it feels like the first chapter on a ride you know will be breath-taking. At that moment, it feels like nothing can get much better.

Until it does.

I knew what Ophelia was feeling and I knew what would come next, and I smiled as I watched her make her speech, feeling like a proud older sister and a jealous bitch at the same time.

I didn’t like feeling like that, but I couldn’t help it. I still vividly remembered the Anne Hathaway interview when she said that, at just thirty-two-years-old, she was already losing parts for younger actresses.
I remembered how adamantly opposed Richard had been to me leaving movies to work on Broadway and If Tomorrow Comes. I remembered his claim that I had to take advantage of my young age, since actresses usually peaked in their twenties.

As I watched her leave the stage, knowing Ophelia was eighteen, I realized I was turning twenty-six in just four months. I was officially in my late twenties, and I wondered how long would my peak last – if it wasn’t over already.

I loved Ophelia – I certainly loved her more than I loved Hollywood, which at that particular moment wasn’t very much. But I loved her very much. I knew she was only doing what I was: her job. Her best. O wasn’t the problem - the industry was.

She was doing her job and reaching for the stars as I did and I knew the joy she must have been feeling, because I had been there less than two years before. I didn’t want to be the reason she looked back into this time of her life with pain in her heart. When she won everything, as I knew – or truly hoped - she would, I wanted to be there. I wanted to celebrate with her – even if she was dating someone who could potentially break her heart into a million pieces. Probably even more so, so that I could help her if he did! So I knew what I had to do.

Ophelia left the stage and the show went into a commercial break. Everyone started talking and walking around and I told Selena I would be right back, before I marched backstage.

Without any sort of a plan in my head, I found her leaving an interviewer, and made my way to her, thinking only of how scared and excited I was when it was me in her shoes – and I was six years older than she was now! Going through all this while barely out of high school?! She must have been going nuts! I wanted to talk about it. I wanted to talk her through. I wanted to be her friend. Hollywood took enough from me, I wasn’t about to let it take me away from the people I loved as well.

“Hey.” I said, bracing myself, when I reached her.

“Hi.” She returned, not annoyed as I had expected - just surprised.

I thought, with no success, about what should come next.

“Congrats!” I said, in a sigh, pointing at the award, a little smile on my lips.

“Thanks.” She smiled back, holding her award tighter. “I keep thinking I’m gonna drop it!”

“As long as it isn’t on live television, you should be fine.”

I joked, remembering that is what I did when I had won my Oscar. She giggled. There was a silent pause.

“Oh.” I started, deciding there was no easy way to do this, so I might as well just come out and say it. “I’m sorry if I made it seem like I don’t think you know what you’re doing. I think you’re strong, and capable, and intelligent… I was just trying to look out for you.”

“…I know.” She nodded, and sighed. “…He’s not like your ex-boyfriends, you know?”

I nodded. “…I know.”

I didn’t.
“I hate not talking to you.” She added.

“I hate that, too.” I smiled.

“…But I can’t be around you if I think you are silently disagreeing and judging my choices.” She said, seriously.

“I know” I nodded. Of course that’s what it seemed like. “I’m just looking out for you.”

“No, you’re not. You’re judging. There’s a difference.” She said, pointedly.

There was an awkward silence as I realized that my intentions didn’t matter. Their effect mattered. It mattered how they made her feel.

“I wish you would trust me.” She went on, “If it goes badly, it goes badly, but I don’t want to have you waiting there to say ‘I told you so.’”

“I would never do that!” I added, sighing. What kind of friend would I have been if I did?

I remembered, with a knot on my stomach, when David cheated on me. I remembered waiting for the ‘I told you so’s from my family and friends, that never came, no matter how much I knew I deserved it.

“He makes me happy, Jen. Isn’t that enough?” She gave me a little smile. “I really like him.”

I sighed deeply, “Then, for your sake, I will try to like him too.”

Ophelia smiled a little stronger now, and I reached forward and gave her a hug.

The People’s Choice Award was over, and we went out for drinks with Selena, leaving behind the horrible last two months we hadn’t spoken.

We talked about her nominations and I did my best to hide away how truly horribly the industry was making me feel lately. After all, and this is what I was holding on to, maybe I just felt like that because of the hate wave. Maybe it would get better. I just had to wait.

Professionally, everything was great: I had just won an Emmy award for If Tomorrow Comes a few months ago, was nominated for a Grammy, and was about to start more active work with the U.N., but the hate-wave was making it impossible to see any kind of light at the end of the tunnel.

I talked to the girls about the good things instead, like how I would be spending most of January and February talking to specialists on the U.N. headquarters and coming up with an active plan to tackle the issues we were concerned about. I talked about my plans for the year, like shooting Heathers and trying to get a studio to pick up a movie for a script I had written.

And then, sure, we talked about boys – if we could call that our thirty-something boyfriends. I told them how weird it felt that Harry and I had been together for more than a year, and how I preferred to instead consider only the time since we were dating officially, as to not freak out too much.

“But even that,” I argued, “is slipping away, since just another few months and we’ll be making a year too!”

Ophelia had no complaints – in fact, she did talk about how she had never expected to be this happy this soon in her life, which made it easier to pretend I was okay with her relationship.

Interestingly enough, I didn’t even had to pretend for long. Two weeks after the People’s Choice
Awards, the Academy nominations came out and Ophelia was nominated for not one, but two Academy Awards – for best leading actress and best supporting actress, for two different movies.

The U.N. work gave more flexible hours, so I took a weekend and flew from Manhattan to Los Angeles to celebrate the awesome news with her and our girlfriends – like Taylor, Selena, and the others the media had grown to tackily refer to as the squad.

When we were getting ready to leave for a restaurant, at Taylor’s house, Ophelia told us what had happened after the nomination: she broke up with Oscar.

“So…” I started, careful, “you broke up with him?”

Sitting in Taylor’s yellow armchair in the living room, Ophelia took off her bright red pumps and brought her legs up, to hold her knees. “Yes.”

I exchanged a concerned look with Taylor, who looked at Selena, who looked at Karlie and so forth.

“Mother of God!” Ophelia let out. “You guys are terrible actresses.”

I scorned, for a moment forgetting what the issue was. “You wanna tell that to my Oscar??”

She giggled, slightly. “What I mean is, you clearly want to ask something, so go ahead.”

I sighed, and did as she asked. “…Why? Why did you break up with him?”

“Because I’m nominated for an Academy Award!” She said. “At eighteen! I never even dared dreaming of this, and now is happening! I have a real chance of making something of myself, of achieving a serious level on my career… and I know that if I become the girl who dates older men, there will be no Academy Award that will be able to save me image.”

“So you broke up with him because you were scared of what he might do to your… image?” Karlie voiced all of our doubts. Ophelia nodded.

I bit my lip, unsure if that was supposed to make me feel better or worst.

“Well, I feel proud that you are prioritizing your career.” I told her, honest. “You are young, you’ll have other chances of dating cute guys. But being nominated for an Oscar is a unique chance.”

She smiled, a little forcefully. “I know. And I’m confident that I am making the right choice!” She brought her legs back down and put on her shoes. “Now, are we going for dinner or not?”

If Ophelia was sad, she didn’t let us know. She smiled throughout the night and participated in conversations at all times, accepting tips and shared wisdom from all of us to guide her through her rise in the entertainment industry.

All this time I had been worrying about what Oscar might do to her, I forgot to take into account one important point: Ophelia wasn’t me. She wasn’t alone, she wasn’t broken, she wasn’t fragile like I was when I had met Adam and David. Unlike me, she knows that consent can be retracted. She knows that even when it is given, it might have been coerced by someone in a position of power over you. She knows who she is and what is her worth. She is strong and smart and surrounded by people who know what to warn her about, and who knew how to recognize the red flags. People who would know how to put her back together if she fell apart – which she clearly wasn’t about to.
As I started feeling better about Ophelia, another friend that I had had to leave behind took up space in my mind: Tyler.

The only time I had talked to him had been in December, over text, when the Grammy nominations came out and we saw our names on them, as principal soloists on Heathers. He had texted me first, I replied. We talked of nothing other than our shock and excitement and went back to ignoring each other’s existence as quickly as the first time, after his drunken kiss in Abu Dhabi.

Now, in February, it became harder to try and pretend that there wasn’t something wrong. Heathers The Movie Musical began pre-productions from a headquarters in New York, so our producers could keep their eyes on the Broadway cast as well, to make sure everything was fine. Because I was there for the U.N., I started dropping by to help with what I could. I took part in creative meetings and helped the costume department and one day I showed Eric, our composer and lyricist, a document I had written when I was preparing for the role with the final script.

It had not only my personal annotations – with voice inflections, and feelings I thought were driving the character at each particular line – but suggestions of shooting: how I thought the camera work should go, the cuts, the editing, the photography, the scenario, etc. Eric was so impressed he showed it to our director, Michael, who took one hard look at my suggestion for one of the group songs and said:

“You think we should do this in one take?!”

I shrugged. “I realize the complications to shoot one take scenes, but I feel it would improve the speed and feeling of the moment.”

He nodded, carefully, and I felt a knot on my stomach, wondering if that had been a terrible idea, if now they thought I was utterly wrong for the part.

“That’s not all,” Eric told him, “Check her thoughts on the Seventeen number. Her idea is we start it on the funeral, but progress into the graveyard.”


So, next thing I know, they’re offering me a job as executive producer, which I took in a heartbeat! That meant I had more work, but it brought me closer to directing one day, which was a long standing item on my bucket list!

I called Harry excited that day, and, that night, he sent me a huge bouquet of flowers and a chocolate basket – because he clearly knows me so well.

As the day got closer for us to start filming Heathers, I had to stop pretending everything was fine and admit to myself that I needed to fix the situation with Tyler, or else not only would I permanently lose a friend, but we would also end up ruining the movie. And now I was an executive producer I had even more reasons to want this movie to be a success.

Fortunately, I didn’t even need to call him, as we were scheduled to meet anyway for the Grammy Awards, in the middle of February. Fun fact: he brought a date.

I met them right as I left the red carpet after posing as usual – that time on my Tony Ward gray sleeveless dress, with a blue print on the edge, Veronica Sawyer’s color, my Heathers character. I thought it would be a good touch, since she was the character that gave me my first Grammy nomination, the whole reason why I was there.

The Musical Theatre Category was not on the televised ceremony, but the previous one, a few
hours before, with all the other technical categories. Janine called them the ‘unsexy categories’, the ones that didn’t excite most audiences, that wouldn’t have the most famous faces making speeches. For instance, if we won, our lyricist and composer would make the speech, not us. Thankfully, Selena’s latest album was a huge hit and she had been nominated in a few of the technical categories, so she was attending that one, and was my date again.

My eyes looked for her when I stepped away from a reporter on the red carpet, and I realized she was still taking her pictures. There were more reporters calling my name for an unscheduled interview, which was not only unprofessional, but unnerving, so I walked to a quieter part of the red carpet area to wait for Selena.

“Jen.”

My stomach fell into uneasiness even before I turned around to see Tyler come to greet me.

‘You have an Oscar, Silva’, I told myself in thought, ‘you can pretend everything is fine!’

I gave him what I assumed was a composed, collected smile. “Ty.”

We stared into each other’s eyes for one long minute before realizing we should probably say something else. Before we could, however, a tall, slim figure popped by his side, in a gorgeous pink degrade Basil Soda gown.

Her green eyes were defensive when she looked up at me daringly, her straight light brown hair flipping slightly as she did.

“Hi. I’m Stacey.” She smiled, knowingly.

“Jenifer.” I held the hand she offered me, noticing the unsurprising air she held about her as a badge of honor. Something told me this girl knew all there was to know about me – which only made me more uncomfortable.

“I’m Tyler’s date.” She explained, enlacing her arm in his.

I nodded, slowly, unsure if it was me or Tyler who were more surprised at her forwardness.

“Well, it is nice to meet you.” I said. “I’m Tyler’s…” I froze, thinking about it. “…friend.”

The word echoed painfully around us, as Tyler eyed me, both of us knowing that wasn’t completely true anymore.

“My God!” Selena blurted out, joining us, oblivious to the tense moment. “I hate red carpet interviews. It’s too loud to hear anything, and the questions are just always the same… Tyler! Hi!”

They exchanged a smile, and a kiss on the cheeks, and a number of lines about ‘how long it had been’.

“Hi, I’m Selena.” She smiled as shook Stacey’s hand.

“That’s Stacey.” I told her, with a smile. “She’s Tyler’s date.”

Selena was nodding, smiling at the green-eyed girl before she shot me a sudden look of understanding.

“Oh!” She let out. “Well, welcome to the Grammys! Is this your first time?”
Stacey smiled. “No. I’m not sure which time it is, actually. I’ve been coming to this since I was a kid, though I did manage to get out of it for a few years as a teenager…”

I exchanged a look with Sel, both of us wondering the same two things: one, who was this girl? And two, ‘when she was a teenager’? When was that, last month? Girl looked twelve.

“Stacey’s mother is Cathy Cooper.” Tyler explained, at the sight of our confusion.

Selena gasped. “Oh, my God! I love Cathy Cooper! She’s the biggest female country star!”

Cathy Cooper was a huge country phenomenon from the eighties or nineties, though she had been retired for a while. I knew I had seen Stacey’s pretty, round face before, probably in tabloids all around, as she and her family were still pretty much highly famous in the music industry. Her dad was a talented musical producer and they owned their own label in Nashville that represented everyone who was someone in country music.

“I’ll tell her you said so, she’ll be flattered.” Stacey smiled, nicely. “She’s here, actually, with dad. They must be inside already. I could introduce you if you’d like.”

Selena looked at me and giggled like a child, I saw her face go a little pale. “Oh, my God!” She whispered, making us smile. “Yes, please.”

“So, I heard about Beezus.” Tyler added, changing he subject. “That she’s gonna be in the choreography production team for Heathers. That’s pretty exciting.”

I smiled broadly, happy at a topic I could genuinely talk to him excitedly about.

In one of the pre-production staff meetings I attended as an executive producer, I had been informed that the Heathers choreography would be adapted from stage to big screen by none other than Gary Magdalen. Even without my quick Google research, I knew he was a big name in the dance scene, a famous Irish-Australian choreographer and trainer who owned one of Europe’s top dance schools. He also had experience choreographing music videos and had been hired – by us – to adapt our dance numbers to work in the movie adaptation. The thing I didn’t know was this: Apparently, he had a dance teacher in his school in London whom he respected very much, reason why he informed us – not asked, informed – that he was bringing her as his assistant. That teacher? Beatrice Quinn – the one I liked to call Bee.

“I know, right?!” I told him, almost jumping with excitement. “I’m so happy I’m gonna get to spend three months seeing her every day! So far the most time I got to spend with her was, well, that time in Abu-” I knew I had done something bad the moment the word came out of my mouth, but by then it was too late. “…Dhabi.” I finished, gloomily, with a deep sigh.

Selena was awkwardly staring at her nails – I had filled her and Taylor in on the events that transpired before Tyler left Abu Dhabi that past November. Tyler was looking at the sky, pretending the sunshine was the reason his face was twisted in a grimace. Stacey just squinted her eyes at me. Not angry or outraged or even jealous, just… curious.

I didn’t know which of their looks I hated more.

“Oh, my God! Is that your mom?!” Selena asked, suddenly.

I looked to where she was staring in a scare, already wondering what was my mother doing there when I realized she must have been talking to Stacey, because just a few meters from us, in all her glory, stood Cathy Cooper. She had platinum blonde wavy hair framing her heart-shaped face that didn’t look a day over thirty-five – though it was obvious some Botox and heavy makeup had a lot
to do with it. She was wearing a skin-tight, shiny, silver dress.

I looked at Stacey, the ghost of a polite smile on her lips. Clearly, she wasn’t very excited to see her mother. I took another look at her straightened down light brown hair, remembering the tempered, articulated way she phrased her words, and composed manner she held herself. She didn’t look very Nashville. In fact, she didn’t look even a little country. It must have been hard growing up as Cathy Cooper’s daughter when you didn’t seem to want anything to do with country.

I felt a little compassion for her.

“Oh, my God! Can you introduce me?!” Selena begged her.

Stacey seemed frightened. “Now?”

“Yes, might as well! Please?” Sel insisted.

Stacey exchanged a scared look with Tyler.

“The red carpet is maybe not the best time for it.” I suggested. “I mean, you said it yourself, is too loud…”

I partly wanted to help Stacey, as I knew mothers could be difficult, and partly just didn’t want them to leave us alone. But it was useless.

“Non-sense!” Selena said, dismissively, holding Stacey by her arm and marching over to Cathy Cooper and her husband, Stacey’s dad, Andrew Havensburg.

For a long, silent moment we watched as they approached the famous couple awkwardly. Her mother gave Stacey a long kiss on the cheeks – which must have left a mark, as she was wearing bright red lipstick.

I was determined to watch them in silence the entire time until they came back, but Tyler didn’t seem so sure.

“It won’t be weird!” He blurted out, after a while, looking restless, as if finally voicing his fears after holding them for too long.

I stared at him for a long time in confusion. “What won’t?”

“Us. Working together. Filming Heathers. It will not be weird. It will not be awkward.”

I took in a sharp breath as I let his words echo in my mind, feeling doubtful.

“Yes, because we’re doing such a good job of handling it now…” I said, sarcastic. “Kissing on camera should be a piece of cake.”

He almost laughed, if he hadn’t been so nervous.

“It will be.” He vowed.

“How can you know?” I asked, sad. “Ty, things are pretty weird-“

“They won’t be! Okay? I promise!” He said, enthusiastic. “Listen, Jen, I promise. I won’t let it be weird.”

“Tyler…”
“I don’t love you anymore.” He said, whispery. I looked around to see if anyone was paying much attention to us, but the reporters, paparazzi, and even the fans in the stands far away, were all out of earshot. “I need you to believe me. I don’t. I know that in Abu Dhabi…” He sighed, biting his lip, distraught. “I was drunk, Jen. And confused. And I was dealing with a bunch of shit and I took it out on you and I am so, so sorry.”

I stared at the ground, wiggling my toes on my black sandals on top of the red carpet, hugging my Charlotte Olympia white clutch a bit too strongly as I desperately tried to believe him.

“But I don’t feel that way anymore. And we have to work together, so I need you to believe me.” He went on. I nodded, gulping. “And more than that… I wanna be your friend.”

I closed my eyes in desperation. Could we ever get that back? Could we ever be friends again without me second guessing every single one of his words?

“I know I haven’t been your friend for a long time, much longer than I had realized…” He added. “I wasn’t there for you when your heart was breaking because of David… I focused on us when I should have focused on you. I tried to be something more when you just wanted a friend, and I’m so sorry I left you.”

I started biting my inner cheeks to keep the tears from filling my eyes, realizing he was voicing something I had been upset about for so long.

He took a step closer and held my hand. I took a deep breath, and looked at him.

“I wasn’t a good friend, and I’m sorry. But I wanna be your friend again, if you’ll let me.”

I nodded, still using all of my strength to keep myself from tearing up. Then, in a second, I gave him a quick smile before I pulled him in for a hug, wrapping my arms around his shoulders and hearing as the shouting nearby got louder as our fans rejoiced at the public display of affection.

When I forgave Tyler that night, I wasn’t just forgiving his stupid drunk kiss, but his misguided anger and abandonment as well. His absence when I needed him most. His misplaced feelings that ruined us.

“…They’re taking a lot of pictures of us right now.” I said, half-jokingly, half-worried as I heard the clicking sound of cameras going off around us.

Tyler let out a giggle. “I don’t mind if you don’t.”

“We’re gonna be fine.” I told him, as I let go of his embrace, deciding if he didn’t love me anymore, there was no reason why we shouldn’t be.

He nodded, smiling, and we overheard a commotion near where the girls where.

We looked back at them to see Selena holding her phone up, taking pictures near the paparazzi of Stacey posing in the red carpet, looking absolutely mortified, as her parents kissed each of her cheeks.

“She seems nice.” I told him, watching how he nodded absentmindedly, eyeing his green-eyed date with affection. “…do you love her?”

He looked at me, suddenly, a bit thrown off by the question. He seemed to think for a long time as he looked at Stacey before replying.
“I don’t know.”

I gave him a sad smile of understanding, hoping, truly wishing my (former) best friend would find new hope on the green-eyed girl who seemed so sure of herself. Begging that God would let him fell in love with her so deeply he would one day laugh at how silly he was for thinking I was the person he was supposed to end up with.

“…I should probably go rescue her, though.” He added, looking worried as Stacey face grew as red as the carpet under our shoes.

He gave me one last reassuring smile, which I returned.

“See you inside.” He said, before leaving.

Less than a minute later, Selena walked back to meet me with a fan girl smile still on her lips.

“Oh, my God!” She said, breathless, “Cathy Cooper is wild!” she said, as we made our way into the theater where the ceremony was being held.

“Jenifer!” A reporter shouted from behind a steel barricade. “Are you excited about winning your first Grammy tonight?!”

I waved, smiling, but kept walking with Selena, resolute to not speaking any more than I had to, especially with people who seemed intent on raising my expectations too high.

“When we got there,” Sel went on, “Stacey introduced me and Cathy immediately poked my breasts with her fingers-“ I shot her a glance of shock, and she laughed, holding her boobs popping out of her dramatic cleavage. “I know! Right?! She said, Oh dear, look at these tatas, I wish my daughter would let me dress her up in these daring dresses! Stacey looked like she wanted to die!”

We giggled as we walked down the corridor of the place. It felt too bright before the show started, and I remembered that, because the ceremony was not televised, the full lighting effects were even played. In fact, most guests didn’t attend, choosing to arrive exclusively for the televised ceremony later, so the seats were only half-full.

Selena and I were sat together in the front row. Her musical producer was by her side, and Tyler and Stacey by mine, with our lyricist and composer right behind us. We made our way there stopping by to say hello to old friends, enjoying the fact it was still a little early.

Suddenly, just as I was saying hello to the Imagine Dragons’ vocalist, I realized he had someone beside him. As much as I wanted to, I knew it would be rude not to acknowledge him, so I did.

“Hello, Oscar.” I said, giving him a polite smile I knew he would see right through.

The last time I had talked to Oscar Isaac played in my head, when I had practically threatened to make his life a living hell if he ever mistreated Ophelia. That might have explained why he seemed a bit scared to see me – he and Ophelia had broken up, after all, and he probably assumed I was going to blame him for it.

“Oh, that’s my friend right there! Excuse me, guys.” Dan Reynolds said, making a quick exit without realizing the tension he was leaving behind.

There was an awkward long minute of silence before Oscar shot me a funny look.

“You must have heard about me and Ophelia.” He said.
“Don’t worry.” I told him. “I know she was the one who broke up with you. I’m not about to make your life a living hell just yet.”

He laughed, seemingly uncomfortable.

“I suppose you think she’s made a bad decision, breaking up with you.”

“No.” He said. “She’s worried about her career. I understand.”

That took me a little off-guard. “Really?” I asked, suspicious.

He smiled, a little more natural now, and seemed to think really hard of how to say his next words.

“I know that as a woman, and as someone who loves Ophelia, it’s just… easier for you to believe I’m some sort of… conniving jerk who wants to hurt her…” He started. “After all, if I am, you know what to tell her and you know what to do. You tell her not to be with me. Simple like that.”

I felt my own eyes squinting at him. He thought that was easy?

“After all, that’s easier than the other possibility.” He shrugged. “That I care.”

“How so?” I asked.

“I care about Ophelia and I care about her career, because I know that’s important to her… and she’s important to me. So I understand that she needs to focus on it right now, as much as it might feel like hell being away from her.”

I saw the way his eyes avoided mine as he spoke, knowing he must have meant those words if it they made him feel so uncomfortable.

“And believing that would be a problem to you, because then you would have to face the reality that Ophelia fell in love with someone who will make her life a bit of a mess.” His eyes met mine now, and they looked even sadder than he sounded. “And when we love someone, we just want their lives to be simple. So, of course, you wanna believe that there’s a good reason to keep her from me, because it’s easier than seeing that she would be happy with someone who would complicate her life.”

There was another long moment of silence before he sighed.

“Of course that lives us both in a bit of pickle, doesn’t it?” he asked. “You keep trying to convince yourself that I’m a monster, and by doing so keep Ophelia away from someone that could make her happy, and I… I just want her life to be simple and happy, and so I just let her do whatever she wants with me. Including breaking my heart in a million pieces… And so, because we both love her, we’re all just settling for misery.” He shrugged, sadly. “Love is weird, isn’t it?”

There was a longer silence than I was comfortable with, and as I realized I was starting to warm up to Oscar – with his deep dark eyes and charming smile -, I decided it was time to go. We weren’t close enough to need a good excuse, so all I said before turning around to leave in a hurry was:

“Good luck tonight.”

I might have even meant it.

Sara Bareilles was blushing adorably while I told her how much I loved her latest album when my phone ringed. I excused myself, with an apologetic smile, walking absentmindedly across the rows
while I answered.

“Hi, babe.” I said, smiling involuntarily.

“Hey.” He shot, a little too dry for my taste. “What’s going on?”

“Nothing much, just, you know…” I faked calm and poise. “At the Grammys! Where I’m nominated!” Harry giggled, and I followed, allowing myself to enjoy the moment. “I mean, I know the ceremony is not televised, and if we win I don’t even get to make a speech… But still, I’m nominated for a Grammy Award! It just… downed on me. How crazy is that?”

“Not crazy at all, honestly.” He said. “Makes perfect sense to me…”

I smiled, even when he sounded a little less than his usually enthusiast self to be talking to me, he was still complimentary.

“So,” he started, and I had a feeling this would be when he let me know what was really on his mind, “seen anyone interesting?”

I thought about it, “I was just talking to Sara Bareilles. But other than her, the most famous people here are me and Selena… Most people usually just arrive for the televised ceremony later, so still a bit soon for it… Ah!” I bit a lip, after a few people turned to look at me when I shouted. I whispered the rest of the call. “I did see Cathy Cooper! She looks amazing. A little wild, maybe, but amazing!”

“Really?” He asked, sounding bored, which I ignored as I still wanted to tell him more about Cathy Cooper.

“Yes! Sel got to take a selfie with her! Turns out she’s the mother of Tyler’s date, so small world!”

“What?” He asked, a little more interested now. “Whose what?!”

I sighed, as I finally realized what the issue was.

“Tyler. Tyler’s date.” I told him, remembering that Harry usually went on the internet when I was attending an award ceremony, to see pictures of me. He must have seen pictures of me and Tyler on the red carpet.

“So… you saw Tyler.” He added.

“Yes, we’re both nominated. He’s a principal soloist in Heathers, too, remember?”

“Right. Right… I also remember he kissed you last November, which begs the question, why are you hugging him?!”

I was grateful he couldn’t see the grin on my lips. Men are so typical.

“He apologized.” I said, wondering if I should tell him what Tyler said about not loving me anymore. I decided it was personal, and I shouldn’t unless Harry asked. “I was forgiving him.”

“Can’t you forgive him with a respectful handshake?” He asked, and I laughed. “I wasn’t really joking.”

“I’m Brazilian. So… no.”

Harry sighed. “I don’t like that you have to be around someone that hurt you.”
“I know…” I sighed, “But we’re fine. I told you, he apologized. And he brought a date! We’re, you know, trying to be civil. We’ll have to work together for three months starting next month, so we have to.” He was silent. “Also, he says he doesn’t love me anymore.” I admitted.

“And you believed him?”

I rolled my eyes, getting annoyed now. “Yes! Harry, is fine. We’re fine, I promise.”

The lights on the theater blinked and I knew it was the cue that the ceremony was about to start.

“Sorry, Harry, I have to go…” I told him. “I have a Grammy to lose.”

“You can be so pessimistic sometimes.” He said. “I think you’re gonna win.”

“I think you’re delusional.” I replied. “Also a little uninformed about musical theater.”

“Say whatever you want… I may not know much about musical theater, but I know my girlfriend.” He argued. “And guess what?”

“What?” I asked, making my way back to my seat.

“She’s pretty amazing.” I smiled at myself, feeling my cheeks blush, glad he couldn’t see that either. “And I’m willing to bet a lot of money she’s gonna win a Grammy tonight, because that’s just the kind of crazy shit she does.”

I giggled. “Really? You wanna bet on it?”

“You bet.” He replied, smartly.

“How much?”

“A thousand!”

“A thousand what?”

“…dollars?”

“Deal.” I told him, shaking my head with a smile. “Easiest money I ever made.”

“We’ll see.” He answered.

“Harry, if I win this…” I sighed. “I’ll have an Oscar, and Emmy and a Grammy.” I told him, hoping he would be able to understand how crazy it sounded.

“Yes!” He agreed, clearly not understanding it. “Pretty amazing!”

“And I’ll be a Tony Award short of being the youngest person ever to have all these awards!” I told him, remembering my conversation with Janine and Richard about the E.G.O.T. so long ago. “It’s insane!”

“I know!” Harry said, exasperated. “I know what it means, Jen, I just really believe it’s gonna happen.”

I smiled, sighing, reluctant to buy into his optimism. “I’m still on a hate wave…” I reminded him.

“Which does not influence critically voted awards.” He said.
I took the phone away from my face to look at the name on the caller I.D. – it read Mr. Smith. For a moment I had thought I was talking to Richard.

“How do you know that?”

“You greatly underestimate my interest in your life.” He teased, making my smile grow bigger.

The orchestra started playing and I could see a host walking on stage. I quickly took my seat between Tyler and Selena, whispering a quick goodbye to Harry.

“It’s beginning, Harry, I have to go!” I told him, avoiding Tyler’s eyes, knowing he could hear me. “Get ready to transfer me a thousand bucks!” I joked, before turning my phone on silent mode.

Though I loved his enthusiasm, I was very sure we weren’t going to win, because it just felt like that kind of year: the year Jenifer Silva is hated. The year Jenifer Silva works, but doesn’t feel like it. The year Jenifer Silva doesn’t win.

Which is why I was so surprised when we won.

I was so surprised that, when we heard the word ‘Heathers’ come out of the announcer’s mouth when she was announcing the Best Musical Theater Album category, my mouth dropped open, and I automatically looked at Tyler, who was looking at me – his expression and mine were the same. We hugged, forgetting all kinds of drama from the past as if they had never even happened.

“We won a Grammy!” He shouted in my ear.

“We won a Grammy!” I shouted back, laughing, while we got up.

I hugged Selena, ecstatic. Tyler hugged Stacey. And we made our way up the stage with Eric and Marcela, our lyricist and composer.

Maybe the ceremony didn’t look as fancy as the one scheduled to start a few hours away, and maybe I didn’t get to make a speech – as Eric and Marcela did – but when they put that trophy, that shiny, golden gramophone trophy, on my hands, it felt as real as it could be.

I looked at Tyler on stage, as Eric, a few feet in front, by the mic, started to thank our cast and crew, and gave him a shocked look.

“What the actual fuck is happening?!” I mouthed. He shrugged, laughing, as the words ‘Jenifer Silva, Grammy winner’ echoed in my head.

And that’s the story of how I lost a thousand dollars to my boyfriend.

Chapter End Notes

Yoooooooooo. Jen won a GRAMMY. Will this girl ever understand she’s good at what she does? If she’s winning an Emmy and Grammy when the world hates her imagine what she’ll win when they love her!

Sorry about the filler chapter, you guys, but here’s a spoiler: the next few chapters will have a lot of Harry! =D Tell me if you liked it? I’d love to know! THanks for reading!
I marched into the living room, barefoot, my Anthony Vaccarello mini skirt had a piece of fabric on the side that extended almost to my ankles, and it was flowing behind me as I walked.

“Harry?” I called.

“Wait.” He said, looking intense, his eyes frozen on the TV as he and Adam played some shooting video game.

They were both leaning forward supporting their elbows on their knees as if it would help them play better, and I stared at the TV until they were done, about half a minute later. Harry pressed pause, and they both looked at me at the same time.

“Woah.” Harry said, eyeing me up and down as Adam let out one long whistle of admiration.

I smiled, flattered, and gave a spin. I paired my black mini skirt with a black, skintight crop top, a thin golden necklace and turquoise and bright pink drop earrings. My hair was down in loose waves, but the best part would come later: bright pink stiletto heels with black and white stripes in different patterns.

Adam looked at Harry, seeming confused for a moment. “Were we supposed to dress up?”

Harry looked at his own outfit – blue jeans, brown shoes and a white button up shirt.

“I don’t know, this is what I usually wear.”

I rolled my eyes, realizing Adam was also wearing what he almost always wore: black everything.

“Here, is this okay?” I asked, walking closer and leaning down so he could see my makeup.

Harry barely took the time to check before shooting Adam a worrying, embarrassed glance, and starting to sing off-key:

“When I see your faaaaace-“

“Ugh, you’re useless!” I interrupted.

Ever since the day I was getting ready, and he had made the joke about that song, if I ever dared asking him if I looked okay he would start singing. Of course, my frustration is exactly what he wanted.

I turned to look at Adam. “Adam, is my eyeliner straight?”
His eyes widened as he looked at Harry, confused. Harry ignored him and just kept singing, looking at me with a teasingly romantic look.

“…there’s not a thing that I would change…”

“Adam. Here. My eyeliner. Focus.”

Adam leaned forward to look at my eyes, probably confused as to what he was supposed to be checking. “Uh…” He mumbled. “…yes? I think? Yes.”

“See, a straight answer.” I told Harry. “It’s all I need!”

He stopped singing, “You will remember that that was precisely my argument when we first talked about this song.”

“You made your point when you sang it the first time, you didn’t have to keep doing it.”

He smiled. “But you look so cute when you’re frustrated.”

Rolling my eyes, battling a smile, I went back into the room to finish getting ready.

“What the hell was that about?” I heard Adam asking him while I walked.

We were in Tribeca, at Taylor’s house, getting ready for a surprise birthday party that I had been planning for a couple of weeks now. I hadn’t seen Harry since we spent New Year’s together in Brazil, but he had been supportive when I told him I needed to spend my first days off since in Manhattan.

“You could come!” I said, excited, and soon enough he had bought a plane ticket.

He arrived that morning, and instead of making out, he had to work out his jet lag by helping me set up the party, which bored him to all ends, but he did anyway.

It was March, the few days I had off before heading into full-filming schedule for Heathers, the Movie Musical. I had been so busy with writing my book, looking to find studios to shoot the script I had written, working with the U.N. and doing the executive producer work for Heathers, that my mind had finally started to drift from the Hate Wave. That’s how I found the solution to my problems: If work is making me miserable, I should just work more! Work harder, do more, do new things, fight to find the love I once had for the industry that made me who I was.

Dr. Arrow, the therapist I was still seeing, though mostly through Skype sessions now, had been quick to point out the irony of looking for a solution at the root of the problem, but I just ignored him.

I put on my bright pink shoes and looked in the mirror. Perfect! The shoes were very Ophelia, which was the theme of the night! We had told everyone to wear colored shoes, like she would, and there would be a photo booth with red hair wigs and Academy Awards props for people to pose like her.

It was Ophelia’s birthday, but more importantly, we were celebrating her rise. The big champion of the 2016 award season was her: She had won the SAG award, the Golden Globe, the Bafta and, of course, the People’s Choice that I had been there to see.

And then, of course, there was the Academy. Ophelia had been nominated for two of them: best supporting actress and best leading actress, for two different movies. A feature in itself that was
already an honor.

I attended the ceremony, because Richard and Janine were still pestering me about ‘being seen’ and ‘remaining relevant’, and the organizers had asked me to present the Best Leading Actress award. Screen time was golden time, which meant my management wouldn’t hear of me trying to get away from me no matter how much I reminded them of the Hate Wave.

Admittedly, it was starting to fade now, as people got more excited about other things, though I still remembered an article claiming I had had a fight with Harry because I was demanding he called me ‘princess’ – he thought it was pretty funny.

Still, when it came down to it, I was glad I was there to be with Ophelia on her big day. There was no question on my mind that she would win – though she seemed to have her doubts —, but the question was just which one she would win for. I was hoping she would win the best leading actress one, since I would be presenting it. I just really wanted to give her her first Oscar!

When the time came, she won the best supporting actress Academy Award, which already made as happy as I thought I could be for someone else. She hugged me on her way to the stage, trembling and crying, but it didn’t stop then.

“And the Academy goes to…” I said in the microphone, a few minutes later, starting to try and open the envelope and stopping myself to give the crowd a funny look. “Oh, I always wanted to sat that!” they laughed, and I popped the golden lock on the paper to read the name of the winner.

Admittedly, because Ophelia had already won her award and no one ever won two, I was now feeling a little less enthused about it. Reason why I was so shocked when I saw her name on the card.

I looked up, the gigantic crowd of the Academy Awards, the best and the brightest of the film industry, looking at me in tension wanting to know who that year’s winner was. I kept wondering if there was a mistake. But, of course, there wasn’t.

I looked at Ophelia, on second row, dressed in red, holding her Academy Award like a baby looking as happy as I had ever seen her and a lot calmer than she had been all night – thinking the emotions were over.

I smiled at her from the stage when I approached the microphone again, knowing my voice would break in a cry even before I spoke.

“Ophelia Callis!” I cried out, trying to sound impartial and failing miserably.

I saw her eyes widen as she wondered if I was joking. Sitting in front of her, I saw Oscar Isaac turn to her smiling as the rest of the crowd erupted in applause.

The stage assistant handed me the Oscar. It had her name on it, so I knew it couldn’t be a joke. I was feeling so many things that all I could do was cover my mouth with a hand as I felt tears streaming down my face as Ophelia made her trembling way to the stage.

I had only a few seconds to remember something she had said when we first met.

She was a cute thirteen year old, her hair was just as red, her cheeks were a little chubbier, and her eyes had some more wonder to them. We were sitting at Comic Con, wearing Power Ranger costumes, trying blend in to enjoy the madness without being bothered.

We had been sitting in silence, watching the crowds, when Ophelia asked about the things I had
done as an actress, and I started telling her about being nominated for a Tony, and for a Bafta. Her eyes shined in amazement.

“Did you ever go to the Oscars?” she asked.

I nodded. “I went last year.” I told her, remembering my first year at the ceremony, still as not much more than a television star – wondering if a one-hit teenage wonder was all I’d ever be.

“It must be so crazy.” She mentioned. “Standing in front of all those people… How would you even know what to say? I mean, can you even imagine?”

I didn’t - not then. At twenty years old, all I knew was fear and heartbreak and parties. All I knew was to daydream about it. I wouldn’t know what it felt like until three years later, when my time came.

When I stood in that same stage and raised my first Academy Award to the air telling my abuser to kiss my Oscar-winning ass, feeling like my own version of a super-hero. Saving myself.

Because I still remembered that amazing feeling so clearly, the feeling of knowing you made it, I knew exactly what Ophelia was feeling. I knew she could feel her fears leaving her body at each step she took, I knew she kept repeating the words ‘Oscar winner’ in her head, trying to convince herself that that was really her.

As she walked towards me, her face almost as red as her hair from the tears, she was holding an Academy Award in one hand and covering her mouth with the other, still in shock. I was still crying for her, my tears of happiness for the little thirteen year old I met once, who had just found out what it felt like to win not one, but two Academy Awards.

Ophelia finally reached me at center-stage.

“You won!” I shouted, loud, so she’d hear me through the applause. “You won another one!”

She stopped walking right in front of me, looking at the golden statue in my hand. She couldn’t take her hand from her mouth to grab it, so she just leaned forward and rested her head on my shoulder and started crying harder.

Laughing through my tears, I hugged her tightly, patting her back.

“You won, O! You won two!” I kept repeating, unsure if she could understand me.

Finally, she took a deep breath and tried to dry her eyes.

“Look at me.” I told her, and she did, so I gave her her – second – Oscar and started drying her eyes and checking to see if her makeup was smudged – it wasn’t. God bless waterproof mascara.

“Go, you have a speech to make!” I told her, pulling her gently towards the microphone.

She took some deep breaths in front of the microphone and seemed to think deeply of what to say. You don’t usually get to make a second speech, so I really had no idea what was going through her head.

Suddenly, she shook her head, smiling. “I can’t remember what to say, ‘cause all I keep thinking is God bless Jenifer Silva.” She looked back at me, laughing, and I felt so touched I quickly walked towards her and hugger her by her waist, from the back, resting my head in her shoulder as the crowd applauded.
“Get to the speech, your time is running out!” I urged her, jokingly, as I walked back to the side, making the room laugh.

“Right, I know!” She took a deep breath again, getting on game mode. “God, winning this just means so mu-” she stopped talking. She had looked down to the award I just handed her as she spoke, before realizing she didn’t know which one of the two it was. “Wait. Which one- Doesn’t matter!”

The crowd erupted in laughter, and she broke into a smile herself, blushing.

Soon enough it was all over and we found ourselves in the Vanity Fair after party, dancing and talking the night away, enjoying the best night of her life.

A few weeks later, in March, Taylor marched into her own bedroom looking excited.

“She’s here!” She squealed and I jumped up, having just finished putting on my shoes. “Are you done? Are we all done? We need to go, she’s here!”

“I’m ready, calm down.” I told her, as we walked back into the living room. The boys were already at the door, ready to leave.

I had decided to throw Ophelia a party inspired in one Taylor had thrown me in 2014, right after I had won my first Academy Award. A celebration party, basically. Except we had managed to schedule it for the Saturday of her birthday, which meant we got to make it a surprise birthday party as well! I was happy, as I had missed her birthday the previous year because of work.

“Oh, we’ll go upstairs.” Taylor was saying, pulling Adam into an elevator, “We’ll get everyone into position and the lights out for you. You wait for her here and take her up, remember to makeup an excuse as to why you need to go to the terrace-“

“Taylor.” I interrupted, seeing the numbers of the second elevator dangerously approach our floor. “I know how a surprise party works! Just go!”

“Right! Right!”

The door on her elevator closed just as the second one dinged that it was on our floor. Harry was putting his blazer on.

“Show time.” He said, with a grin, as the doors opened to reveal not only the birthday girl, but her boyfriend as well.

Oscar Isaac.

“It’s slippery!” Ophelia complained, looking at the two golden Oscars on her hands. “I mean, is it supposed to be slippery? I thought I was going to drop it the whole time!”

The music was loud at the Vanity Fair party, and we were sitting alone in a table after having spent maybe two hours dancing like crazy on the dance floor. Her family had gone home, and I had enjoyed the lack of press on the party to slip her a Vodka soda to try and calm her nerves about the whole night. Not that her parents would mind, Ophelia was almost nineteen, after all, and in Australia, where they’re from, the legal drinking age is eighteen, so she had drank before.

“Look, all I can hear is someone who didn’t drop her Academy Awards on live national television bragging about it to someone who did.” I teased her, and she laughed.
She put her Oscars on the table, looking at them dreamily.

“I might sleep with them tonight.” She told me. “Would that be weird?”

I shrugged. “I did it.”

She smiled, looking at me. “You did?!” she laughed.

“Wanna know what the best part about winning an Oscar is?” I asked her.

“Winning an Oscar?” She asked.

“Free cars.”

She gave me the weirdest look, and we laughed again. “I’m serious! Just wait for it!”

Then, as we took some deep breaths, watching the party go on around us with smiles on our faces, I realized I wished I could go back to a time when it had felt that good. When it had felt like nothing could hurt me.

I looked at Ophelia. She wasn’t smiling anymore, but her brows were curled in preoccupation as she stared ahead. I followed her sad eyes, realizing she was staring at Oscar, at a table nearby, nodding as he listened to Jennifer Lawrence ramble. If I knew Jen, she was probably drunk-rambling at that point of the night, which meant Oscar was just being polite, since, when Jennifer Lawrence drunk-rambles, nobody can understand her.

I remembered his words during the Grammy Awards, about how he respected the fact Ophelia’s career was important to her. I remembered how Adam told me I wasn’t the type of actress to win awards, or how David once told me I had a ‘face for television, rather than movies’. Biting a lip, I started to think maybe Oscar wasn’t so bad.

I looked at Ophelia again, sighing as she brought her eyes from Oscar to look at her awards.

“O?” I asked. She looked at me. “What do you want?” She looked confused. “In the deep of your soul, in the most obscure little corner of your heart, right now, what do you want more than anything in the world? What is the one thing that would make your life perfect at this exact moment?”

I knew which answer I wanted. I wanted her to look at her record-breaking Academy Awards and smile at me, as if to say, I have everything I could ever want.

I also knew which answer I didn’t want: the one she gave me. She opened her mouth, a little surprised by the question, and her eyes immediately went back to where Oscar was. She gulped, and I also knew how she felt then.

I knew it, because when I had won my Academy Award, in 2014, Harry and I had broken up. We were trying to follow ‘Plan A’, the plan in which we go on and find other people to love, to try and live our lives in an uncomplicated way. I remembered looking at my Oscar and thinking that Harry was the only other thing I wanted.

“You told me you broke up with him because of your image.” I told Ophelia, leaning forward in my chair to look at her closer. “Here’s the thing, O. And bear in mind I could be wrong. I could regret my words… But I think that’s a mistake.”

I saw her brows curl in confusion. “I don’t think you should ever break up with someone because
they might tarnish your image. Fuck your image, Ophelia. That’s just what people think of you. And, sure, in our line of work that’s somewhat important… but when you go home at night, you’re not Oscar-winning actress Ophelia Callis. You’re just you. When you lay your head on your pillow to sleep, your image will not stop the regret from filling your heart.”

I saw her take a deep sigh, and I thought I might have seen some tears on her eyes.

“I know I said it was a mistake. But…” I sighed. “Even Jenifer Silva can be wrong sometimes.”

She nodded, serious.

“At which point after you win an Oscar…” She started, “Do you start to refer to yourself in the third person?”

I laughed, and O joined me, her remark breaking the terribly tense moment.

“I just want you to be happy.” I told her, after we were in silence again. “As happy as you can possibly be. And if he’d do that, then… by all means, go be happy, O.”

She smiled, looking at Oscar, and I knew I had just one more thing to say:

“Coming from someone who was once dubbed ‘the girl who dates older men’,” I started, “trust me when I tell you there’s nothing you can do when people decide to hate you. They will, either you give them a reason or not… so just… live your life the way you want to.”

She stood up, suddenly, and gave a strong kiss on the cheek that I was sure would leave a lipstick mark. I didn’t care.

I followed her, to make sure Jennifer wouldn’t be a problem and, sure enough, when we got there, before Ophelia could even say something to Oscar, Jennifer started speaking.

“Ophelia, Jenny!” She said, drunkenly. “I need milk!”

We looked at her, confused. Well, I did. Ophelia and Oscar were locked away in their own little world as they still stared at each other with heart-eyes.

“Okay, honey, let’s go get you some milk.” I told Jennifer, dragging her away from the other two.

After that, as they say, the rest is history.

It was a few days later that the world woke up to the news that double-Oscar winning actress Ophelia Callis, eighteen, was dating singer-actor Oscar Isaac, thirty-five. They had spent a weekend at the beach, and the pictures showed them cuddling each other in public with no shame.

I still worried it was a mistake, but I knew that if I could go back in time and be with Harry earlier, I would. So why not let Ophelia live her life, even if it was a mistake? I would be here if her heart broke. I would help her through.

Thought, by the way Oscar looked at her, I was starting to think that might not happen. I couldn’t say I liked him just yet, though, which Ophelia knew.

So we didn’t repeat the fight we had had last year, instead of ignoring the problem, she decided to address it: by telling me she knew I didn’t like her boyfriend.

“I don’t mind him particularly.” I told her. “I just worry…”
“I know, but I want you to try!” She begged me. “Just try and like him as a person! Not necessarily as my boyfriend… Please! For me!”

“I’ll work on it…” I had said.

And then the perfect opportunity to work on it arrived. We needed an excuse to bring Ophelia to Taylor’s house for her party, so I had called Oscar and told him my plan.

As he still remembered my words, he was very prompt in helping.

The plan was this: All Ophelia knew was that Harry and I invited her and Oscar for a double-date, to celebrate her birthday. She was so excited that I wanted to spend time getting to know Oscar that she said yes before I had even finished asking. So, the next step, was to tell her to come and meet us at Taylor’s, because she thought I was staying there, so we could go to the restaurant together.

We set up the party, with the caterers and the decoration and the music. We had made sure everyone walked in through the back, so she wouldn’t even see it on the news that all her friends were in town – I had managed to invite most of them, since we knew a lot of the same people, and then just told them to invite whoever else they thought she’d like to see there.

Now, all left was to get her upstairs.

“Hi!” She smiled, when the elevator doors opened, quickly running her eyes up and down my outfit before looking serious. “I am clearly underdressed.”

Of course she was – she thought we were only going for dinner.

“Non-sense!” I said, as Harry and I stepped into the elevator before they could make to get out. “You look beautiful!” I kissed her hello, and wished her a happy birthday very casually, quickly turning to Harry. “O, this is Harry. Harry, Ophelia.” I introduced, enjoying the moment of distraction when they shook hands to press the elevator button to the terrace instead of foyer without her seeing it.

I had planned on calling it a mistake when she noticed, but she was so busy blushing over Harry’s accent as he said it was ‘a pleasure to meet her’ and ‘happy birthday!’, that she didn’t even see it.

“Jen speaks very highly of you.” He told her, noticing the need for a distraction.

“Thanks.” Ophelia squealed, still not letting go of his hand after a long time. “And, I must say, great hair!”

They laughed together, Ophelia still hanging onto his hand absentmindedly. “You too!”

Oscar cleared his throat.

“Right.” She jumped, blushing, letting go of his hand. “This is Oscar. My boyfriend. This is… Harry.” She said his name, unsure she could call him that.

The two men shook hands with polite smiles. It was weird thinking that Oscar was even older than Harry – even if just a couple of years. They both sort of looked the same age, though they were physically so different. Harry was pale and strongly built, with ginger hair and blue eyes, as Oscar was slightly skinnier, with a tan skin and dark hair and eyes. They both had very slight wrinkles around their eyes.

In all the time I had dated him, including when it was all a lie, it had just occurred to me how weird
it was that I had never gotten to introduce Ophelia to Harry and vice versa.

“And you know Jen.” She said, and Oscar and I exchanged our usual cold look, with a respectful nod.

Ophelia didn’t look like that’s what she wanted from us, but she seemed to let it go for now. She eyed me up and down again, noticing my feet and she gasped. “Oh, my God! I love your shoes!”

I smiled, “Thank you, I wore them in your honor.”

Then, the doors opened and we turned to them.

“Oh, this doesn’t look like the foyer.” Ophelia commented, the first to step closer to the doors.

“Hm, really?” I asked, innocently. I needed her to step out to see the people hiding just around the corner from the elevator. “We should go see what floor it is.” I said, right before giving her one strong push on the back.

She stumbled forwards a couple of steps, and turned to me, looking confused at the unnecessary use of strength, when the lights turned on and a chorus of people shouted ‘surprise!’.

Ophelia looked more surprised than when she had won the Oscar. She immediately started laughing, putting the pieces of the puzzle together.

I walked out of the elevator and gave her a big hug.

“Happy birthday, O!” I shouted, all I could say before Taylor’s arms were around us. With her, came the arms of Maisie Williams, Natalie Dormer, Gigi Hadid, Karlie Kloss and… that’s all I could see before we were buried in a group hug of our girlfriends.

Laughing, we let her so she could hug each of us individually.

“This is so amazing!” She squealed, looking around the decorated room before she focus on the two gigantic Academy Awards Statues by the elevator. “How did you even get that?!”

“We might have bribed the Academy staff after the ceremony was over and flown them across the country here.” Taylor told her and I winced.

“Bribed is such an ugly word…” I commented. “We got them in exchange for money… which might not have been legal. That sounds better.”

She started noticing all our colorful shoes then.

“I wish I had dressed up more!” She complained.

“Don’t fret, we have everything planned.” I told her, and almost out of thin air Taylor brought the two big shopping bags with her gifs from us. “Go back to Taylor’s and change, we’ll be waiting.”

Taylor left with her, leaving us to get the party started. The girl dispersed again, going about the food and drinks, and getting ready to start using the karaoke.

When I realized it, I was alone with Oscar and Harry, who smiled at me.

“See? It all worked out.”

“I know.” I smiled back, taking a step closer and hugging him by the waist. “I knew it would.
Taylor was the one freaking out.”

“Right, because you didn’t yell at me today for setting up the balloons wrong.” He said, looking at Oscar with a desperate glance.

“It’s letters-balloons!” I explained, pointing at the big, golden ‘Ophelia’ letters floating near the wall. “You had spelled her name wrong!”

Oscar let out a giggle at us, and my smile vanished. Now that the surprise was done with it, there wasn’t much need for us to try and get along unless Ophelia was directly involved.

“Anyway…” He started, looking uncomfortable. “Everything looks great!”

I smiled, coldly again, hoping he would get a hint and go find someone else to talk to. Now that the planning was done I wanted to spend more time with Harry.

“So, Oscar…” He started, and I sighed in frustration. “You’re from South America, right? Jen is from Brazil.”

I stared at him for a long time, trying to understand why was he trying to make me talk to Oscar.

“Yes, I know.” Oscar agreed, smiling. “Jenifer is like, our Latina Ambassador. The community is very proud of her.”

He smiled awkwardly again. Still holding Harry by the side, I looked at him. Did he even know what he was talking about? The community? Why was he trying so hard?

“Jenny!” Selena came bouncing after us, “We need to get this party started! Let’s turn on the karaoke!”

“Alright.” I smiled at her, glad to have an excuse to leave that painful conversation.

“Oh, hi, Harry.” She smiled, kissing his cheek a little too casual before remembering they also had never actually met. “Sorry, Jen talks so much about you I feel like I know you already.”

They laughed.

“It’s fine, I feel the same. About time we met, I think…” Harry smiled, and pointed at Oscar. “And this is Oscar, Ophelia’s boyfriend.”

“Right, of course!” She said, before kissing his cheek.

That was all I needed before heading to where the big flat screen stood hooked up to the karaoke. I turned it on, checked the mics, and the noise had everyone’s attention at me.

“Oh, let’s do a song all together!” Suggested Karlie, excitedly.

“We should wait for O and Tay to come back.” I told her, who agreed. “Yeah, let’s just warm with something. Who’s gonna get the party started?!” they all suggested each other at the same time, giggling. “Come on, guys, someone come sing!”

“I’ll sing.” I heard, from the back of the room. Oscar was walking calmly to where I was.

“Girls?” I asked, ignoring him. “Anyone?”

“Oscar said he would sing!” Hailee told me, as if I hadn’t heard him.
“Oh, did he?” I asked, trying to sound surprise.

He joined me and I handed him the microphone without looking, hoping to, at least, be able to go and be with Harry now he would be busy.

“Why don’t you sing with me?” He asked.

I turned on my heels slowly to look at him.

“Nah.” I dismissed. “I don’t think we could agree on a song.” Gigi

“You like musical theater?”

Those, of course, were the magic words.

“Do I like musical theater?” I asked.

“Oh, that’s right, you were nominated for a Tony once, right?” He nodded, though he didn’t seem to have really just remembered that.

“I just won a Grammy for Broadway Cast Recording album.” I told him. “Which spent a lot of weeks on the top of the charts last year and was elected by Billboard the years’ third best album.”

“Well, then let’s sing. Say… Raise a Little Hell? From Bonnie and Clyde?” He handed me a second microphone, almost daringly.

“No, thanks.” I said, knowing he was just trying to get me to like him. “I have stuff to… you know, check.”

“Oh, you don’t think your voice can range that high?” he asked, as I was leaving. I stopped, and turned back to look at him, who was working hard to look innocent.

Everyone else had gotten back into their own conversations, and I didn’t anyone was really looking at us except Harry, standing by the window nearby.

“Come on, Silva,” Oscar asked again. “I’m a professional singer, you’re a Broadway actress. Let’s Raise a Little Hell.”

I accepted the microphone he was still offering me because, 1: even I could appreciate how smoothly he had worked the song title into his bid. And 2: proving wrong a man I didn’t like was pretty much my aesthetic.

He pressed play on the song, and the girls, excitedly, stopped talking to crowd around us as the heavy guitar notes filled the room. They cheered us on with ‘whoo’s and ‘bring it down!’s, their phones raised up to film us as the tense song changed the mood of the party.

Oscar and I were facing each other, exchanging death-glares, and I was a little glad Ophelia was still not around to see this.

“I can’t take no more of this…” He started singing, his voice a deep, husky, guttural sound. “This nightmare has to end… In this God forsaken place, death would be a welcome friend…”

I could appreciate how he truly threw himself into the song, focusing on the lyrics and on the emotions they portrayed instead of just singing it. A true performance, as Broadway stars are used to not seeing in most professional singers.
Then I brought the microphone to my lips and sang, changing the naturally male notes to fit into my female voice easily. “I could pay a crooked guard to kill me, yeah, that’s it…” I sang, my voice a well-tuned soprano. “Better than sixteen years…” I took in a sharp breath, to extend the next notes, enunciating the words seductively, as the drums took over. “…dyin’ slowly bit by bit…”

There was a few seconds when the drums got heavier, the crowd cheering us on loudly again, before the next strophe, when he gave me a sharp look, raising his hands in the air as if to ask ‘that’s it?’.

“Come on, Silva, you have a Grammy, you can do better than that…” He teased.

“Oooh!” I heard the guests let out, laughing, amidst their filming phones.

Harry was by the window with his eyebrows raised in surprise at Oscar’s words, as if he knew that had been a mistake.

I walked back a few steps, and took off my leather jacket without breaking eye contact with Oscar.

“Ooh, the jacket is coming off! Now is war!” Emma Stone joked from nearby, making the others laugh.

Then I walked towards Oscar again, bringing the mic to my lips as I sang, at full-lungs capacity, throwing caution to the wind. “All I did was rob a few stores…” the crowd cheered, “was rob a few stores…” Justice here don’t fit the crime…

Oscar took over, walking to me, still holding my daring stare. “I’ve been broken by the Devil…Justice is a waste of time.”

We walked around on the same spot, kind of throwing the words at each other, and sang together now. “I won’t get to heaven… Why not raise a little hell?”

The melody died down and started up again, slowly increasingly up, building up on heavy guitars and drums. And we were still just walking in circles around each other, having a daring stare-off.

I saw from the corner of my eye that Ophelia had walked back in, wearing her Alexander McQueen white short white dress, and pink and orange shoes. Her comeback was ignored as everyone was focused on mine and Oscar’s sing-off, so she went to stand by Harry, and I saw her questioning him about what was happening.

“He’ll see me, but it’s the last time…” I sang. “That filthy scum has gotta go…”

“By tonight it will be over,” Oscar replied, holding my glance, as we walked more and more closer to each other. “When I strike the fatal blow…”

“No way out, I gotta do this!” I stopped walking in circles and headed straight at him, hearing our friends go wild. “Hi or me, okay let’s play!”

He took a step closer, accepting the challenge and singing right on my face. “Never killed, but now I have to… oh, time to make it happen” he gave me a teasing look, “Jen Silva pay…”

I heard our friends go wild again, cheering him on, and gave him a look that translated well what was on my mind, which was ‘oh, really?!’.

He went on and sang the hook again, louder and stronger, his eyes closing as he threw his notes as high as he could go. “I won’t get to heaven,” I really got into the way he accepted the fact this
wasn’t just a friendly song. “Why not raise a little hell?!”

It was my turn, so I gave him my most daring look as I took in a deep breath, preparing to give it my all. “No way I’ll see heaven,” I sang.

It was the last line of the song, so the guitars and the melody died down and only the drums stayed, getting dramatically faster. “so let’s raaaaaise a littleeeeeeeeeeeeee”, I extended the note as much as I could, but saved my strength for the big finale, “…heeeeeeeeeeeeeeelm!!”

The drums were silenced, only my voiced remained for the whole time I extended the note perfectly. Then, the melody came back, stronger than before, drums and guitars bringing it to a climax, but I didn’t stop singing. He dared me to sing, so I was going to. I extended the note a lot longer than it was on the original and didn’t stop until the melody did. My eyes closing, I felt my body tilt backwards, my arms rising up, as my friends started yelling in excitement. I heard their applause before I was even done.

Finally, the song was over, and the room erupted in a stronger applause and whistles of excitement. I raised my arms to the air in victory, noting, with pleasure, that Oscar was applauding as well, looking impressed.

He raised a hand to give me a high-five, which I gave. If I had to pinpoint the moment we became friends, I’d have to say that was it.

The chilly breeze of the Manhattan night cut through me as I stepped outside into the terrace. Inside, a Halsey song was playing, barely audible through the chatter and laughter. Harry was standing a few meters away, leaning forward against the wall, his arms crossed on it as he watched the city around – the skyline, the lights from all the buildings, the noise from everywhere at once. His orange hair was waving slightly because of the wind, and he didn’t seem to see I was there until I was hugging him from the back, my arms rounding up his waist as I rested my chin on his shoulder.

He looked back at me, and gave me a small smile as he brought his arms to cover mine, intertwining our fingers together.

We stayed in silence for a long time; I enjoyed his smell, and the sound of my friends’ laughter, and the way I could feel his chest moving as he breathed.

This was the first time I got to see him since New Year’s, and I hated it. I hated that it had been so long, and that I had a clock counting down in my head till the moment I’d have to say goodbye again.

“I miss New York.” Harry said, breaking the silence.

“Really?” I asked, enjoying the fact that he, too, thought back to the city where we had become a ‘we’.

“It felt like so much was possible here…” he went on, staring off dreamily into the city lights.

“Like I could have everything I wanted…”

“What did you have in New York that you don’t have now?”

The corner of his lips curled into a gentle smile.

“You.”
I sighed, hugging him tighter.

“Harry, you have me.”

He stood straight, breaking the hug to turn back to me and hug me by my waist. I leaned in, resting my body against his as he leaned against the wall. “I’m yours.”

He raised his hand to tug my hair behind my ear.

“Do I?” he asked, sighing.

I stared at him, confused, and he tried to explain what he meant.

“Jenifer… How long have we been together?”

“A year in May.” I answered, in a heartbeat.

I had been excited to beat that mark, as it would be the first time I had dated for so long! My first real anniversary with a guy!

“And unofficially?” He asked.

“A year and a half.” I replied, counting from when we first got together in Corsica in September 2014, right after the Clooney-Alamuddin wedding.

Harry gave me a sad smile. “I met two of your best friends today for the first time.”

I nodded – Ophelia and Selena. “…yes?”

“You talk about them all the time and I met them for the first time today, a year and a half later.” I was still trying to understand his point. “…You don’t even know my friends.”

“I know your friends!” I argued.

“You know three of my friends, and we weren’t even together when you happened to meet them.”

With a guilty knot on my stomach, I realized he was right. I’d met Thomas van Straubenzee and Liz Pelly on his birthday, and her husband Guy later on at lunch in Manhattan, but on the first occasion we were just friends, and on the second we were still just ‘casual’.

 “…I’m not even sure you like them.”

“…” I told him. He raised one of his brows questioningly. “…I like Liz.” I admitted.

“We’ve been together for a long time,” he added, “but we don’t really get to have a relationship. We just… stumble forward. Once every month, if we’re lucky. We see each other, and that’s it. We say hello and start counting down the minutes until goodbye.”

I nodded, sadly, knowing he was right.

“It’s the distance.” I shrugged, feeling powerless. “It’s all- We can’t really-” I stuttered, struggling to defend this relationship that was the best I’d had, but still so thin and fragile. “We don’t really have any other… option.”

He nodded, slowly, biting his lip; his gaze didn’t meet mine.
“We’re doing our best…” I went on, weakly. “We see each other whenever we can… We’ve been managing it quite okay, I think. I mean, we have, right? I mean, I know it’s been hard, lately, but it’s because it’s the beginning of the year, it’s my busiest time of the year. And I know I’ve barely talked to you today, but I really needed to do this for Ophelia, our fight had been killing me—”

“Jen,” He sighed, “I don’t mind the party…”

“I know, but you’re right.” I insisted, trying to explain. I knew we would have to talk about the fragility of the relationship at some point, but I had really not expected for that to be the day. “I mean, we’ve managed to go on a double date with my friends. And on a holiday with my friends… And on this party with my friends…”

Suddenly, I felt very guilty that I had been making efforts to see my friends, and yet made no efforts to see his. I didn’t even know the names of his friends besides the three I had met.

“We should see your friends more.” I decided. “I say more, I mean at all. We will. We’ll schedule something. Next time I can be in London, we’ll go out and you’ll introduce me to them.” I smiled, feeling the knots in my stomach at the thought of the likes of van Straubenzee and Pelly again. “Should be fun.”

Harry didn’t say anything for a long time; he just traced my face very lightly with the tip of his index finger, watching every centimeter of my skin as if trying to memorize me.

There was something very sad about the moment, almost melancholic. Almost as if he tried to memorize a dream after waking up, knowing he’d forget it soon enough.

The knots on my stomach never disappeared, as I started to realize that this was not a good moment at all. And suddenly I felt like crying. Why did I feel like crying?

“Tell me what’s on your mind.” I begged.

His hand fell to rest on my waist again and he gulped; his turquoise eyes stared at me in doubt as he struggled to decide if he should lie to me or not.

“I don’t think I can say goodbye to you anymore.” He told me, and now I knew the tears would soon be clouding my vision.

Because now I knew why I felt like crying: because it felt like a goodbye.

“…what are you trying to say?” I asked, whispery, holding his gaze with the bit of strength I had, trying to be strong.

I wondered if this was the moment he decided he had had enough. Was the distance finally too much? Was my job finally keeping me too busy? Was the world’s opinion of me finally too negative? Is this when he breaks up with me? Is this when another one walks away?

I was thinking that would be moment we broke up – as I had always knew it would happen sooner or later. After all, breakups were all I knew. Goodbyes were far too common for me.

I did not expect his next words to be this:

“I think we should move in together.”

Chapter End Notes
Merry Christmas Eve! The early chapter and the ending of it its my gift to you! hahahaha Hope you like it! THank you for reading! I wish you a good Christmas and new year’s! Hopefully you’ll have fun.

I’m at my parents house, and internet is difficult here, so if I dont answer or something, know its because of that. THank you for everything!

Next chapter: Harry explains his idea and Jen is freaking out.
Dance Party and Elevator

Chapter Summary

Harry explains his idea and Jen has her own way of dealing with it.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“What?!”

If Harry was expecting a different reaction, he didn’t show it. In fact, I was almost completely sure I reacted exactly like he thought I would. I could feel my face in a pout as I leaned back from his embrace to look at him, a question mark written all over me.

“I think we should move in together.” He repeated, extraordinarily calm, a little louder and clearer as if my hearing was the only problem with his idea.

There was a long silence as I tried to think of… well, anything. I was so confused and shocked by his proposition my mind went completely blank. It’s almost like there was so many reasons why that would never work that my mind just rebooted itself.

“I know what you’re thinking.” He started.

“I doubt that very much.” I replied. If he did, he wouldn’t have even considered that.

“Jen,” he said, “I can almost see the smoke coming out of your ears… You’re freaking out. Breathe.”

I let in a sharp, deep breath, knowing I had forgotten to for the past few seconds. Harry waited, watching me breathe for a while.

“I know what you’re thinking…” He started again, after a while, when he assumed it was safe. “How could that ever work?”

I gave him a dramatic glance, sarcastic; I didn’t even need to voice out the ‘duh!’ in my head.

“But let’s think of it this way, what are you gonna do next? What are you doing tomorrow?”

“Flying to Ohio.” I told him, a bit coldly. “To film Heathers on open locations. Then some more time in Los Angeles inside the studio.”

“Right.” He nodded. “Then?”

I thought about it, impatiently, not seeing his point. “Then it’s… May. If I get a studio and a budget, I’ll make my movie, the one I wrote.”

“Yes,” he agreed, enthused, “which you will, because it’s great. You’ll film that in Brazil, right?”

I nodded. My script was an adaptation of two Brazilian books about the military dictatorship telling the story of the horrors practiced by the state by the point of view of a young activist who
reluctantly joins the fight and eventually gets caught and stands trial. So, obviously, I wanted it to be a Brazilian movie, with a Brazilian cast and in Brazilian Portuguese, filmed in Brazil.

“So, after that…” He went on, “what comes after that?”


Broken was going to be a romantic drama movie; it was an adaptation of a famous Australian book by author P. Robinson. It told the story of a young immigrant actress trying to make a living as a musical theater star in London when she met a-

I stopped, starting to see where he was going.

“Yes, Broken.” He agreed. “Which you’ll film in…”?

He looked at me, expectantly.

“…England.” I answered.

He waited a few seconds, as my eyes drifted as I started to understand his point.

“And you’ll have to live there, right? For the time you’re shooting?”

“Yeah, but Harry—“

“And how long you’ll shoot that for?” he interrupted.

“Three months, I think.”

“And after?”

“After I go home for Christmas, then there’s another award season in Los Angeles—“

He wouldn’t let me get an argument in.

“Just until February. What happens in March next year?”

The fact I had an answer ready was kind of sad.

“Hamilton.” I told him.

The hit Broadway musical would get a movie adaptation and I had already been cast in it. I didn’t even had to audition: the minute Lin-Manuel Miranda got the approval of the budget he called to offer me the part, which I took in a heartbeat. I told him I was unavailable until next year, and he said it wouldn’t be a problem. ‘We’ll wait for you’, he said.

“And where are you gonna shoot that?”

“New York and Virginia for a month, then England.”

No need to point out the irony of a story about America’s independence from the United Kingdom being shot there – everyone was well aware. But the studio funding the movie had more resources in Pinewood Studios, in London, so that’s where the studio scenes would be shot.

Harry allowed himself a smile.

“So that’s another three months or so.” He added. “And that contract your lawyers and Richard are
still working on? For after that? The one you’re supper excited about?”

“That’s not final, yet.”

“But if it does get final? If you sign it and realize your dream of being in Doctor Who… then, what?”

The Doctor Who offer had come a couple of months ago, something I had barely dared think about as to not jinx it.

“Then I’d be in England for a few more months… but, Harry-“

“Jenny.” He stopped me. “I know what you’re gonna say.”

“Then why do I feel like I still need to say it?! ”

“You’re gonna say that that would be temporary, and that at some point you would go back to traveling around.”

“Exactly!”

How could he think that was such a simple problem?!

“Yes, but consider this,” he held my shoulders and gave me an intense gaze, “until you have to… you would be in England. For maybe ten months you would be living so close to me!”

I had thought about it, of course. Not moving in with him, of course! Just that I would be living in the same country as him for a few months. I had signed the contract for Broken and Hamilton thinking ‘should be fun! I could see Harry every weekend!’ . And now, here he was, proposing something a lot more dramatic.

And just minutes after I thought he was going to break up with me!

“Say something.” He begged. “But before you do, remember we’ve been together for a year and a half, and that by the time you move in we will have officially dated for a year and three months. A lot of people even get married after a lot less time!”

He saw my eyes widened and closed his, in frustrations, as if he was cussing himself in his mind.

“Which is not a good argument for someone with commitment issues…” he mumbled. “Sorry. Strike that. Pretend I didn’t say that last part… Just focus on… on the fact that we wouldn’t have to live in my apartment! Which I know you hate, we could get a new place! For both of us! And… And… Jen, breathe.”

I did as he said, blinking slowly, trying to check if I was having a panic attack. No. Not that bad – which I guess was progress.

“I mean, you’ll have to live somewhere…” he added. “Why not live somewhere with me?”

I bit my lip, thinking about waking up in the same bed as him without having to wonder when we would have to say goodbye.

“We’d be in the same house, in the same country! For more than two weeks, which is the most time we’ve spent together since we started dating…”

In a year and a half we had only been together for two weeks straight? That felt so wrong.
“We could get a place with a garden, like you always wanted,” he bargained, smiling, “somewhere with three bedrooms, at least, so we can have privacy when we get sick of seeing each other so much.”

I felt my lips stretching into a little smile at the thought of actually seeing him so much I might grow bored. Of seeing him so much we might finally enter that domestic stage of a relationship that, because of the distance, we hadn’t reached yet. So many people complained of it, but I just felt like it would be amazing to know him so much and so well that we’d be called ‘boring’.

“It’d probably have to have more than three bedrooms, anyway, since we’ll need rooms for the security,” he went on, when I was silent for too long. “Or somewhere with a, a separate, like, bungalow, for instance, where they could live. And, because of protocol, we’d have to add bullet proof glass and cameras and stuff, but I’ll pay for it! And you don’t have to worry, they’d get it done before we moved in—"

“Harry.” I stopped him, with a long, deep sigh when he started rambling a bit much.

He waited, but as much as I tried, I couldn’t think of what to say.

“Tell me what’s on your mind.” He begged.

I passed my arms under his and hugged him, resting my head on his chest watching the lights on the Manhattan skyline around.

“I’m scared.” I told him.

I felt his arms tighten their grip around me, and enjoyed how it instantly made me feel stronger.

“Of me?” He asked, sounding scared himself.


“Why would you lose me?”

“Well, I don’t know. My mind goes to weird places sometimes… just now I was convinced you were breaking up with me.”

At that, he let go of his embrace to lean back and look me in the eyes.

“What?!” he asked, confused. “Why would I break up with you?” I shrugged. It sounded stupid now. “Do you want me to break up with you?”

I shook my head. “It’s just the way you said it… I don’t think I can say goodbye to you anymore…”

“Well, yeah, I meant I don’t wanna have to.”

I smiled, realizing I’d probably never fully understand that he didn’t seem to want to let me go.

“Jen, what are you scared of?” he asked, concerned.

I shrugged, trying to downplay the way my insides seemed to be twisted in anxiety. “That I’ll say no to this and you’ll break up with me… that I’ll say yes to this and, in a year, when I have to go back to traveling, you’ll break up with me… that I’ll say yes to this and we’ll end up hating each other…”
Now he was the one whose face was in a pout of confusion.

“Why- I don’t even-” he sighed. “I don’t even know where to start… why would we hate each other?”

“People change when they live together…” I shrugged again. “What if you find out I’m a slob? What if I can’t stand your morning breath? What if we just don’t have anything to talk about and get bored at each other?”

At that he actually laughed, shaking his head in disbelief.

“My God,” he sighed, “you have a lot of issues, don’t you?”

I looked at him with concern. “You’re just figuring that out now?!”

He laughed again at my distress, and quickly hugged me again, making me rest my head on his shoulders as he brushed my hair with his fingers calmly.

“Jenny… I already know that you are not a slob. I lived four floors above you, once, remember? I know you’re a control freak with a need for cleanliness and to have things all in their place. And you already know my morning breath, so if you haven’t broken up with me thus far because of it, I fear your window of opportunity has closed.”

I allowed myself a giggle, realizing he did have a point.

“And I don’t really mind if we run out of things to talk about…” he added. “I mean, if we do, it means we’ve grown to know all there is to know about each other. And I like that idea. It would mean we’re… you know, growing up. Becoming a serious, adult, boring couple… that sounds exciting in a weird way.”

…it actually did.

“Not that I actually think it’ll happen, since I’m afraid we might be bickering about the same things in ten years…”

We giggled, together, and he placed a kiss on my forehead before I leaned back again to look at him.

“And about the other possibilities… I can promise you right now I do not intend on breaking up with you if you say no.”

I took a deep breath. Why wouldn’t he? He was asking us to go one step further and make the relationship more serious, and I knew how important that was for him, so why wouldn’t he break up with me if I said no? Why wouldn’t he interpret this as me not wanting to have a future with him? Was he simply… mature like that? This kind of healthy and adult approach to a relationship was completely new territory for me.

“And I definitely do not intend on breaking up with you if we live together for ten months and then you have to travel again. It’s your job, I understand that.”

I nodded, because I wanted him to know I knew he did. But the truth was, I was glad to have it confirmed.

He sighed, placing another long kiss on my forehead.
“I’m trying really hard to think of something I can say to convince you that won’t send you running for the hills.”

“You must think I’m such a… puppy.” He looked at me. “You know, so scared of everything… like I’m about to break with the slightest breeze.”

“Not a puppy, no…” he thought about it. “More like a fox.”

“A fox?!”

“Yeah… you know, you have the… really sharp teeth, ready for a fight at any minute, completely able to defend yourself. But, then again, you walk carefully about the woods and any sound too loud sends you running because you’ve learned to fear hunters.”

I looked at him for a minute too long.

“Woah.” I let out. “That was a… very specific metaphor.” He laughed.

He smiled.

“It doesn’t have to mean any more than just… the two of us… living in the same house, since we’ll be in the same country, for the time that we can, which may or may not come to an end at some point.” He said. “Convenience. It doesn’t have to mean any more than that.”

But it did, didn’t it? Was I overthinking the whole thing? Was it just me that thought that moving in together was pretty much training to be married?!

“Don’t answer now.” He went on, holding my hands in his delicately. “Take your time. You have time, of course. If you do move in it won’t be until September, so that gives you… six months. That’s a lot of time, a lot more than the fifteen seconds I gave you before I kissed you for the first time… So, think about it. Overthink the hell out of it, as you did every question I have ever asked you, and then…” he sighed, before shrugging. “Let me know.”

I bit my lower lip, nodding, wondering if I’d ever deserve the overly patient ginger prince who one day gently knocked his way into my door.

“I just had to ask.” He added, as I still didn’t know what to say. “Because, you see… I’m a little in love with you.”

I smiled, feeling all the knots on my stomach loosen up.

Ever since I had said it for the first time, in Abu Dhabi, we hadn’t started throwing ‘I love you’s around at every opportunity. We didn’t end our phone calls with it, or anything. We had to work so hard for it, it was like there was a silent agreement that the words shouldn’t be said lightly. We knew it was serious: it was a big statement, a promise. So when we said it, we made sure the moment deserved it.

I felt like that moment deserved it.

I hugged him tighter. Bringing my body closer to his, I rested our foreheads together, brushing our noses against each other slowly, feeling his warm breath on my lips.

“It’s just that… I love you so much that getting bits and pieces of a relationship with you at a time just isn’t enough anymore.”
I let out a long sigh.

“I love you.” I told him, the promise on my lips warming up my chest. “…Is that enough? For now?”

“Enough? Jen…” He shook his head, bringing me closer, as if he wanted to crush my bones to his in the hug. “That’s everything.”

His hand grabbed a grip of my hair and he pulled my face back so his lips could reach mine. I felt my stomach twist in warmth, breathless, as he kissed me strongly, and I kissed him back, letting the two months we had just spent apart speak louder.

He was still kissing me a few minutes later, his hands raising even more my already short crop top, splattered against my skin crushing my body to his as I felt the cold of the night disappear as my skin got hotter and hotter. His tongue danced away with mine as my fingers gripped his hair tightly, his soft lips framing mine when he gentle nibbled on my lower one, his body bending forward to get closer to me as mine bended backwards at his intensiveness.

“Hey, Princess! And Jen.” Adam called, as he stepped out the door to the terrace interrupting our… moment.

“…Yes?” Harry asked, a little annoyed at our already precious time being cut shorter.

“What about our game?”

“Game?” I asked.

“I said I’d play champagne pong with him.” Harry explained.

“Champagne pong?!”

“Yes, like beer pong, but with bubbly. It’s how we played at Eton.”

I rolled my eyes. “God, you’re such an aristocrat.”

“Come on, You Royal Highness,” Adam teased. “Or are you scared this poor commoner will beat you up?”

That little phrase was it. Harry looked at me. “I’m gonna have to go destroy him.”

“I understand.” I told him, and we giggled.

He gave me one last kiss on the lips before holding my hand and walking us back inside the party.

“Alright,” Harry called, once we stepped into the place, following Adam to the big dinner table the others were cleaning up and setting with champagne flutes on triangular formations at each end. “Who’s gonna be the first to lose to me?!”

I walked to the bar, passing right through the bartender and going for the freezer. I opened it and grabbed a bottle of Vodka.

“Miss Silva?” The bartender called, offering me a glass. I shook my head and circled the bar again, sitting on a stool by Ophelia, who was staring at her own boyfriend helping the others on the table.

“Are they seriously gonna use two hundred dollar bottles of champagne for beer pong?” she asked, curiously.
“Champagne pong.” I corrected, automatically, as I opened the bottle to drink.

“Well, right. I guess that makes sen-“ she stopped talking, as she had turned to look at me and was now seeing me down the vodka straight from the bottle.

“Ah!” I let out, with a shudder, shaking my head frenetically as I gulped, before taking a deep breath, suddenly feeling a lot more awake.

“How do you manage to sit there, in a mini skirt and heels, with your legs crossed like a, well, like a princess, and drink Vodka out of the bottle and still manage to make it look classy as fuck?”

I sighed. “He just asked me to move in with him.”

That’s how.

I didn’t look at Ophelia, so I don’t know what her reaction was, but what I did do was raise the bottle to drink some more.

“Harry!?” She asked, a bit loudly.

“Yes?” Harry called, from the table.

We both looked at him, a bit alarmed.

“Nothing.” Ophelia said, quickly. “…I meant Harry Potter. We’re talking about Harry Potter.”

Harry eyed her suspiciously, before giving me a cheeky grin.

“Are we pretending you’re not telling your friends about the conversation we just had on the terrace?” He asked, and I closed my eyes, trying to block out the awkwardness. “Okay, I’ll play…”

And with that, he went on to ignore us.


I nodded, pretending the alcohol on my mouth was the reason why my face was all twisted in a mask of anxiety.

“Alright, Your Royal Drunkenness, I think we need to talk.”


I let the bottle at the bar counter and jumped on my feet, turning on my heels to walk blindly by the party to go and talk to people.

It wasn’t even five minutes later when, in the middle of trying very hard to focus all my energy on paying attention to a conversation with Jennifer Lawrence, that Taylor poked my shoulder.

“Sorry, Law.” She said, “Can I still her for a minute?”

The girls had started referring to Jennifer as ‘Law’, as to not confuse the both of us.

“What’s going on?” I asked her.
“We have an emergency we need to deal with.” She told me. “Downstairs.”

Thinking it was something to do with the party, I followed her out of the room into the elevators and back to her apartment.

When we walked into her living room, Selena was there with Ophelia.

“What happened?” I asked.

“You tell us,” Sel started, “Harry asked you to move in with him?!”

I gave Ophelia a sharp look. She shrugged, looking guilty.

“You didn’t say it was a secret!”

I let out one long sigh. “It isn’t, I guess.”

“J, this is an intervention.” Taylor said. “We all know you have a tendency of self-sabotaging, so we need you to blow up here so you don’t do it with Harry and end up ruining your own relationship because of fear… again.”

Looking around the room, I sighed. “I need a drink.”

Selena pointed at Ophelia. “O was bringing the vodka.”

She seemed confused. “I thought you were joking.”

The other two eyed her, worryingly.

“No, honey, she needs vodka!” Selena told her.

“What she needs is to deal with things!”

“Vodka is how I deal with things.” I complained, frustrated, joining the other two in the big couch, laying down with my head on Selena’s lap and putting my legs up on Ophelia’s.

“It’s okay, I have alcohol… somewhere.” Taylor set out to the small bar in the corner of her living room, coming back with a bottle of red wine, which I downed unceremoniously while she turned on some sad song on the radio and sat down on the armchair nearby.

“So…” Ophelia started, watching this preparation unfold. “You guys do this sort of thing a lot?”

“These little interventions are pretty much eighty percent of our friendship.” Selena told her.

“Except it usually happens on Award show bathrooms.” Tay added. “So the privacy is nice, for a change.”

I told them about the conversation I had with Harry on the terrace, in detail, recounting his exact words and how they made me feel. They listened to it attentively, asking little questions sometimes while I avoided their look staring either to the ceiling or to the bottle.

There was a long pause after I was done, when I drank another big sip of wine.

“So…” Started Ophelia, trying to make sense of the fast, hectic rambling I had just ended. “You don’t wanna move in with him?”

“Rehearsing to be married.” Finished Taylor.

“Exactly!” I agreed.

“Not necessarily.” Contested Selena. “He did say he thought it would just be convenient. Which it would, I mean, you’d have to live somewhere.”

“You’re afraid he won’t understand you’ll have to move out eventually?”

I was afraid of something a lot worse than that: that I wouldn’t want to. But I wasn’t strong enough to tell them that. To tell them that I was terrified of living with Harry, of growing used to the familiarity and closeness and then never wanting to leave.

So I just shrugged, letting them understand whatever they wanted to.

“The only reason this relationship has managed to work is because we have been very…” “I went on, “careful not to kid ourselves about the future. We know we can’t be together for too long, not with my job. And he wouldn’t ask me to quit, he’s too nice.”

I loved that about him.

“I think you’re jumping the gun here.” Ophelia intervened. “I mean, it’s just living together. He’s not proposing or anything. Maybe you don’t have to freak out.”

“It’s Harry!” Taylor exasperated. “He would marry her tonight if she said she wanted to!”

She had a point.

“What are the odds he really means it when he says he only wants us to live together out of convenience?” I asked, more myself than any of them. “He found a way to make me less freaked out about listening him say he loved me, why wouldn’t he say this just so I move in?”

“I think you should make it very clear to him that if you do move in, it’s just a casual living arrangement, nothing else.” Taylor told me.

“I don’t see what would be the problem about it being something else.” Selena argued, and I gave her an exasperated look. “I mean, Jenny, come on! You’re almost twenty-six, he’s thirty-one, and you’ve been together forever. Everyone can just see you’re made for each other.”

I took a deep breath, trying to see her words as a compliment. “Yes?”

“Well, you love him. Move in. Take the relationship to the next step.” She told me. “Maybe it’s time.”

I groaned, loudly, feeling myself more and more confused, and got up, starting to pace around the room still holding the bottle.

“Jen…” Ophelia started. “If you don’t wanna do this, just don’t.” She said. “If he breaks up because of this, that’s his loss. But don’t feel pressured to do something out of fear you’ll lose him. Remember what you told me in the pool that time, you should complete yourself.”

I loved that she remembered my advice, but as I listened to her I realized they all had each a different opinion: Ophelia said I just shouldn’t, Selena said I should go for it and make it serious,
and Taylor said I should do it, but keep it casual. I mean, thank you for laying out my options for me, girls, but it doesn’t help.

“How can you say that?” Selena asked Ophelia. “She clearly loves him, she can’t keep running away from her feelings forever!”

“Girls,” Taylor intervened. “She can move in, and it doesn’t have to be a big deal! It’s okay!”

“Of course it’s a big deal-!”

“Okay! Thank you! That’s enough!” I stopped them. “Please. Guys. That’s… enough.”

They looked at me, worried. I took in a deep breath, and made a decision.

“I can’t… you can’t…” I knew they were shooting concerning looks at the way I paced about, energetic, moving my arms around too much. I took in a deep breath, and tried to make sense. “I don’t think this is the sort of thing you can help me decide.”

I bit my lip, knowing after I voiced it that it was the true. I had to do this on my own.

“I mean, it is a pretty big deal. Even if Harry truly doesn’t think so. It is, to me.” I told them. “I wanna get married, I’ve always had, I always dreamed about the day I’d be in the kind of serious relationship where I’d live with someone, and build things up from the ground, you know?”

They smiled, and I realized they did because I had. The thought just made me happy, though, something was sad about it.

“After everything that I’ve been through, I just stopped dreaming about it.” I shrugged. “I didn’t think I’d get the chance. And so it is a big deal to me. So, that makes it the kind of decision I have to make on my own… If I say yes, I have to know it’s really what I want. And if I say no, than it definitely has to be because I chose to.”

There was a long, silent pause.

“We just wanna help.” Selena said.

I smiled, sadly. “I know. And I appreciate it… but I have to do this on my own.”

“Then what can we do?” Taylor asked. “To help?”

I took another big sip of wine, as I thought about what I needed from them.

“Let’s speak honestly.” I started. “We all know I have a tendency for self-sabotaging.”

I paused, wondering if any of them would contest my statement. They didn’t.

“So.” I went on. “I need your help to keep my… I gestured to myself, and how I was still pacing about, trying to find a way to describe it.

“Mental breakdown?” Taylor offered.

“Sure. Okay. Breakdown.” I nodded, furiously. “I need you to help keep my breakdown in here, because if I do it in front of Harry, I’ll end up sabotaging that relationship. And I can’t sabotage that relationship. I don’t want to. I just… I love him.”

Finally, I let out a deep breath and looked at them, almost pleadingly. Almost finishing my ramble
“You have a point.” Ophelia offered. “If you freak out here, with us, where it’s safe and no one will judge you, maybe you can get it out of your system and then just take your time to make a decision with a clearer head.”

I nodded. Yes. That sounded like a plan. It made even more sense when she said it.

“What is wrong with your generation?” I asked Ophelia, suddenly. “With the good advice, and the healthy, responsible choices and prioritizing your career over men? I mean, on our time”, I looked at the others, “if you grew up on the limelight you either developed some kind of addiction or an eating disorder or spent years in therapy.”

Taylor and Selena didn’t disagree. Ophelia looked confused.

“…thank you?” she asked, making us giggle.


I smiled, feeling understood and comforted, even amidst their weird intervention ceremony.

“You know what we need, though?” Selena asked, a grin on her lips. “A dance party.”

We smiled. “Oh, yeah.” Taylor said. “It’s been a while.”

“What’s that?” Ophelia asked, confused.

“Like in Grey’s Anatomy?” Tay explained, as I simply turned to the radio to pick a good song. “Whenever you’re overwhelmed or freaking out, you just drink and turn on the music and dance as if there’s no tomorrow to shake your worries away.”

“It really helps!” Selena agreed, taking off her heels and getting to her feet.

Ophelia still seemed unsure when I hit play on Fifth Harmony’s Worth It and turned the volume up to a deafening level.

“Your neighbors are really having a crappy night with the party upstairs and now this, huh?” She asked, being simply ignored by us, who merely started shaking our hips to the rhythm and turned to each other to sing, together:

“Give it to me, I’m worth it! Baby, I’m worth it! Uh-huh, I’m worth it! Gimme, gimme, I’m worth it!”

There was a quick beat, and I twerked to the sound, making Taylor and Selena cheer, and laugh right after.

“Okay! I tell her bring it back, like she left some!” Selena and I rapped together, “bring it back, bring it back, like she left some! Oh! In the club, with the lights on…”

We danced away to the rhythm, as we knew to do, as if there was no one watching. Suddenly, Ophelia stood up and started to sing.

“Hm, just gimme you, just gimme you! Just gimme you, that’s all I wanna do!” we cheered, loudly, seeing her finally get into it.
We danced away, harder, finally reaching the chorus. We clapped together to the rhythm, singing in harmony, louder at every word, trying to out-sing the radio.

At every line in the song, I felt my nerves lighten up. I felt the knots on my stomach untangle themselves. I felt myself lighter. Maybe I was just tiring myself up so much I finally wasn’t physically able to overthink anymore. Whatever it was, it worked. The dance parties always worked.

When the song finally ended, we were breathless and our stomachs hurt from laughing too hard. We laughed even harder when we realized Oscar had been standing at the door for a few seconds watching us with his eyebrows raised in confusion.

“What is this?” He asked.

“A party!” Ophelia answered, giggly, going to hug him

“And what are we having upstairs, a business meeting?”

We followed him to the elevator, and made our way back to the party. When we walked through the doors, to the sound of Thrift Shop by Macklemore and Ryan Lewis, six arms hugged me at the same time and I giggled.

“Are you gonna be alright?” Taylor asked. I knew she didn’t like not being able to do more to help.

“I will.” I told her. “I think I will. Either way, I feel better. And I do have time to decide, so for now, I’m not gonna think about it anymore. I have other things in my head.”

“Like what?” Selena asked.

With a sigh, my eyes hovered the room after the large shoulders and ginger hair that haunted my every thought. Harry was still playing Adam on champagne-pong, looking awfully sexy focusing on throwing a Ping-Pong ball into a crystal champagne flute across the table from him.

“Like banging my boyfriend.” I told them, honest.

“Okay.” Ophelia complained, awkward, taking her arms from me with a smile on her face.

“TMI, J.” Said Selena, doing the same.

“Go get him, tiger.” Taylor added, pushing me away, and with a smile, I took a deep breath and did just that.

I marched on my heels to the loud crowd around the table and stopped by Harry.

“Hey, babe.” He greeted, still watching Adam take too long to take his shot.

I loved how he had stuck to calling me ‘babe’, which he had started to do ironically because he thought it just sounded couple-y when we were still pretending to date. I loved how tall he looked, and how even in his uniform-like white button-up and blue pants he still made me breathless just to look at him. I loved his beard, that he hadn’t shaved in almost a year just because I asked him not to. I loved his jaw line and his big hands and pretty much everything that I could see and what I couldn’t.

I walked closer, resting a hand around his back, on his waist.

“Let’s get out of here.” I asked, on his ear.
Adam got his shot in. The crowd cheered and Harry took the ball out to drink the champagne, not before he told me:

“Just a minute, I’m winning.”

Adam scorned while Harry drank.

“My arse!”

“Do the math, mate.” Harry told him, smugly, getting the ball to take his shot.

I sighed, getting impatient. I loved how competitive he got. And how he was getting along with my friends, all around watching him, bewitched.

I loved him. I wanted him.

I got closer, before he could to anything, and whispered very softly in his ear, “I want you to make me cum. Right. Now.”

He froze in place, his hand raised to throw the Ping-Pong ball. I saw him gulp and smiled.

“Silva, are you distracting my player?” Adam asked, teasingly and, almost in response, Harry took his shot and the crystal champagne flute closer to Adam got a Ping-Pong ball in it.

“I’m out.” Harry said, quickly holding on to my hand and pulling me out of them complaining crowd on the way to the elevators.

I did my best to hide my smile as we hurried out of the party, leaving the music behind. I was glad our security was stationed in other posts, not following our every step, this way we had some privacy on the elevator.

He pressed the button to Taylor’s floor and didn’t even wait for the doors to close before he slammed me against the elevator’s wall, my back to him. He thrust his body against mine, and I felt him hard against my upper butt.

“That was fast.” I commented, grinning, feeling his arms embrace me, intense with desire, griping tightly every bit of me his hands could reach.

“Two months.” He reminded, the time we had been apart. “Besides, you said now.”

His hand slid to my thigh and its touch, first light as a feather, sent chills through my whole body. He slid it down lower, to the middle, to my inner thigh, and up towards my crotch, stronger and heavier. That’s when I threw my head back to fall on his shoulder, breathless.

It felt pathetic that such little gestures could have me already panting.

He pressured his body against mine, stronger, his stubble causing friction on the sensitive skin in my neck as I felt his warm breath come out just as rare and thin as mine. His other hand circled my waist and made its way up the naked skin between my skirt and top very slowly, teasingly.

Between my legs, his other hand now touched my underwear strongly, and moved it down and up to my clit, over the fabric. He moved it again, faster now, ignoring how I shut my eyes tightly and brought up my hand that had been supporting me in the wall to grip a fistful of his hair. If I held to it too tightly, he didn’t let it show. His hand only got more aggressive and faster as I started to wonder if he was really going to make me cum on an elevator.
“You know…” He whispered, as soft as a breeze on my ear, kissing my earlobe, making me weak. “If we moved in together, we could do this every day…”

I bit a smiling lip; the thought was tempting, I had to keep from moaning aloud at this point, because I wanted to keep the upper hand.

His middle finger slid quickly under my underwear and into my big lips. Under the fabric, his finger slid lower into me, frantically, circling my clit to the rhythm of our ragged breaths, increasingly faster.

I started to lose the sensation on my legs, knowing if he wasn’t thrusting us so hard against the wall I might have stumbled down to the floor.

“I can use my own fingers…” I teased, with a cheeky grin. “Make it your tongue, then I’ll be impressed.”

I felt his smile when his beard fractioned harder against my neck.

Right as I thought I couldn’t keep the moans soundless any longer, he pulled away his hand – wet from my arousal – pulling down my skirt again.

Disregarding my grip on his hair, he turned me around to face him, slamming my back against the wall. His lips glued to mine quick, intense, his tongue unceremoniously dancing its way with mine, making my skin feel hotter.

I started feeling my legs weaken again, as his soft lips touched mine like the world was about to end and the last thing he wanted to do was kiss me, when he suddenly pulled away. His hands had a strong grip of my hips when, with an intense look and as mischievous a smile I had ever seen on his lips, he started to slid down to the floor.

Trembling with anticipation and lust, I just knew he was about to eat me out in an elevator. Thankfully, with a soft noise, the elevator’s doors started to open. Harry didn’t let this poor timing damper his enthusiasm and, without as much as a look back, he squat down completely, held my legs firmly, and threw me over his shoulder, making me break in loud laughter as he made our way out to Taylor’s door.

He made his way to the guest bedroom we had left our things in, being attentive enough to lock the door before he dropped me in the mattress.

I only had time to stop laughing and catching my breath before I saw the intense look he was still giving me. I supported myself half up on my elbows and he approached.

Slowly, delicately, without ever breaking eye-contact of making a sound, his hands untied my shoes and threw them away. Light as feather, his hands slid up my legs, sending electric shocks all over me. He continued up the back of my thighs until my butt cheeks, and he pulled down my lacy, black underwear, throwing it blindly back. His hands reached for the crook of my knees and opened my legs wide open.

Kneeling to the mattress, he finally closed his eyes as he leaned down to place a string of strong, wet kisses down my inner thighs. Each kiss made me weaker, and I felt my breath grow rarer as he made his way to my crotch. I could feel myself pulsing with desire when Harry opened me up delicately with his bulky fingers. He shot me one last erotic glance before I felt his tongue lick me intensely, from my entrance to the tip of my clit.
“Oh, fuck-“ I heard my own voice, recognizing the despair in it from the turmoil of pleasure I felt suddenly, as my head tilted backwards as I started to lose control of my own.

As his tongue grew hungrier inside of me, faster, I felt an orgasm grown stronger as I grew weaker, losing the feeling on my legs as the waves of pleasure ripped through me merciless, again and again.

My voice got louder, and I started to make less sense in my moaning, feeling, somehow, that he had a smile on his lips down there.

I realized, weakly, that if he kept up his methods of persuasion, there was very little I could do to keep up my determination.

And I wasn’t sure I wanted to anymore.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading and for all your wonderfulness this past year! It makes me so glad to know there's people who like this story!
What Jen Wants

Chapter Summary

A video surfaces and Harry surprises Jen.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

“It’s really not that bad!”

I didn’t need to open my eyes to know that Beezus’ face, her sweet face, was strongly striving to look optimistic as she spoke.

“I mean, you can’t even see much…”

“You can guess.” Chipped in Gina, with a grin, one of our hair and makeup artists on the set of Heathers, as she pulled my hair into the short, eighties-looking wig I had to wear for the movie.

It was another day of work on set and it had started as it normally did. In sunny, spring-colored April, Ohio looked bright and felt hot. We woke up in the hotel the studio booked for the whole cast and crew – the cast could usually wake up later, but as an executive producer, I had to leave by six-ish on a van also from the studio, that drove us to location. There, my first job was to check in with the director and producers to know what still needed work.

We’d have a creative meeting about the scenes shot that day and then I joined the cast on their first appointment of the day: to head to the hair and makeup trailers, where they made us look like our characters. Not a lot of us actually needed makeup to look like we were seventeen year-old high school students, but a lot of work was put on our hair to make us look like we could have lived in 1989, when the story happened.

Then we headed to our own trailers, where our appointed production assistants – or the ones appointed if you were a lead actor - would have already picked our costumes for the day from the dress up department. As in the musical on Broadway and the original film, each character had a specific color theme that every outfit followed. Mine was royal blue, so everything I wore for those three months was a different shade of it – usually a schoolgirl pleated skirt, button up shirt and blazer. The tones of my clothes started light and progressed to darker blue as my character went through her dramatic story, so even if I wasn’t an executive producer, I would have been able to know what we were going to shoot that day just for the color of my clothes.

From there, we had some time to head to the food area, where they laid out a big table with everything anyone ever might have wanted to eat, to have breakfast and, in a half an hour or so, we were called to location.

I usually ate breakfast with Beezus, who was there as Gary’s assistant. Gary was the hired choreographer responsible to adapt our Broadway numbers to the big screen, an important job as not everyone who watched movies would be able to appreciate Broadway-type choreographies.

Gary was an interesting man, whose passion for the dance numbers was contagious. I had liked
him straight away, and especially how impressed he seemed to be about my dance background.

“Good to know I don’t have to take it easy on you.” He said, after our first rehearsal.

And he really didn’t – his numbers seemed to be almost harder than the ones from the Broadway musical.

Beezus, on her brow hair and small figure, still carried around her leather backpack everywhere, with a small oxygen tank inside, connected to her nose through a transparent cannula that helped her breathe her way through her cystic fibrosis.

The director, Michael, a petit man in his late forties who always wore sunglasses (even inside, even at night, even inside at night), had called me aside on a break from our first dance rehearsal with an intrigued expression on his face.

“Are we really paying for the sick dance assistant?!” he asked. “I get we needed Gary, but there has to be limits to what people can request.”

I gave him a determined look. “Beatrice is amazing.” I told him, using her name to sound more professional. “She’s talented and her health limitations are not an issue for her to do her job. You should know a professional like Gary wouldn’t have employed her if he didn’t think so.”

He shrugged, looking unconvinced, and allowed me to get back to rehearsal after Gary yelled at me to.

I didn’t actually know any of the things I told him, having never seen Beezus do her job, but I felt it was my duty as her fairy godmother to protect her and, fair enough, she was great at her job, even yelling at us louder than Gary sometimes.

Now, I sat on the makeup trailer, still on my sweatpants, as Gina did my hair, hating everything about my life like the drama queen I knew, deep inside, I was, though in that particular situation I didn’t think it was very unreasonable. The whole world was, after all, prying into the most intimate parts of my relationship once more.

“I mean, it looks awesome.” Gina went on, still sounding like she thought the whole thing was just extremely fun – of course she did. It wasn’t she who was almost orgasm-ing on a video on the internet! “Tell me, I need to know. Was it good? Like, is he good? Tell me he’s good.”

“Ugh!” I groaned, loudly, sinking deeper into the armchair as she struggled to keep a hold of the wig as she adjusted it.

Suddenly, the trailer’s tiny door was opened and I heard Tyler’s voice as he arrived to get his hair and makeup done.

“Oh, look, it’s Jenifer Silva.” He started, on a teasing voice. “Oscar winner, Grammy winner, and amateur porn star-“

I opened my eyes now, and grabbed a bulky powder brush form the table to throw at him in a quick move.

“Ow!” He complained, laughing.

“You’re suing them, right?” Asked Stacey as she walked into the trailer right after Tyler.

Oh, yes, she was still around. Stacey Havensburg-Cooper, or just ‘Havens’, as she liked to be
known as to dissociate herself from her country star mother as much as possible, was apparently a talented sound engineer. She worked mostly for her dad in his label as a musical producer assistant, but was branching out to work on television. Heathers was her first movie and, though I didn’t know much of sound engineering, from what I asked around, she was doing ok.

She seemed to always be around, or, at least, when Tyler was there. They weren’t dating, though, something I was quickly told by the gossiping production assistants. It wasn’t even like they were friends - it looked more like a reluctant, overly honest acquaintance. I wondered why Tyler had taken her as his date to the Grammys, but as we were trying to leave the whole drama about him being in love with me behind, I didn’t think asking about his love life was a good idea.

“I don’t know.” I told Stacey, brisk.

I didn’t have anything particularly against her, she was nice enough, but the topic just made me sick.

“I just got out of a lawsuit with them.” I went on, with a sigh. “No one seems to be able to prove how TMZ got the video, and, because it’s a… hm, public space, there could be no expectation of privacy, so my lawyers don’t think I could win.”

“Again, I’d be just bragging if I were you. That looked hot.” Gina protested.

“Ugh!” I groaned again, and she just giggled. I noticed Beezus had her cheeks red and that even Stacey had seemed to agree, though Tyler now seemed very busy reading the label of a hair spray he found by the mirror.

Of course I had asked my lawyers if we could sue TMZ, who had just released a video from a security camera in the elevator of Taylor’s building that showed Harry and me aggressively making out against the wall. I didn’t need to watch too much to remember that was during Ophelia’s party the month before, when he nearly made me cum on the elevator on our way to Taylor’s guest bedroom where we were staying.

Just like that, my name rose to headlines again. The classiest of them read ‘Prince Harry and Jenifer Silva’s Passionate Elevator Make Out Session!’. On the others, you could always find the words ‘fingering’, ‘orgasm’ and a number of puns with the word ‘royal’, and it was downhill from there.

“I wonder why they would wait so long to post it, though.” Beezus said. “You said it happened last month, right? You think they just got it now? How would they even know where to look?”

“The paparazzi knew the building was swarming with celebrities that night.” I told her. “They probably asked for anything they could get from someone who worked there… or maybe someone came across the footage lately and decided to sell. A security guard, or whatever.”

“But if they got it long ago, why wait until now to post it?” she asked.

“It’s because of the lawsuit.” Stacey explained as I just sighed, sadly.

The lawsuit I had started against TMZ on 2013, over the release of content from my stolen cellphone, had finally come to an end with a big victory to me – or, you know, my good lawyers. They had managed to prove, with enough technological… stuff that the release of content had come from TMZ’s building and therefore they were the ones who had my phone.

The judge had decided the release of ‘private content, such as contracts, photos and conversations, with no expressive consent from any of the parties involved’ was of ‘malicious nature’, and
therefore TMZ had been ordered to pay all the legal fees plus an undisclosed seven figures amount of money over ‘general damage’ and ‘punitive figures’.

I say ‘undisclosed’, but as they make a living out of releasing private information they had been the ones to tell the world they would be appealing the court’s order to pay me two million and a half dollars - not a bad amount for the headache they had given me.

My lawyers had managed to gather information and testimony from everyone who was affected by the stolen phone debacle – from the Marvel directors, who spoke about the ‘unprecedented danger to marketing’ over the scripts of the movies I had on the phone, to most of my friends. Selena, Tyler and Harry, all vowed to not have given permission to have their image and private conversations with me released, and to the extent of the moral damage it caused them.

The TMZ lawyers had tried to get a court order to get these depositions in person, so they could cross them, which would, of course, have made me settle. I could never ask Harry to sit on a judicial court to talk about how much he hated having his face on the forty-three selfies we had taken that TMZ had released. Or Tyler, about how damaging the text about our one night together had been for him. Or Selena, and the terrible message about what we really thought of her then-boyfriend, Justin.

Thankfully, the judge had denied that request and we won. I released a statement, saying I was appreciative of the decision and intended on donating the money to a number of charitable organizations, including whichever one my friends who were directly involved in the problem wanted. That included Taylor, Selena, Harry, and even Justin.

Harry wanted me to donate it to Sentabale, his foundation; Selena chose a center for care of street dogs in Los Angeles and Taylor a group who aided cancer patients who had no funds to afford comfortable living. My part would go to my own foundation, in Brazil, and Justin- well, his manager had emailed us we could donate his part to a Canadian public orphanage. Justin himself hadn’t really talked to me since 2013, when everything happened.

Selena said he was convinced Taylor and me were the reason they had broken up, though she was the one who didn’t want anything to do with him anymore. He had become such a douchebag over the last couple of years it was very hard caring.

“When the news broke that TMZ lost the lawsuit, every tabloid started printing my name again.” I told Beezus. “They needed to wait until I was relevant enough to make sure when they released the video, it would generate enough public interest. They knew people would be paying attention when the lawsuit thing happened, especially after I said I would donate the money to those institutions, mentioning who picked them. Just the fact I used Harry’s name in a press release was enough for them. Even vultures know how to keep their cards to themselves until it is more profitable to play them…”

Beezus looked astonished and sad.

“It was the same thing when David cheated on you.” Tyler added. “Remember?”

I scorned, and looked at Beezus to explain.

“I was on a Broadway musical with a boyfriend once,”

“David Cobb.” She nodded.

“Yes. He had a week off before my last performance weekend.” I told her. “Us Weekly got
pictures of him with his ex-wife on Hawaii, and instead of posting it right away, when I hadn’t been seen in public with him for a few days…”

“Which would give Jenifer the chance to pretend she and David had broken up, and come out of it on top.” Tyler added.

“They waited until he was back in Manhattan, and had been photographed after a performance hugging me, so the world knew we were still together when they told everyone he cheated.” I finished, sighing, realizing I hadn’t talked about that for so long.

“This way the drama is bigger, which is more profitable to them.” Stacey added. “Either that, or TMZ just wanted revenge after losing the lawsuit.”

“I don’t know which one is worst.” Beezus commented, lowly.

---

“Happy birthday, love!” I heard, a smile taking over my lips, as I collapsed, exhausted, to the couch on my trailer after a long day of work.

“Thank you!” I told Harry, feeling my chest warmer with how much I missed him. Just hearing his voice made me feel better about everything. “I miss you. I wish you were here.”

I turned twenty-six on a Tuesday in 2016. The director and producers bought a big cake for the whole crew and cast, that we ate for desert after an extended lunch. Then, it was back to work.

We were in California now, having finished shooting the location scenes in Ohio, we had moved to the studio ones, in Los Angeles. It was nice to be able to go back to my own house every day after work, where, during most days off, I’d be in the pool enjoying the sun with Beezus and the girls – Emma Stone, Anna Kendrick and Carrie, the original Heathers from our Broadway cast, who were also reprising their roles in the movie adaptation.

We would have other girls over, too, sometimes, Ophelia and J. Lawrence, and some of the models from the squad. It was a nice way to relax from the busy movie schedule, having everyone there for sushi and a pool day under the sun. The only weird part was we just could never go more than half an hour without someone starting to sing a Heathers song, that were simply glued to our minds, and then we all started singing until our throats hurt.

“Well, you’re in luck.” Harry told me that Tuesday, as I tried to get a little excited about turning twenty-six.

“What do you mean?”

“Are you in your trailer?” I said yes. “Do you see a little box in there somewhere?”

I looked around, eyeing the little red velvet box on the little counter that served as a table on my trailer. I had thought it was a gift from the studio when I walked in, but now realized Harry had probably had Eddy place it there for me.

“Is it a gift?” I asked, smiling. “It’s a little small to be flowers, I have been wondering when you would send me a compliment.”

“It’s not flowers.” He told me, as I got up to pick up the box.

Opening it, I found a small GPS tablet.
“Uhm…” I started, confused. “You shouldn’t have.”

He laughed. “That’s not your gift, it’s just to help you find it.”

“Oh!” I let out, understanding it. “Is it a scavenger hunt?!”

“…sort of.” He told me. “A little more glamorous than that.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, you’ll have to dress up.” He said. “And probably start getting ready now.”

“But I—”

“Have work?” he asked.

I remembered how just before I left me last scene that afternoon, Michael had told me to take the night, as they wouldn’t be needing me to film or as a producer. I had found it weird, as I had been full of work all the days before, not getting home until almost midnight, but I thought he was just being nice because of my birthday.

“Did you tell my director to give me a night off?” I asked him.

“…are you mad?” He asked, sounding concerned.

I smiled. “No.”

“Then yes.” He told me, making me giggle. “I wanna take you out for dinner. A date. For your birthday.”

“We’ll do it when I see you next month.” I promised.

“Have a good birthday, Jenny.” He said, before hanging up.

That’s how, a couple of hours later, I was wearing a black, sleeveless, skintight dress, with a fend mid-thigh, and heels, driving with Eddy through the streets of southern California as Harry’s GPS voiced out orders.

We drove south, losing the paparazzi following us on an intersection – they probably thought we’d make a specific turn, to go to a popular restaurant-, until we finally parked in front of a different one.

“Oh, I heard about this restaurant.” I said. “It’s new, it’s been getting really good critics.”

“It’s empty.” Eddy noticed, as he got out of the driver’s seat to open the door for me. “That explains why there’s no paparazzi here tonight.”

I smiled, feeling my heart full at the thought of Harry giving me a night out to relax even though he couldn’t be with me.

The hostess greeted me at the door with a smile, guiding me inside.

The restaurant was, indeed, empty. Not ‘slow business Tuesday’ empty. Completely empty. The staff stood in a line by the bar, smiling at me as I walked in, slowly, confused. There was only one table occupied, the best one, by the back window, with a view to the sea. Beside it, stood, tall and handsome, my smiley boyfriend. I broke into a giggly smile as I walked towards him.
Harry was wearing black pants, shoes and button up shirt, with a dark gray suit jacket, an ensemble that made him look even hotter than usual. His beard had been smoothly shaved off, his hair brushed back, and the amazing smell of his perfume reached me first as I made my way to him, quickly wrapping my arms around his shoulders into a hug.

He lifted me off the ground as he held me tighter, and I noticed a smooth violin music filling the air – a woman had started playing on a small stage nearby, beside a man in a piano who quickly followed her. I recognized the melody as Already Home, by A Great Big World, and I wondered if Harry had told them to play it.

“Hi.” He smiled at me, after I leaned back in the hug to look at him.

“Hi.” I smiled back, feeling my heart full with joy as I cupped his face with my hands, feeling his smooth cheeks. “You shaved.”

“Just temporarily.” He assured, giggly, “I’ll grow it back if you ask nicely.”

I laughed. “Then I’ll have to ask nicely.”

“Happy birthday.” He told me, and he pulled one of his arms away from my waist to grab something on the table – a bouquet of pink roses, that he handed me.

“My compliment!” I smiled, smelling the roses, making him laugh. “Thank you! But, Harry… what are you doing here? When did you get here? Why didn’t you tell me you were coming?”

“It was a surprise!” He protested. “I said I wanted to take you out for a dinner date for your birthday…” he winked. “And I thought we could use some privacy, so I bought out the restaurant for the night.”

“Kiss me.”

He didn’t need any more incentive than that, quickly leaning down the small distance to my lips and touching my tongue with his as he deepened the kiss – our first in a month, since Ophelia’s party.

When I had to lean back, breaking the kiss to catch my breath, he let me go, and pulled a chair for me to sit. I wanted to go home right away, and skip dinner, but I could barely speak with excitement, so I sat down and let him take me through his carefully planned through birthday gift.

“May I keep those for you, Ms. Silva?” a waitress asked, gently, pointing at the roses on my arms as she approached.

“Yes, thank you.” I told her.

“Would you like the wine list, madam?” the maître asked as he approached, and I looked at Harry, knowing he had instructed the man to let me chose the wine.

I smiled. “Do you feel like wine?”

Harry shrugged, slightly. “I don’t mind. It’s your choice.”

“Then I’ll have a vodka soda, and he…” I looked at Harry. “Will have your finest whiskey.”

“Yes, I will.” He nodded, impressed.

The maître made his way out, and Harry reached both his hands across the small round table. I
covered his hands with mine, and we started tracing patterns on each other’s palms with the tips of our fingers.

“Busy day?” he asked, referring to my choice of drinks.

“Busy month.” I corrected. “Being a producer is hard work. I thought acting was hard.” He laughed. “I’m so glad to see you.”

He smiled.

“Is your family too mad?” I asked, with a small voice, deciding it was better to address the problem instead of avoiding it.

Harry sighed. “The usual.”

“I’m so sorry.” I told him.

“It’s not your fault.” He said. “If anything, is mine. I should have controlled myself and waited until we had privacy.”

“You couldn’t have known!” I told him, quick. “It’s not your fault either!”


I took in a deep breath, nodding.

“Besides,” he added, “I don’t want us to regret that night. That was a…” he grinned. “a pretty great night.”

I smiled. “It was.” I agreed. “And Beezus says it’s not that bad. I mean, she’s nice, but I don’t think she’s lying to make me feel better.”

The video, after all, was aimed from above the elevator doors to the back, where Harry had slammed me against the wall. So it wasn’t possible to actually see much of me, or, thank God, where his hands were and what they were doing. It was possible to see my hand gripping his hair pretty enthusiastically, and throwing my head backwards, so, as Gina had, people guessed.

The video also showed when Harry turned me to face him, kissed me strongly, and lowered down – though they couldn’t see his mischievous grin. They could, however, see how he held my legs and threw me over his shoulder before walking us out, both of us laughing excitedly.

Of course it was enough to get the entire world buzzing with excitement. And more than enough to make my parents spend a good two hours on the phone with me.

“How is Beezus?” Harry asked.

“She’s great.” I told him. “I love working with her.”

“Okay, but…” He went on. “I saw Kit last week. We went to a pub for a few drinks with Richard and this guy, Alfie.”

“That’s Anna’s boyfriend.” I told him, nodding, happy over the fact he had grown to be friends with those guys. “He’s from Thrones, too.”

“He didn’t seem so great.” He told me, seeming frustrated. “Is Beezus’ mind made?”
I nodded, sadly.

I had learned as soon as Beezus arrived in Ohio, and we went for lunch on my trailer, that she and Kit broke up. Or, more precisely, she broke up with Kit.

“Kit says he wanted to marry her.” Harry told me. “Is that not something she wants?”

“It’s not about what she wants, sadly.” I said, as the waiter brought us our drinks. “It’s about what she fears.”

“That’s bullshit.” Harry complained.

“I know!”

That had been precisely what I told Beezus when she told me she had broken up with Kit, a man she was very much in love with, because she knew he was growing too attached to her.

“I’m gonna die, Jenifer.” She told me. “I can’t have him making plans to spend his life with me when all that means is he’s planning to become a widow! He deserved more.”

“That’s bullshit, Beezus!” I told her, that day, still wearing my eighties outfit, “Kit knows you are sick, and he’s a big boy. He’s capable of making his own decisions. You shouldn’t take that away from him for something that you won’t even be here to see.”

She sighed, longingly, staring sadly into her potato salad.

“I know is hard to understand, but it’s for his own good. I’m trying to keep him from hurting-”

“You don’t think he’s hurting now?! You don’t think that right now he doesn’t feel like you’re dying already?! Simply because he can’t see you anymore?! I exasperated. “All you’re doing is anticipating a pain that might be far into the future. You’re just killing yourself without needing to! And that’s just really cruel.”

I took in a deep breath, drinking a sip of my water waiting for her to speak. But she didn’t.

“It is one thing to break up and stay away from someone you don’t want in your life anymore,” I went on, unable to stop myself, “but this is so stupid, Bee! This is just putting both of you through unnecessary pain! What did I tell you the first time we met?! Prioritize your happiness! Don’t you owe it to yourself to live your days to the fullest instead of just anticipating your own death?!”

“I am living my days to the fullest!” She let out, finally, sounding irritated now. “I’m working here! Accomplishing something I didn’t think I’d get the chance to! I’m traveling and living my life the way I want to!” she sighed, seeming to immediately regret her outburst. “I don’t need you to be my fairy godmother, Jen! I just need you to be my friend and understand that this is my decision and I need it to be respected.”

I knew she had a point when she mentioned me being her ‘fairy godmother’ – I had a tendency of overlooking reason on an attempt to protect, having grown too close to her to accept the fact she had a fatal disease.

"…okay.” I said, after a long, silent pause. “I don’t like this at all! But… okay.”

We resumed our lunches in silence, and I struggled to think of something to say that would break the tension, but all I could think was how sad it made me they had broken up.
“...good thing I have a sad scene to shoot today, because you just gave me a lot of feelings to work with.” I joked, glad to see a little contradicted smile had perched on her lips.

While Harry and I talked, I couldn’t help but think about our conversation a month ago. His words still resounded in my ears as if he had just said them.

“I think we should move in together.”

I felt breathless just thinking about it, but I couldn’t seem to grasp if that was in a good or bad way.

“You’re thinking about it, aren’t you?”

He asked, suddenly, in the middle of the main course, after I had been silent a bit too long while he told me about something cute his niece had done last time he’d seen her.

I raised my head to look at him.

“You’re thinking about what I asked.”

I tried to give him a playful smile. “I think you overestimate your effect on me.”

“I don’t think I do.” He retorted, smugly, making me smile bigger now, as I felt my cheeks blush.

“You have time.” He said.

“I know.”

“Five months.”

“I know.”

“I don’t want you to think I’m pressuring you into deciding.”


He nodded, playing with his fettuccini Alfredo with his fork.

“I hope you’re not freaking out.” He added.

“I’m not.” I lied.

“Really?” He asked, suspicious.

I gulped. “…Yeah.”

“You are.” He replied. “It’s okay. Just… what about this?” he rested his cutlery by his plate and looked at me, attentively. “What if you just… asked me what’s on your mind? Whatever you want, like in Hunger Games. I promise I won’t lie. This way you can get the doubts out of your head.”

Slowly, I finished chewing and rested my own fork down.

I was afraid of asking questions, because, truly, I was afraid of his answers. But I was even more afraid of going another day with all the thoughts on my head. So I took a deep breath, and avoided his eyes.

“When you said we could just live together out of convenience, nothing else…” I started. “Did you mean it?”
“Yes.” He replied, on a heartbeat.

I nodded, wondering if he would answer differently if I had asked in a different way.

“So you don’t think of this as a way of taking the relationship to the next… step?” I asked. “You don’t see it as making us more serious?”

He smiled, a bit sad, before answering. “…I do.”

I nodded, suppressing a sigh.

“Okay.” I said.

If I was being honest, I knew that.

“Is that a problem?”

I wanted to say that it was. I wanted to say that it was a huge problem, but I stopped, and for a very simple reason: Beezus.

As I realized why it was a problem, I also knew I was doing exactly what Beezus was: I was avoiding making the relationship more serious, out of fear that it would have to end eventually. And as I had told Beezus myself, that was stupid!

“Jen,” Harry started, folding his napkin by his plate and standing up, looking like he was struggling to find the right words to convince my scared-fox personality into not running from the loud noises. “I am not going to lie to you. Okay? I’m going to tell you some scary things now.”

He pulled a chair from a nearby table and turned it to me, sitting closely. I turned on my own chair to sit facing him, who held both my hands on his, lovingly. He eyed our hands together, taking a deep breath, and I smiled at how patiently he tried to go out of his ways to make me comfortable on my issues.

“I love you.” He said, looking up at me from his lashes.

He was right – that in itself was scary.

“And I’m sorry to have to tell you this, but I want to spend every last day of my life with you.”

I felt my heart skip a thousand beats and all the air on my lungs leave me.

“I’m not proposing. Breathe.” He reminded, and I pulled in a deep breath. He watched for a couple of seconds my chest rising up and down as I breathed. “And this is my point, okay? I am not proposing to you. Not now. Now when I suggested we live together and, if it’ll make you more comfortable on my issues.

“Don’t get me wrong, I want to,” He told me. I could feel my hands shaking in his, but he held them tightly together. “And this is my secret, after all. I’d marry you right now if I thought that’s what you wanted.”

I hoped he couldn’t hear my little gasp.

He was smiling, nervous. “I wanna be with you. Forever. You’re it for me. But I understand is not that simple, so this is what I’m offering. I will not ask you to marry me. Not today. Not if you
move in with me. Not ever.’”

I felt a knot on my stomach. Not ever? That wasn’t very nice.

“This way you can be sure that whatever happens, you don’t have to be scared.” He added. “And I don’t have to be the jerk that asks you to give up things you might not want to.”

I realized, finally, why this was so important to him: Harry had been engaged before. Harry proposed before. Harry asked someone to give up things they didn’t want to. And that someone had changed her mind.

He didn’t want that to happen to us. He, too, like me, didn’t want his last relationship to shape the way his current one unfolded.

“So, if you ever decide you want the relationship to be more… serious,” he went on, with an intense look, “let me know… this way, the pace is yours. The ball is in your court.” He smiled. “You’re the boss. Until then, nothing changes.”

I remembered how he had immediately stopped incessantly asking me out when I asked him to. And how he had taken back every ‘I love you’ I wasn’t ready to hear. And how he had said them to no answer so many times until I finally let mine out. And how, even then, he asked if I wanted to take it back. And how he was having Brazilian Portuguese lessons to talk to my family, and to me, in a way that sounded more comfortable for us.

I realized there was so many reasons he should walk away – all the mistakes I had made in the past, the ones I was writing in my book; the pictures from my stolen phone; the video on the elevator – and yet, he wasn’t running away. Just like he had vowed almost three years ago on the woods in Scotland, right before he asked if he could kiss me even though there was no one around.

“Nothing could make me run away from you.” He said, then, the words that still sounded exactly like what I wanted to hear.

“We do what you want. When you want it.” He told me, at the restaurant, and I felt my heart constricted when I remembered what Edward Lane-Fox had told me once, about how only one person was calling the shots in our relationship, and it wasn’t Harry. “This way you don’t have to be scared I’m gonna ask you something you’re not ready to give me.”

I smiled, nervously, staring at our hands together. I was the one grasping his tightly now. He raised them up to kiss mine, and made to let them go, standing up. I held them tighter, in place, and pulled him down to stay where he was.

I took a moment, a long moment, to – without any of my walls – stare right into my heart and ask myself what was it that I truly wanted.

I wanted his hands on mine; his arms around me at night; his warm breath on my neck as he cuddled me to sleep; his sleepy, drowsy smile greeting me in the mornings; his teasing smile when I rambled about something dorky; his ridiculous jokes, good advice, understanding voice when I was angry. I wanted him so much even as I sat there I just wanted to crush my bones to his.

“It’s okay.” He said, smiling. “You don’t have to say anything… I just wanted you to know.”

“Just…” I started, my voice trembling in a whisper. I smiled, nervously. “Just give me a second. I can do it.”

I took in a deep breath. And another, staring at our hands together. His hands still felt soft and
warm in mine, and my heart still felt full and warm, beating fast inside my chest.

I took another deep breath and looked at him, being a little taken back again by his turquoise eyes.

I felt my chest get hotter and hotter as I looked at him until I finally said it.

“I wanna live with you.”

“You don’t have to say it just because I said all those things—”

“I want to.” I interrupted, realizing as soon as the words had left my mouth the warmth on my chest had dissipated throughout my body. Knowing I wanted it. I really did, and just saying it aloud had already made me so happy.

“I’ve wanted it since you asked. I just… I’m used to listening to the fear more than to what I actually want.” He still seemed cautious, but I saw a smile starting to make way into his lips. “You see, Mr. Prince, I’m a little in love with you.” I said, feeling a smile on my own lips now. “And when I move to England after the summer, I want to live with you.”

Chapter End Notes

WOAH. ITS HAPPENING! WHAT DO YOU THINK? Also, come on, Jenifer, we all wish we were you in that elevator.
Thanks for reading!
I didn’t plan on talking about my love life with the first lady of the United States, but hey, 2016 turned out to be that kind of year. The year weird shit happens.

Take Harry and me, for one: when we had started dating officially, exactly one year before, I could have sworn we were out of our minds. After all, there was not a chance we would last, right? How could we? I’m full of issues and he’s full of responsibilities, us both shining too bright, exploding even brighter when we’re together. In all ways, we should have broken up. That is the reason when we were still pretending to be a couple in 2013 people loved the idea of us so much: because it just felt wrong, despite looking so good.

But there we were, three years later: it was May of 2016 and Harry and I were celebrating our first official anniversary. Because people didn’t know our first year together was a lie, they didn’t understand this math. They seemed to agree that technically we had been together ‘on and off’ for about two years already. Which probably explains why most of them weren’t that surprised that we were moving in together.

“You know what that means, right?” Had been Richard’s response when I had lunch at the Artchet-Merchant household in California right before leaving for Florida that May. “Moving in together? It means you’re taking the relationship to the next level.”

“I know.” I said, surprising even myself. “I want to do it.”

Tyler was someone else I had been nervous about telling and the way it happened had been another weird thing that happened in 2016.

After my birthday in April, I woke up in my house in Los Angeles with Harry’s arms around me and a smile on my face. The sun hadn’t come up yet, it was a Wednesday, and I had to get ready for work, so I painfully took his arms away and hopped into the shower.

“You had sex.” Said Gina, a few hours later, when I hopped into the chair at the hair and makeup room at the filming studio, making me blush both because of the truth of her words and because Tyler was sitting on the chair beside me. “I can always tell when people had sex, it's gift.”

I giggled, nervously, but didn’t say anything. Maybe Tyler would just think she was insane. Maybe he hadn’t even heard it.

“Harry flew in last night?” He asked, dampening my wishful-thinking.

“How do you know?” I asked, hoping that wasn’t weird, that we were talking about it.

“Oh, Gina has a gift.” He joked.
“Damn right.” The hair and makeup artist agreed. “Did you guys did that elevator video thing again? Was it good?”

“God, Gina!” I protested, laughing. “He flew in to surprise me for my birthday. We had dinner.”

“And sex.” She added, and I shook my head, blushing.

Tyler didn’t say anything else, but he didn’t seem upset. I didn’t think we’d talk about it anymore until later on, after lunch, when he knocked on my trailer’s door.

“Jen, I have a favor to ask.” He said, walking in, “Oh. Hi.”

As he finally looked up, he realized I wasn’t alone.

Harry had showed up to the studio that day by lunch time, with sushi.

“You said I had to try the California sushi, so here I am.”

Turns out he had a couple of days before he had to fly back to England, and he decided to try and spend some time with me, even though I had to work, so we sat on my trailer after I was done with my morning scenes and started eating. I was just so happy to be able to show him to my job and work place, and just so excited to know what he thought of California.

My excitement was thrown out the window the moment Tyler walked in.

“Hi.” Harry told him, serious.

That was a lot more civility than I had expected.

“Right.” Tyler went on, cleaning his throat, trying to simply move on from the awkwardness. “I should warn you, this is gonna sound absurd.” He told me, and looked at Harry. “Do you guys wanna go on a double date?”

It did sound absurd, which is why there was a long silent pause as Harry and I exchanged a confused look.

“You’re kidding.” Harry told him.

“I know what you’re thinking, but,” Tyler started.

“With you and who else?” I interrupted.

“Stacey.” He told me.

“Really?” I asked, sounding interested.

He shrugged, looking as surprised as I felt. “I just… She’s just…” He sighed, a little smile on his lips. “I like her.” He told me, sounding excited and shocked at the same time.

“Tyler, that’s great!”

“Though I agree it’s pretty great you’re finally letting my girlfriend go,” Harry added, coldly, “why would you think a double date would be a good idea?”

Tyler took in a deep breath and prepared to talk, as if he had rehearsed his reasons, probably knowing we would ask.
“One, it would be good publicity.” We looked at him, intrigued. “People still think there’s something going on with us, if we went out, all of us together, they’d know we’re just friends and maybe the craziness from the fans would stop.” He paused. “Two, it would help you see I meant it when I say I’ve let you go, and three,” he sighed, pausing. “It would really help me a lot.”

“How would taking her out with the girl you were in love with before her help you?!” I asked, astonished.

“Because she thinks I’m still in love with you.” He said.

“Don’t we all?” Harry mumbled, barely audible.

“And if she sees us together, she’ll know there’s nothing here anymore. Because there isn’t!”

As unconvinced as I was, I said yes. Tyler ran off before Harry could protest and, after he was gone, I turned to him.

However, his only reaction was, “Are you gonna eat your uramakis?”

Because I didn’t want to start a fight, I didn’t ask why he was so calm, and we merely enjoyed a good lunch together – which was so rare these days.

He stayed for a few hours after lunch, to ‘watch me work’, which was in itself so weird. Harry was always so worried about too much publicity, always hating the invasion of privacy we went through, that I had always seen him as being completely separate from my work life.

But, suddenly, there he was. Sitting on my high chair by the cameras, the whole crew shooting him curious glances as they tried to focus on work.

We were shooting a big number that day, Shine a Light, a scene of a school assembly as the student counselor tried to make the students admit their biggest fears so they would stop killing themselves. The character in the movie, eccentric hippie Ms. Flaming, was being played by Meryl Streep, who was a showstopper to watch. Took most of us a number of takes just to stop looking at her with our mouths dropped open.

She greeted Harry warmly when she arrived, leaving me even more shocked. Apparently, they met at a charity function in London last year.

Harry watched us shoot, entertained, chatting with Beezus as they both stood nearby, giving me teasing smiles from time to time.

After seven takes, he asked me in a concerned voice when I approached to drink some water during a quick break, “Is it not over yet?”

“No, we still haven’t got it.”

“How long will it go?”

“Until we get it.” I told him, laughing at how concerned he looked for our well-being.

That night, we left the house and met Tyler and Stacey at the restaurant, fighting our way through the paparazzi to get through the doors.

To say that it was awkward would be an understatement, but we managed to get through the first twenty minutes talking about food and drinks alone.
Then Harry asked Stacey what is it she did, and she went on such a huge rumble even I was impressed at how little she needed to breathe. She pretty much told him his whole life story in one sentence, explaining about how her parents met and had her and all their expectations.

“So basically my father wants me to stay on sound mixing to take over the label, and my mother wants me to have a country singing career and both are very intense about it, which is why I don’t know how to tell them I want neither. Think of it as in Empire, but instead of hip-hop, it’s country music. And I don’t have any siblings, so all the responsibility falls into me.”

There was a long pause and no one seemed to know what to say after that. I went to exchange a concerned look with Tyler, but he was too busy looking at her with a sweet smile on his lips.

That was the moment I knew he was over me. That was the moment I knew he was completely, head over heels in love with her.

Though it was awkward, Stacey didn’t seem regretful of her over-sharing. She just sat there, head held high, waiting for someone to say something now that she already did her contribution to the conversation.

I loved how sure of herself she was.

“Well, I know a thing or two about family expectations.” Harry started, carefully. “One can only do what one musts.”

She nodded, serious. “I know. But how do you get over the fear?”

“You just do.” He shrugged. “Sorry, there’s no magic word. You just decide if something is worth enough for you and go for it. If they love you, they’ll want you to be happy.”

She nodded again, seeming thoughtful, and there was another pause as the waiter arrived with our drink.

I had thought I would drink half of my vodka in one sip out of nervousness, but I was fine then. I was absolutely okay.

“That was beautiful, Harry.” Tyler said, with a mockingly serious tone of voice. “That was so deep.”

We laughed, Stacey and I rolling our eyes, and Harry shaking his head.

The conversation went along better after that.

Stacey talked about university; Tyler talked about being cast to Bonnie and Clyde starting next month; Harry talked about his job and I talked about my book, which was almost entirely done. Finally, we arrived at the unavoidable part where Tyler just had to share a story from our days at The Mediator.

“Jen and I were the pranksters.” He told Stacey. “We developed the habit of pulling one big prank every season to start things off. One year we were shooting in location upstate and got the keys to Jake’s trailer-“

“You have to explain!” I interrupted, looking at Stacey and Harry, who listened attentively, though I’m not sure if really interested in the story or trying to see some sort of spark between us. “Jake is a really heavy sleeper. We called him Jake, The Napper. He took naps every day after lunch. He would actually eat fast just to have more time to sleep.”
“So we took the keys to his trailer and just started driving it!” Tyler went on. “We drove him out of location, up the road and parked it near the beach! Miles away!”

“Then we called a cab and got back to work pretending we just went out for lunch.” I finished, Stacey and Harry had unbelieving smiles on their lips. “Hours later everyone was trying to call him like crazy to know where he disappeared to.”

“They thought he stole the trailer and went off!” Tyler laughed.

“Finally, he woke up and called the production to go and pick him up,” I laughed too. “I don’t think he ever found out it was us.”

“I don’t think he did.” Tyler agreed.

“We should tell him.” I told him. “I wanna see his face.”

We laughed again, and Harry was watching me with an amused smiled.

I think that was the moment he knew Tyler was over me.

“That explains the pictures incident.” He said.

“Are you referring to the thousands of pictures of my meme-situation you covered my apartment with in 2013?!” I asked. “Because if you are I will remind you that you started it!”

He chuckled. “I never got you back for getting me back, did I?”

I gave him a daring look. “Try. I dare you.”

“Oh, I will.” He replied, looking serious. “We’ll be living together, Silva. I will get you.”

“What?” Tyler asked, suddenly, interrupting our little moment. “You’ll what?”

I felt my stomach sink while I wondered if I had been wrong.

Harry and Stacey were silent, allowing me and Tyler to have our moment.

“Harry and I are moving in together.” I told him. “After summer. I’ll go from Brazil straight to England.”

He seemed a little surprised, though not as shocked as I would have expected. Stacey was eyeing him attentively, as was Harry. As was I. We all tried to catch a glimpse of what was going on in his head.

“Huh.” Ty let out, nodding, as if he said ‘sure, yeah, that makes sense’. “Do your parents know?”

“No.” I told him. “We sort of just decided it last night.”

“Can I please be there when you tell them?” He asked, his lips curving into a cheeky grin. “’Cause that’s gonna be hilarious!”

“Tyler!” Stacey complained.

“You’re such a dick!” I laughed, and just like that, they knew it too.

That was the moment she knew Tyler was over me. And so that was the moment we all became
friends.

We had arrived separately – my mere presence there was either a surprise for most people, or it just seemed extraordinarily normal for the others. Harry had created and organized the Invictus Games in 2014 as a sports event for injured armed forces personnel and veterans. Now, in 2016, the Games had come to the United States, for its first international edition.

The opening ceremony was taking place at a huge field nearby the ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex, where the Games were being held in Florida. There was a big stage at the far end with two bleachers with about six rolls of fancy, velvet chairs each. A big crowd had gathered to watch the ceremony, including the players and their families and Imagine Dragons would be performing a set later on, after they had emptied the bleachers.

I was ushered from the arriving area, where bystanders and media were being kept away by security, to the back of the stage, where organizers and guests were getting ready.

The VIP guests were to be seated at the rolls of seats at the bleachers on stage and, when I say VIP, what I mean is I was probably the least important one there. I mean, sure, I had an impressive acting career and awards for my age, and a post with the United Nations, but we’re talking about politicians here.

When Harry had invited me to attend the American Invictus Games, at first I thought he was just trying to be a good boyfriend.

“It’s okay if you think I better not come,” I had told him, “It’s a work event, people won’t expect me to be there.”

That was, of course, a lie. People always expected to see me around him when he was in America. Or anywhere, actually.

“…it’s okay if you don’t want to go.” He had told me

“I’d like to go!” I told him, sensing he had thought otherwise. “But, you know, if I’m there, they’ll talk about it. Good Girlfriend Jenifer Silva Follows Prince Harry to Work Event. And they’ll photograph us, probably together. And I know how much you hate that. So don’t feel like you need to invite me, I don’t want to put you on an awkward position.”

“I want you to go.” He said, emphatically. “I really do! I mean, I’ve seen you work, I… I’d kind of like for you to see me.”

So I smiled and said yes.

People didn’t know I was going, of course, it’s not the kind of thing you announce. I think the press half expected me not to show up since I hadn’t been seen with him the last he was in the country, but when I showed up, they all showered me with questions as I walked along Harry to the doors.

That had been another issue: I had imagined when he invited me that I would arrive separately, maybe after him, to avoid the pictures of us together. Paranoid? No. Think about it: Until I told him I didn’t like it, he always walked meters in front of me when there were paparazzi around. He said he wanted to make the pictures worth less.

But on the Invictus Games? We arrived together. Same car, same time. We walked in together, not holding hands or anything, as Harry was busy talking to the events manager responsible for welcoming him, but side-by-side, and he even introduced me to everyone.
And I had, of course, expected to be seated away. I knew he’d be seated on the stage, as the creator of the Games he was as VIP as it gets, but I expected to be seated somewhere people couldn’t be keeping us together in photographs. Instead, after he said he’d see me in a minute and was ushered away be the manager to greet the Games’ workers in front of the press, and I was shown by a handler to my seat, I realized not only was I sitting on the stage as well, but I was to be seated in the front row. Right beside him.

Right in front of the stage there was a small area for press photographers where they’d be snapping away and filming whatever they could, so I knew when I walked into the stage that I was already being filmed.

The handler pointed at my seat from the corner, as if telling me to walk in in front of the row to it, but before I had a chance, I saw him.

If I was a character in a Marvel comic book, Edward Lane-Fox would probably be my arch-nemesis. He didn’t wear a cape or lived in an evil lair, he actually had a sweet toddler daughter that he named after a Les Miserables character and always wore a suit. But he had a pointy evil nose and bald spot, and I was pretty sure he plot to get rid of me, which is as good an arch-nemesis as I might get.

“Edward!” I greeted, grinning. “Nice to see you again. It has been a while.”

The last I had seen him he had invaded my press junket in Cannes to tell me to stop playing with Harry’s emotions.

“Ms. Silva.” He greeted, eyeing me from the tip of my toes up. “Hello.”

“Oh, come on, Edward. It’s just Jenifer, we’ve talked about this.” I told him, noticing how he seemed to check every item of my wardrobe.

I had prepared for this.

Edward always found every bitty thing about me to criticize and I didn’t want to give him a chance. Also, knowing the eyes of the world would be on us tonight, as it was the first time Harry and I were officially together in public, I wanted to look nice. Pretty, as someone’s girlfriend, and professional, as it was an important work event.

So I was wearing gray Louboutin pumps and a Hugo Boss dress that looked like a button up, long sleeved shirt tucked inside a long, gray patterned skirt that covered all the skin to my knees. The long sleeves kept my tattoos hidden – except the rose on my ankle – and my simple string of sparkly earrings were classy and my makeup, light.

I eyed Edward, waiting for the judgment.

“Have at it, go on, what did I do wrong this time?” I asked. “Skirt too short? Too tight?”

Edward nodded slowly. “No, no… surprisingly appropriate.”

I tilted my head sideways to give him a confused look. “Really? Then what did I do wrong today? Oh, wait, if you think I shouldn’t be here I’ll have you know I told Harry he didn’t have to invite me!”

“No, it’s nice you came, Jenifer. Your presence will bring unprecedented press to the event.” He smiled. “Make sure you talk to the first lady once she comes out, that’ll be a picture!”
There were three reasons I was speechless: one, Edward had smiled, something I had only seen him do once before. He looked even scarier smiling. Two, he was actually telling me to get myself into a picture that would be linked to Harry! The only time he had controlled my publicity was when he thought I was being too damaging to Harry. And finally: he called me Jenifer.

He had only called me by my name once before and it had been an accident for which he later apologized. When we had met and I had gone straight into calling him by his first name, he had lectured me into the proper manners of conversation, which dictated you should only address someone by their name if they expressively allow you to. Of course I had only ever called him by his first name after that, but he had always insisted on calling me ‘Ms. Silva’. I told him to call me Jenifer, or Jen, but he said he didn’t want to grow too comfortable in what he called our ‘doomed relationship’ since, according to him, Harry and I would break up eventually.

But now, here he was. Calling me surprisingly appropriate Jenifer and telling me to smile for pictures with the goddamn first lady.

“Something wrong?” He asked, when he saw I was giving him a weird look and still hadn’t moved to my seat.

“What’s your deal?” I asked him.

“What?”

“Why are you being… nice?”

“I’m a nice man.”

I actually let out a sarcastic laugh. “Come on, Edward, what do you want?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about, Jenifer.” He said, and I really didn’t know how he could say my name with a serious expression on. “Oh, here they come, you should take your seat. Go on, go on! Don’t forget to not cross your legs, you’re wearing a skirt, you’ll show too much skin!”

He gave me small push and I walked reluctantly to the center of the stage. My seat was right at the middle in first row, right beside Harry, who had by his other side Michelle Obama and Jill Biden. Most of the other seats, I noticed, were already taken. I sat down, trying to avoid looking up at the sea of people and press up front a few meters from the stage. The photographers called out to me to look at their cameras and a few people cheered when they saw me, but I kept pretending I was looking for something in my handbag. I knew by now twitter and tumblr were finding out that I was there, and it made me think of the headlines.

In a short while, I heard the photographers go at it again, and realized Harry, the first lady and the vice president’s wife and a few other men were heading towards the stage to take their seats, talking amongst themselves.

Harry smiled when they reached me.

“Michelle, Jill, this is Jenifer.” He told them.

“Yes, of course, we’ve met!” Michelle said, smiling at me from her chic Armani midi dress.

“Hello, Mrs. Obama.” I said, as we shook hands. “Dr. Biden.”

“You’ve met?” Harry asked, sounding surprised.
“We had Jenifer over to sing for us at the White House Broadway night gala last year.” Michelle
told him, as I gave him a squinty look.

“Why do you sound so surprised?” I asked him. “I met the Brazilian President, too, you know?
You’re not the only famous person I know.”

Harry blushed as he gestured us to seat, and Michelle and Jill laughed at my frankness.

“Oh, Prime Minister, hello. I hadn’t seen you yet.” Jill rose to her feet, followed by Michelle, to
greet the Canadian Prime Minister and I turned to Harry, short of breath.

“That’s Justin Trudeau!”

He looked at the man’s young features, and then at me, seeming confused. “I know, I just saw him
backstage. Good bloke.”

“You met him?”

“After he was elected.” Harry replied. “He came to England to meet granny. Canada is a British
Commonwealth country, you know.”

“Oh, my God, he’s so cute.” I saw the Prime Minister start to say he’d talk to Michelle and Jill
later, ready to be walked to his seat. “Can you introduce me?!”

Harry sighed, very slightly rolling his eyes. “Hi.” He said, looking at me. “I’m Harry. Your
boyfriend?”

“Being in a committed relationship does not make me blind, Harry.”

The Prime Minister started to walk pass us to his seat, when his eyes casually passed through me.
He smiled, friendly, which I mimicked and he stopped.

“Hello.” He said, giving me his hand. I stood up in a heartbeat, Harry following me, looking
concerned.

“Mister Prime Minister,” he started, in an emotionless voice, “this is Jenifer Silva. My girlfriend.”

I noticed he said the word girlfriend a bit louder than the rest, and also that he hadn’t specified that
when introducing me to Michelle and Jill. He also rested his hand on the small of my back, a touch
that certainly had the press buzzing with excitement.

“What an honor!” Justin Trudeau gave me a bone-weakening smile. “I’m a big fan of your movies.
Good job on Bloodlines! It had me on the edge of my seat, I was so sure Chris Pine was the
murderer!”

I giggled, nervously, feeling my cheeks blush.

“And how’s your wife and kids, Justin?” Harry asked, a little abruptly. “I forgot to ask backstage.”

‘He’s married?!’, I thought, feeling my excitement damper a little.

“Oh, they’re great. Thank you!” he smiled, before looking at me. “My wife is a big fan of your
show, If Tomorrow Comes. We watched the entire first season in one weekend, I think.”

“Thank you!” I said, “Season two is coming in two months!”
“Yay!” he smiled. “I’ll talk to you later, I must get to my seat. They must be wanting to start already.”

We smiled, nodding, and sat down again. The Prime Minister took a couple of steps before being told his seat was actually the empty chair by my side.

We smiled at each other as he sat, and Harry shifted in his chair by my other side, cleaning his throat looking uncomfortable. He mumbled something to Michelle Obama, who laughed, and soon enough we stood up again to sing the national anthem – or listen to it if, as Harry, Justin and me, you weren’t American and didn’t know the lyrics. Then the different army bands started marching in and a fleet of Air force jets circled the skies – it took a while.

Finally, Harry rose up as we were all watching a video about the first edition of the games, to be escorted to a podium down the stage, nearer the field, for his speech.

Michelle mumbled something to me from across his empty chair. I couldn’t hear her, so I scooched over to sit next to her.

“You two look so cute together.” She said, giving me such a sweet smile it was hard not to smile back.

“Thank you.” I said, blushing, looking at my hands in my lap.

“In his defense, Barack was also very impressed and a little jealous when we met the Prime Minister a few months ago.”

I looked at her inquisitively. “Harry is jealous?” I asked, in a whisper.

Michelle laughed. “Dear, you underestimate Mr. Trudeau’s effect. After he took a seat by your side, Harry asked me, ‘whose idea was it to sit my girlfriend next to the handsome politician?’”

Surprised, I let out a loud laughter along her, knowing the entire world would be seeing this soon enough. I looked at Harry as he approached the podium for his speech, the video still playing in the dimmed lighted field.

As I looked back, I noticed Edward hidden away at the corner of the stage, giving me a thumbs up, probably happy I was being seen all friendly with Michelle Obama.

“How long have you been together?” she asked.

“Today is actually our first anniversary.” I told her.

“Congratulations!” She smiled. “Celebrating here? You’re a patient girlfriend.”

I smiled, looking at Harry nervously staring at his written down speech in front of him in the podium, as he waited for the video to be over.

“No, he’s the patient one.” I told her. “We both have to make sacrifices for each other’s jobs. In March, we only had one day together, and he agreed to spend it on a party for my friend. I’m just trying to learn to be a better person from him…”

“Well, he’s a good example.” She said.

“I agree.” I smiled.

The video was over now, and the lights came back on. Everyone’s attention went back to the stage,
and quickly to the podium, where Harry smiled as a narrator urged everyone to give a warm welcome to His Royal Highness Prince Henry of Wales.

After the warm, euphoric applause, as Harry’s face appeared blushing and smiley in every screen around the crowded field with watchers and armed forces competitors, Harry smiled again.

“Good evening, or, should I say, what’s up?” He joked, saying the last words on an actually really good American accent. The crowd laughed, and so did I.

“He is so proud of that joke.” I told Michelle, who laughed.

Harry went on to talk about the relations between England and the States, and to talk about how the idea for the games came about and how proud he was of having its second edition ever there.

“I am very happy to be here tonight.” He told the crowd, his voice echoing from the microphone. “In England, we like to pretend we’re much better than our lost colony, but if we’re being honest, and I will be since I am here tonight, despite not being big fans of what you do with your tea,” he paused, as the crowd laughed loudly. “We, like a big portion of the globe, are big admirers of many American things, like Netflix, anything with the words ‘deep fried’ in front of it,”

He paused again, for more laughter from the crowd and the stage as well, as most of us were also laughing.

“…and particularly pretty Academy Award winning actresses. Though maybe that one’s just me.”

The effect this line had was lost in me. At a rational level, I knew the crow was laughing and cheering, and I knew there was a camera panning on me somewhere, since I could see the image had cut to my face on the big screens. I knew the press had turned to the stage to photograph me all at once, because despite most lights being thrown at Harry, I was suddenly bathed in flashes. I could tell Michelle and Jill and even Justin were smiling at me, but the truth is, inside, very little of this actually registered.

Inside, my stomach was a twisting hot ball of feelings. I felt my heart beat faster and my cheeks blush as I tried to contain a desperately loving giggle into a simply really big smile. I stared down at my hands, brushing a string of hair behind my ear shyly.

When I raised my head again, Harry was also blushing, looking down at his speech as he waited for the crowd to be silent again. He had a sneaky smile on his lips.

“But, the truth is,” he went on, “we all deeply admire your commitment to freedom. We admire your commitment to providing a home to the lost and hurt, a place where anyone can become free and brave, which is why it is such a privilege to have Florida be the new home of the Invictus Games.”

There was a soaring cheer from the always patriotic American crowd, and I applauded with the rest of the guests on the stage, though my mind was rapidly thinking about two things at once. One, I loved how he had sneakily mentioned the immigrant crisis on his speech. It had never been particularly easy, but lately, it had become even harder to be an immigrant in America, especially the ones fleeing conflict zones, and the fact he had mentioned it would mean so much for the fight for America to accept more refugees. I knew it as a fact as this is what I had been working with at the U.N.

And two, I just couldn’t believe he had talked about me. Harry was a private person. Harry hated giving anyone material to talk about us. Yet, he had brought me there, and sat me on a stage right...
next to him, and talked about me in a public speech!

I told you: 2016 was just that kind of year.

I knew his speech would be going viral in just a few minutes, if it weren’t already, even before it was over.

While he made his way back to the stage, the band got ready to play the Invictus Games’ anthem – which surprisingly existed.

We all rose to our sits and watched. I made to move back to my seat as Harry reached us, but he quickly took the last two steps to sit there before I could.

“No, it’s okay.” He said, giving me a wink. “Just stay there.”

I realized, with a smirk, he wanted to keep me away from the Prime Minister.

As we were all silent listening to the song, he leaned in to speak in my ear.

“Are you mad? Was that weird?” he asked. “Sorry I didn’t ask you about it.”

I looked at him, faking confusion. “Oh, you meant me? I thought you were talking about Jennifer Lawrence.”

I laughed as he gave me a very sarcastic look. “No, Jen, I didn’t mean her.”

“Ophelia Callis, then? She’s great in Agamemnon. Won an Oscar.”

“Oh, really?” He asked, sarcastic.

“Yeah, two, actually.” I told him, and laughed. I smiled, shaking my head. “That was… cute.”

He smiled, and looked straight ahead. “I’m glad Edward told me to keep it, then.”

I let those words sink in.

“Lane-Fox?” I asked.

“Mm-hm.” He mumbled.

“Huh.”

He looked at me. “What?”

“What is up with him?” I asked. “He’s being… nice.”

Harry grinned. “Are you complaining?”

“…no.” I said. “But it makes me uncomfortable. I wanna know what his angle is. He’s always hated me, so why would he be nice now?”

“He doesn’t hate you.” Harry defended.

“Last time he saw me he basically told me to get my shit together.”

“He’s not that bad.”
“Harry, I call him Lame-Fucks for a reason.”

Harry stared down to try and hide his laughter from the cameras.

“He’s even calling me by my name now,” I added, “he’s never done that, he says he didn’t want to grow too comfortable into a relationship that was doomed to en-“

I stopped, finally realizing why Edward had decided to start being nice to me.

“He knows we’re moving in together, doesn’t he?”

Harry looked at me. “Of course, I told him.”

Suddenly, everything clicked. Lane-Fox didn’t like me when he thought I was just toying with Harry’s feelings. But now we were taking the relationship to the next level, he suddenly decided I could be of good use.

The anthem was over and the narrator called Michelle Obama to do her speech. We applauded and waited as she made her way to the podium.

“I think I had more fun when he hated me.” I admitted, embarrassingly, to Harry on a low tone.

“Thank God we barely see each other.”

“Well, you should get used to him.” Harry said and I eyed him, questioningly. “We’re gonna live together.”

“Why should that mean I need to get used to him?”

Harry shrugged. “He is always at my house.”

I gave him a surprised glance. “Why?”

“Love, he works for me.”

“Why does that mean he needs to come to our house?! Don’t you have an office?”

Harry smiled. He looked at me, in silence, with a mysterious look in his eyes.

“What?” I asked.

“…You said ‘our house’.”

I smiled, and looked ahead, contradicted, unable to remember what was it I had been worried about five seconds ago.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” Michelle started, at the podium, “esteemed guests, dignitaries, Your Royal Highness… particularly pretty Academy Award Winning Actress…” she greeted, and I felt my heart race again as everyone’s attentions shifted to me once more, as I tried to contain my laughter with the rest of the crowd.

The first lady went on with her speech, but I couldn’t make myself pay attention.

I reached over and held Harry’s hand gently. He smiled, as his thumb gently caressed my fingers.

I leaned in and placed a gentle kiss on his cheek, something I had naively hoped would go unnoticed.
“Happy anniversary, Harry.” I said, smiling. Happy.

The previous one had been confusing, but 2016 was shaping up to be a good kind of year.

Chapter End Notes

Who said Jen is better than Harry at badass speeches, amiright?? And can I hear an ‘hallelujah’ for Tyler finally letting go? Thank God for Stacey! Next chapter: Jen wins more stuff - because that’s what she does best. Also her book is ready, but now she needs to tell her parents about it! See you then, have a good week thanks for reading!
“Okay, I’m ready.” I said, smiling to the tall, thin figure staring back at me from the mirror in a royal blue Hamda Al Fahim dress.

“No, you’re not.” Said Rachel, my stylist, coming back from her black, velvet go-bag with shiny drop earrings. “There, now you’re ready.”

My dress had an A-line shaped, ruffled skirt with a train and sheer sleeves tying up on my shoulders from my breasts, leaving a big V shaped neckline.

The Antoinette Perry Award for Excellence in Theatre, created to recognize the live Broadway talent, is more commonly known as the Tony Award. It is presented by the American Theatre Wing and The Broadway League at an annual ceremony in New York City, and it’s considered the highest theatre honor in America, a direct equivalent of what the Oscars are for movies, the Grammy for music and the Emmy for television.

I stepped down from my limo at the Radio City Music Hall that 5th of June of 2016 with butterflies on my stomach. The last time I had been in the Tony Awards as a nominee had been in 2012 and the memory still burned bright red in my mind.

I had recently been through my highly public breakup with David just hours before we performed together on stage for the last time ever. Weeks later, when the tabloids were still dissecting every aspect of my personal life, we were both scheduled to attend the Tony’s as we were nominated for Legally Blonde The Musical. I had had to gather every ounce of energy I had to go and almost turned right back and went home when I realized David had his wife with him, posing together on the red carpet as if nothing was happening. I got my revenge later, though.

Every nominated musical gets to perform a song at the Tony’s to showcase their production. Normally, the creative team chooses the performance and whoever is playing the character currently, plays it there too. Since I had left the musical very recently and was nominated, the directors asked me to perform that night, and I agreed with one condition: that I could perform a solo called So Much Better.

The song narrates the moment Elle Woods discovers she is good enough for law school, when she decides maybe the man she thought was the love of her life isn’t worth it if he didn’t see her potential. I sang that song at the top of my lungs and when the time came, I belted:

“Maybe she’s what you prefer, but hey, last year I was her! Maybe you will change your mind, but you might look up to find, I’ve grown on to better things, to better jobs, to bigger rings! I don’t have the time to cry, I’m too busy loving my name up on that list!”
The ‘explosive’ performance, as it was described in the media the following day, made headlines for weeks, with many calling ‘Jenifer Silva pokes back at David Cobb’.

The time I had been in the Tony’s before that was 2008, when I was nominated for a short run in Les Misérables the year before. Despite having performed so long before, when the ceremony came I had long left Broadway and also college and had moved back to California after breaking up with Adam. That, too, had been a bitter night when all I wanted was to go home. Two Tony nominations, two ceremonies I attended wearing couture and a broken heart. Two awards I lost.

Maybe you can understand why I was so excited for this new one. In 2016, my heart was not only whole, it was shining with joy and excitement over the new. In 2016, my name didn’t take space in tabloids over the shameful breakup I had to endure, but over the fact I had a happy and healthy one.

In the days that anticipated the Tony Awards 2016 ceremony, my name was making headlines over the Invictus Games in Florida. ‘Prince Harry Gushes Over Jenifer Silva in Speech’, ‘Jenifer Silva Dazzles Crowd as Prince Harry’s Date’, ‘Jenifer Silva Laughs with Michele Obama in Invictus Games’, ‘Jenifer Silva Blushes Over Prince Harry Public Declaration’, ‘Jenifer Silva and Prince Harry: Power Couple Takes Florida’. People just couldn’t get over the fact that Harry and I dared not only to be seen in public, but to not shy away from the fact that we were, indeed, together.

Of course with us letting ourselves be seen in public a brand new batch of rumors arose. Now the general idea was that if Harry and I were being seen together in public, it was because our relationship was more serious than never, which probably meant ‘a proposal was on the way’. Just like that, suddenly everyone was thinking we were about to announce we were getting married.

That wasn’t all wrong, of course. We were, after all, more serious than never: we were moving in together just as soon as the summer was over. A little before I had finished shooting Heathers, I had finally managed to get a studio to agree to film my movie. I got the budget from the Brazilian Culture Secretary, to boost national production, and hired executive producers – including the two authors’ whose books I had used as a base for my script -, crew, and a director. Or, more accurately, a co-director. The other director was me.

My directing debut would, however, have to survive amongst a number of breaks: I would only get to Brazil after the Tony’s, before I got a break to go on a book tour for the release of my autobiography, something so huge I was still refusing to acknowledge was happening. After that, I would fly back to Brazil to resume shooting until I had to go to Rio to represent the ‘international Brazilian community’ in the 2016 Olympics. Before flying to England, I would still take a week to take part in a charitable all-stars edition of the Brazilian version of Master Chef.

But before any of that craziness could take part, I still had a Tony to lose.

The Tony Awards were televised by CBS and it usually attracted the attention of the media and those who liked musical theatre, though it wasn’t as much of a big deal since not everyone did. That year, however, many more people found themselves interested due mainly to two shows: Heathers and Hamilton.

Hamilton An American Musical, telling the story of the US’s first treasury secretary Alexander Hamilton, had its entire score in hip hop and R&B, something that immediately attracted mainstream attention when it was released in mid-2015. Heathers, released a bit earlier, had its score in pop and pop rock, an intensive kind of melody and lyrics that attracted just as much attention. Both cast recording albums went to the top of the charts, selling like water on deserts, and I was pretty sure the only reason Hamilton hadn’t been nominated against us for the Grammy was because they release their album after the eligibility period had passed.
We were nominated against Hamilton in most of the big categories: best musical, best director, best choreography, best score and lyrics, best costume design, best lead actor, best supporting actor and best supporting actress. To my luck, the only reason I didn’t have to worry about them in my category – best leading actress – was because their biggest female role was a supporting one.

The entire night, the jokes ranged around the fact both our musicals had attracted mainstream attention and that we were each other’s biggest competition.

We lost best costume design, best director, and best musical to them, but won best choreography and best score and lyrics. In the main categories, it was very much a tie:

Our Emma Stone and Greg Quentin lost best supporting actress and actor to them, but Tyler won his first Tony ever as best lead actor, beating creative genius behind Hamilton, Lin-Manuel Miranda.

He rose up, shaking, from his seat to hug Stacey by his side. He turned around and hugged me, tears streaming down his face, as I remembered how much he loved musical theatre and how much this meant to him.

He climbed up the steps to the stage to the cheering crowd and the orchestra dimmed down the music for his moving speech about growing up in Broadway and finding hope in music and in this industry.

“I wanna thank Marcela, Eric, Christopher, Johanna!” He thanked, smiling, our producers, “Our amazing cast, especially Emma, Carrie, Anna, Greg, Tim and, always,” he smiled down at me, “my Susannah, my Elle Woods, my Veronica Sawyer… Jenifer.” He paused, breathing heavily, before looking at Stacey. “And last, at last, my love. I love you.”

He winked at her, smiling, before he bowed, slightly, and the crowd cheered loudly as he made his way out of the stage and the narrator called the commercial break. I looked at Stacey, smiling, knowing the cameras would be cutting to us now.

She had a shocked look on her eyes as she applauded absentmindedly.

“Are you okay?” I asked her, kindly.

“He…” She stuttered. “He had never said that before.”

My hands froze in place mid-clap. “That he loves you?”

She nodded. I watched, worried, trying to decode her reaction. Was that a good thing or a bad thing?

Slowly, she smiled, blushing, staring at her hands in her lap, and I knew she loved him too.

The Hamilton against Heathers rivalry felt weird to me, particularly, because as someone who had been the lead in the Broadway Heathers and in the soon to be out Hollywood Heathers, I was also going to be in Hamilton in the upcoming year. Their movie adaptation would be shot in early 2017 and I was to play Eliza Schuyler/Hamilton, a supporting character with a heartbreaking solo I was extremely excited about. So in a way, it was good to me they were so successful, but, in so many other ways, I really wanted Heathers to win.

Especially because as of early June of 2016 I, Jenifer Silva, had an Academy Award, an Emmy Award and a Grammy Award. And if, that night, they decided to hand me a Tony, I would become the youngest person ever to achieve the E.G.O.T. honor. Only twelve people in history had won all
four – Emmy, Grammy, Oscar and Tony Awards. Twelve! If I won, I would be the thirteenth. In history. Ever.

When I had brought up to my management the idea of fighting for an EGOT in 2014, I had done it only to keep them busy and to make them let me go back to Broadway and to make the TV show I wanted. I didn’t actually think I could do it!

Or, sure, okay, in a more wishful-thinking kinda way, maybe I did. Maybe I dreamed of it. Maybe I dreamed of it every day since I had won my Oscar before shaking my head every time to come back down to reality. Because no one, no one, could win all those four awards at twenty-six years-old less than two years after deciding they wanted to. Not even me.

Right?

“And the Tony for best leading actress in a musical goes to…”

In an irony of fate – or a smart move by the organizers –, the presenter of my category was Jonathan Groff, who not only played King George in Hamilton, but had played my husband in Wild & Free.

His adorable face calmed my nerves as he looked up from the envelope, a charming smile in his lips as he chanted the name that wasn’t really mine, but that I had learned to love.

“Jenifer Silva!”

I felt the air leave my lungs in shock as everything went silent. Not really silent, just in my head. I saw everyone standing to applaud. I could tell there was music filling the room. But in my head, there was just the echo of a beautiful silence. My heart was skipping a thousand beats when I heard my own voice say: I won a Tony.

I felt Tyler’s arms around my waist as he hugged me and pulled me to my feet, laughing. Behind him, Stacey threw her arms around us and I felt one, two, three more pairs of arms tangle themselves around us from behind me as Emma, Anna and Carrie hugged us too.

I could only half-hear them saying things, congratulating me in excited squeals as they crushed me in their group hug, but in my head, I was hearing something else. An echo from the past, a deep, cold, just casually calculating voice from a man I once loved:

’You know what I mean, dear… it’s Broadway. I’m not saying, by all means, that you don’t have talent, I’m just saying that we both know there are different kinds of talent… yours is just not the kind that gets into Broadway. Sure, sure… you did Les Mis that one time. But to do something serious, to be recognized, is something else entirely… Surely, you understand. You’re just not… Tony material. Teen Choice Awards, maybe. Yes, that would be on your reach. You have a voice for television. Not the stage.’

I felt the knot on my throat as David’s words ringed in my ears. He had that in common with Adam, Tony Awards. And also his complete lack of faith in my talent. His causally manipulative diminishing words towards me.

I walked away from my friends with tears in my eyes as the noise started getting to me now. The applause, the music – an instrumental, orchestra version of Beautiful, our opening number -, the cheering from our cast and crew. I smiled, shakily, to my friends as I walked, the corner of my eyes catching sight of Lin and the cast of Hamilton nearby. They were standing to applaud too when I walked towards them. I hugged Lin tightly, quickly, in a sign of respect of his work and what he
stood for. He was still holding the Puerto Rico flag he had waved during his last speech, the place where he was born. It made me like him even more. I wished I had a Brazilian flag.

I climbed the steps, hearing what the fake voice of the narrator told the audience:

“This is Jenifer Silva’s first Tony Award on her second nomination. She also has an Academy Award, a Grammy Award and an Emmy Award and tonight becomes the youngest person ever to have won the four biggest awards of the entertainment industry.”

The crowd cheered louder at this, those that were still sitting standing up now.

Jonathan had his mouth dropped open dramatically in a big smile when I reached him.

“Wifey!” he shouted, hugging me before handing over the small trophy with a round disc that I knew would spin if I flicked it.

I held it, the weight of it on my hands, its shiny silver glow being all that I needed before the tears started falling down my cheek.

I stood on that stage almost ten years after Adam, four years after David. I stood there in a royal blue dress, my hair up, my makeup intact, my happiness bursting through me in the form of tears. I stood there, at twenty-six years-old, knowing I had what they didn’t. Not just an Academy Award, a Grammy and an Emmy. Not just my seven digits bank account. Not just a love life that wasn’t hurting anyone. Not just principles and integrity and self-respect.

I had my heart. My heart that was beating fast in my chest, in my own hands. My heart that wasn’t theirs to break anymore. It was mine again. My story was mine again. And as I stood there, ready to thank people for one of the biggest honors I never really thought I would ever get, it felt like my heart was playing the drums of a victory march.

I took a deep breath as I prepared to start my speech, as the audience settled down on their seats again. Suddenly, I felt panic take over me. My mouth was open for a long time, but no sound came out. I brought a hand to my eyes and closed it in exasperation.

“I know this is the part where I thank people.” I told them, knowing I had to say something. “But I literally can’t remember the names of anyone I know.”

The sound of loud, collective laughter broke down my tension as I laughed too, feeling a little better. I looked up, lowering my hand, and focusing on the smiley faces on my friends in first row.

“Oh, my God!” I shouted, desperate, in the microphone. “I can’t- I can’t remember. I know you! What is your name?!”

The crowd laughed more, but my friends now knew that I wasn’t kidding. My mind was just completely blank. So they started mouthing their own names at me.

“Yes, thank you!” I said, and it all came back in a hurry. “Emma, Anna, Carrie! Thank you! I love you! Thank you for…” the crowd was still laughing as I struggled with their names, but I was decided to keep talking before I forgot again. “Thank you for being the kindest, most adorable mean girls a girl could ask for! Thank you Eric, Marcela, Chris, Jo, for believing in this story enough and not give it up before we had the chance to believe with you. You have made this journey so much easier, I love you!” I took a deep breath. “I remember I was standing beside Tyler after we sang a song together on the Governor’s Awards in Los Angeles in 2014 when Eric approached us and with, maybe one of two sentences he managed to convince us to do this show. So I wanna thank Tyler, because it feels like you’re always standing beside me when I make the
kind of decisions that change my life. I love you!”

In his seat, smiling, Ty raised his own Tony at me, kind of like in a toast, and I couldn’t believe that after years on The Mediator, and everything else we had been through, we had won Tonys on the same night.

“I wanna thank my family, in Brazil, whom I love and miss,” I went on, “my friends for loving me even when I don’t have time to catch up as much as I wish I could, and my management, because they believed I could win this even when I didn’t think there was even a chance.” My voice broke as I struggled against my crying.

‘One day’, I thought. ‘One day I’ll manage to make a speech without crying!’

Taking in a deep breath and sweeping my hand across both of my cheeks as to dry them, I tried to get myself together in one last attempt to end the speech in the kind of note I liked.

“I made a speech not long ago about a man who had told me I wasn’t the kind of actress people gave awards to,” I paused, in a sigh, trying not to smile as people cheered the memory. “There’s another man who said something similar once, someone whose opinion I valued and whose career I respected, who once told me I had a voice for television.”

With a bite of my lower lip, I heard as the audience cheered in protest of my abuser’s words. I shot a look at the award in my hands, remembering David’s words when I had asked him for advice, for guidance from someone I thought I could trust.

“And, you know, for a really long time I believed him…” I paused, feeling my throat hurt again as the tears threatened to come back. “But tonig-tonight…” I giggled, nervously, looking at the award in my hands. “Tonight I have an Emmy, a Grammy, an Oscar and a Tony Award!” I broke in an excited laugh, watching as the many faces in black tie in front of me smiled back. “And he, he…” I sighed. “He can suck it!”

Being a director was nothing short of exhaustive.

As I left America for my home country for my second professional project of the year, I felt like I was carrying turmoil wherever I walked. The ruffled feathers that had risen right after my Oscar win in 2014 were suddenly on a riot again.

As I became only the 13th person ever with an Emmy, Grammy, Oscar and Tony Awards, and the youngest, every news outlet wanted an interview, every talk show wanted me on it, every paparazzi wanted a picture or a quote or a video. I felt the Hate Wave be washed away as people not only wanted to know how I had managed it in such a short period of time, but who was the new man I had dared insult in my speech this time.

The speech went viral again – my, what? Third one already? I was losing count. This time, instead of raising my award to the air in victory, I had given the audience a big, energetic shrug once I was done. That picture was highly shared in the following weeks. My face twisted in smug confidence, my shoulders up in a shrug, I had seen it captioned as everything from ‘my face when people tell me to act like a lady’ to ‘when you have lost every last shit you used to give’.

People on tumblr had edit the iconic pictures from my three most known award show speeches – the one in my first Golden Globe when I hadn’t known how to start, the one in the Oscars, and the Tony Awards one – and captioned it: ‘The exciting trilogy: watch as Jenifer Silva increasingly loses all the fucks she used to give’.
Harry was thoroughly pleased. When I had landed in Brazil to start shooting my new movie – that we were, for now, calling Project 64 – he had sent a cake to my hotel room. It was a large chocolate cake covered with white frosting and a picture on top. My picture. The one with the shrug from my speech at the Tony’s.

I had laughed so hard I took a picture of it and posted to Twitter without even remembering I should ask Harry if he’d mind. The caption read: ‘When your boyfriend knows you so well…”

Thankfully, as I was now a little better at dealing with the turmoil that came with becoming hugely popular, I knew that I had to delegate in order to survive. I trusted that Janine, Richard and Monica would deal with whatever they had to and focused on the movie I had to get done. I focused on revising the last notes my editor had made on the book before we gave it the final seal of approval to go into printing.

The movie I was shooting – Project 64 – rivaled in sadness and tragedy to Wild & Free. It was the story of the activist fight during the military dictatorship that took part in Brazil for twenty-one years starting in 1964. The first scene was of my character – Agatha – in her cell after months of torture, being left alone by the torturers. They allow her nails to grow back, they feed her better, and finally give her new clothes and let her shower. They cover the remaining bruises on her face with makeup and send her to a car. Because there was a picture of her being arrested, if she simply disappeared without a trial people would know the police had something to do with it. So, to keep the appearances, they gave her a trial.

Before she’s put in the car for court, her torturer whispers in her ear: ‘Be careful what you’ll tell them… remember you will come back to me’. For this, we were thinking of calling the movie: You Will Come Back To Me.

After this, we see through flashbacks the story of how Agatha became an activist after leaving her small town to study Law in São Paulo. We see her reluctantly join the activists and let her studies behind more and more until they finally had to go into hiding. We see the progress of her relationship with one of them, the death of so many others, their despair as most civilians simply seemed to ignore the war going on around them. And, finally, we see her arrest. Her torture. Her rape for information.

In the end of the movie, after she tells the truth about everything, she begs the judge to arrest her, so she at least doesn’t have to go back to the place where she was. They grant it, and she’s put in a car again. In the last scene, she leaves the car to realize she’s back where she was in the first one. Her torturer greets her grinning as she screams. ‘I told you you would come back to me.’ The end.

The story itself wasn’t mine, I had written it from a short story by Paulo Rosário and used parts of a novel by Renato Tapajós – I had hired both of them as executive producers to make sure we could convey the right feeling into the movie that they had in their pieces.

Not only that, I had spent months reading everything I could get my hands on about the period: history books, articles online, many novels and autobiographies from people who lived the period. I read about the torture methods and watched every gruesome movie made about it, including one that showed every form of torture and a documentary about how the US government had aided the Brazilian military – something that was proven, though barely talked about.

I had personally interviewed everyone who had auditioned for the roles – through skype calls, of course, from when I was still in Heathers. Because I was unfamiliar with Brazilian actors or actresses, I had managed to cast based on talent, not on name, though a few popular names ended up being cast as well.
As I was the director, I had been the one to go into meetings with studio executives and business people who handed the money to ask for a budget and permissions from the government to film in Brazilian locations. I had filled paperwork. I had written emails, answered emails, made calls, answered calls, traveled for Brazil in one day to be back the next just to make sure everything was in order until I had hired enough people to delegate duties to.

When I did, I gave orders. I trusted. I checked. And I focused on Heathers, on Invictus, on the Tony’s until I could finally fly home to see everything in person. By then, I had also hired Camilo.

Camilo Cabello was a critically acclaimed Brazilian director who had agreed to co-direct the movie with me. I needed the help, and he agreed to let me take the lead, so we moved on from there. He was a great help as I didn’t know much about Brazil anymore.

We hired more people, took care of wardrobe, bought and rented what we needed, and finally made a schedule of shooting before we began.

It was not only physically, but emotionally challenging. I was not only busy with things to get done at every hour of the day, but I had my character to worry about as well.

Agatha, in every aspect, was as sad and tragic as Wild & Free’s Claire had been. I felt the dark cloud of sadness start to follow me around as I became her.

With the shooting schedule, we were to film first the scenes that had most people on it – in college and in protests, for instance -, before starting to film the torture scenes. But as filming progressed, I knew what was coming.

I would have to get half-naked and hang upside down from a pole, with my hands tied behind my feet – that in itself would be challenging, but I was working towards it with a personal trainer so I wouldn’t need a stunt person. I knew I would have to shoot scenes where Agatha was beaten, electrified, and raped in every possible way.

In the final product, the scenes wouldn’t be too long. They weren’t the theme of the movie, after all. But for us to be able to use them, for them to look authentic enough to be used, even for just a few seconds, they would need to look good. Which meant they would need to be shot properly, with care and intensiveness. No matter how long it took or how uncomfortable it felt.

The feeling that followed me around as I carried this character with me was very similar to the one from Wild & Free. I carried her pain with me as I started to feel like closing myself again. That was, after all, how I had dealt with it then.

When I was shooting Wild & Free I stopped answering phone calls from my family, friends and management. Even Harry – especially Harry as back then I was trying to stop liking him. It all felt ‘too happy’ then, in contrast to the pain of my character, that I didn’t know how to separate from myself.

A number of factors helped me deal with this new movie in a better way; the first was the Tony I had won so recently. When I did, it had felt like closing a book. Like finishing a long, sad movie I hadn’t been ready to see. It felt like a shot of energy I hadn’t felt in a long time, as I finally realized that even through the Hate Wave, my talent hadn’t disappeared. Even through it, I still won an Emmy, a Grammy and a Tony. I still got to work with the U.N. And now that it went away, now that I felt myself leave Adam and David and all of my brokenness behind as I moved forward, not only with my career, but with Harry, I felt renewed. I felt ready to take on whatever came next. It coincided that this happened right as I finished writing the book, and so I think that was the feeling it gave me: closure.
The second thing was my family. As I was in the same country as they were, it was easier to make myself stop shutting them out. I flew them in to São Paulo every other weekend to see me, and sometimes flew home to my hometown to see them. I played with ever growing Arthur, now an energetic two year-old, and argued with my brother about which movie we should watch as we had dinner. I talked about Harry with my sister-in-law, and about work with my parents, asking about the company, the charity, and whatever I could do to help.

Finally, there was Harry. I had him now, I really had him as opposed to trying to distance myself from him. I talked to him on Skype every day as I shot Project 64, telling him how my day had been and about everything that hurt. He didn’t know what to say, but he didn’t have to. I just needed him to listen. I just needed him there. Smiling at me even through the low quality image on my computer that froze sometimes. Telling me about his day, about his work, about his hunt for a place for us to live come September.

I talked to Harry as I forced myself to talk to the others: no matter how hard I didn’t want to. I made myself call Richard, Janine and Monica every day. To tell them about the challenges I was facing and listening their good advice and well-intended praise. I asked about their kids and listened to their professional warnings, all in between Agatha’s pain and, sure enough, it stopped feeling like it was my pain. It was hers. I just had to carry it for a while.

Then, work felt like work. It didn’t feel like a hobby, as it hadn’t in a long time anyway, but it didn’t feel like a sacrifice either. It felt like something I had to do and I managed to do in an easier way. It felt like I could do it. Like I was good enough. Like I knew what I was doing, which wasn’t the kind of feeling I was used to.

Having Harry in my life, and deciding to stop running away from the commitment of our relationship, had me in a kind of over-sincerity that I think neither of us was prepared for. That’s how he ended up coming to see me that late June.

We had been talking about the book. Harry had called me that night to ask about a package that had arrived for him from me – the first finalized manuscript of my autobiography.

“That’s Not My Name, by Jenifer Silva.” He read on the first page, with a grin on his lips. “I like the title!”

I smiled, nervously. “Do you really? Isn’t it weird?”

“No, it’s great. And then there’s your name right here, and everyone will be wondering what is it about.” He nodded, flickering through the pages on the screen on my computer. “It’s because it’s not your real name, right? Just to make sure I got it.”

I giggled. “Yes. I explain it somewhere in there. And also because of how people label us different things and we have to learn not to let those labels define us in order to define ourselves.”

“Jen, that’s great.” He smiled, looking honest, and I sighed happily.

“I’m so glad you like it.” I told him. “And…” with a knot on my stomach, I forced myself to continue. “And you know, I highlighted in that copy the parts in which I talk about you.”

He looked at his own computer, his brows raised. “You talk about me?”

I tried to resist the urge to smile. “Well, yes. Kind of. Not blatantly! I don’t say your name, or mention anything that could be directly linked to you. I kind of dance around it, but I do. I wrote some stuff about you… About us.”
He was smiling now, as in a daze as he looked at the pages on his hand. Then he nodded, enthusiastically.

“I’ll read it.” He vowed.

“I just thought you might wanna read it and make sure you’re okay with it.” I went on. “And if you think people might understand more than I think they will, if you think there’s anything too obviously about you that you want me to cut, just let me know and I will.”

He nodded, serious. “I will.”

He paused, opening the manuscript on the first page and silently staring at it for a while.

“You can’t read now!” I shouted.

He looked at me, in a hurry. “Why not?”

“Because I’m watching you!” I replied. “I’ll be watching your reactions and it’ll make me anxious! Just… just… read it later, okay? When you’re alone.”

“Okay.” He laughed, and with one last look at the first page, closed the manuscript smiling. “I like the dedication.”

The first page of my book read: ‘I dedicate this to my fifteen year-old self: chin up, kid. You’ll be fine.’

“At least now you have one last thing to worry about,” he said. “I know you’ve been stressing about this for a long time.”

I flinched. “Well, not really.”

“How come?”

I sighed. “I still have to tell my parents.”

The problem with publishing an autobiography owning up to all of my life’s mistakes was that there were a bunch of those that my parents didn’t know about. Everything from the fact I wasn’t a virgin, to the drugs and DUs and the extent of the abuse I endured with Adam and David. Things I felt I needed to have out there, but that would mean I would have to tell them about it.

I couldn’t just tell the whole world with two exceptions – I checked.

“Oh, shit…” Harry sighed. “That’s gonna be difficult, huh?”

I was silently nodding for a while, staring at Vodka eating her late night snack near the bed next to me as I tried to think about how the dreadful conversation would go.

“Are you, uhm,” He cleaned his throat. “Are you also gonna tell them about us?” I eyed him questioningly until he went on. “That we’re moving in together.”

“Oh, no!” I said. “God, no! They’d kill me.”

“Jen, they’re gonna know.”

“No, they won’t!” I told him. “I thought about everything. They won’t be in England, so the only way they might know is through tabloid pictures, but those are misleading so I can just tell them
you were pictured leaving my place because, well, you were there to see me but you didn’t spend
the night! They know the media lies, they’ll believe me.”

“Jen,” Harry sighed, “you’re twenty-six years-old-”

“I know!” I interrupted, blushing at my own immaturity. “But, like… they wouldn’t understand!”

“Well, make them.” Harry shrugged. “It feels too weird that we’re moving in together and I’m…
talking about you in public events and you can’t even tell your parents we’re gonna live together.”

I sighed, letting my head fall on the mattress with a muffled bang, knowing he was right. Knowing
it was fair that he was continually the only one who seemed to be willing to commit.

“I wish you were here.” I said, my voice still muffled by the mattress, after a long silence had
passed. “I know I’ll be feeling so shitty when I tell them, it would be nice to have someone there
who I know still loves me despite everything I’ve done.”

“Okay.” Harry said, and I raised my head to look at the computer screen again. “I’m coming.”

In all honesty, at first I had thought he was kidding. I even laughed slightly, wishing he wasn’t.
Luckily, he wasn’t. The very next day I got back to the hotel from shooting and Harry was playing
with Vodka in the floor of my hotel room – I didn’t know which of them seemed happier to see me.

“Hi!” I smiled, weakly, walking towards him as he stood up to hug me.

He crushed my bones to his and I took in a deep breath, marveling in his perfume, feeling like very
little could hurt me.

“Hi.” He whispered, his warm breath on my neck making my stomach twist in joy.

I felt so much happiness to see him I almost forgot why he was there.

“I read the book.” He went on.

I raised my head from his embrace to look at him. “You read the parts about you?”

“I read it all.”

I blinked. “You read it… all?”

He nodded “It’s… it’s amazing.”

“Harry,” I started, in shock, “it’s four-hundred pages long!”

He shrugged, dismissively. “It was a long flight, I had a lot of time.”

“Harry-“

“Jen,” he interrupted. “I’m… I’m sorry.” As I eyed him intrigued, he went on. “About… David
and… and Adam.” I noticed how his jaw clenched when he said their names, anger flickering
through his eyes. “I knew it was bad, but… I never knew how bad. I’m sorry you went through
those things.”

“Is there anything you want me to change?” I asked, both because I wanted to know and because I
wanted to change the subject.
“No.” He smiled, letting go of the hug so his hands could frame my face. “Jen, I… I love you.”

He smiled, and I couldn’t help but mimic, wondering why he seemed so intense.

“I love you too.” I said.

“Everything, everything…” He went on, still gazing at me. “Everything you said, about me. About us. And how… how this feels for you. I…”

I looked down, feeling my face warm as I knew I was blushing.

In my book, I talked openly about how terrible my previous relationships had been. I described every form of abuse – psychological, verbal and sexual – that I’d been through. I did it as a way of warning people for how smooth those could be. As a way of giving the readers hope that that wasn’t all there was, I also spoke about Harry.

I didn’t mention his name, but I spoke about the one good relationship I had, the one love I felt which made me feel like it was okay to believe in happy endings. The love that was patient, kind, understanding and just utterly joyful through thick and thin. I spoke about how I had never felt anything remotely similar and how in dark times one of the few things that still had the power to make me smile was thinking that I had this person in my life.

I guess you could say it ended up sounding pretty deep, if Harry’s amazement was to be believed.

“You know all of that.” I said, trying to downplay everything I had written in the book. “I told you. I love you.”

He shook his head. “You don’t really…” He sighed. “You very rarely talk about us in a way that’s… serious. Committed. I know you have issues you’re working through, but… sometimes is hard to remember you love me too. And when I read those things, I-” He smiled. “I love you.”

Feeling my heart beating fast in my chest, I leaned in and kissed him strongly.

It was a Friday night in São Paulo. Harry and I spent the night together, to allow him to sleep the jet leg off, and me to recover my strength after a heavy week of work. When the morning came, we packed our things and left for the airport.

I had a private plane at my disposal, courtesy of the studio, that I had been using to go home in the weekends or to fly my parents to São Paulo to see me. We managed to walk through the sea of paparazzi waiting at the hotel entrance and avoided the ones in the airport since we were flying private.

“No matter how many times I come here,” Harry started, staring out the window as we prepared to land in my hometown, “I always get wonderstruck at how pretty it is.”

My parents were happy to see us, they always seemed delighted when I came home these days, always making me feel guilty about how they hadn’t seen me this frequently since I was a teenager.

We got home by lunchtime, and sat in the kitchen with my parents as my father cooked and my mom cuddled Vodka in her arms happily. They asked Harry about work, and he answered, trying to speak in Portuguese as well as he could, though he was still rusty on it.

As we ate, I felt like I could throw up at any time. Harry kept squeezing my knee under the table lovingly, trying to get me to relax seeing how I clenched the fork making my knuckles white.
“The press has been talking a lot about you and that boy, Caio.” My mom said, faking a casual tone that didn’t fool anybody.

“Yes, we have a lot of scenes together, so there’s a lot of paparazzi pictures of us.”

“Caio…” Harry started, “Is that the guy that plays your love interest in this movie?”

I nodded, remembering the tan, broad-shouldered, tattooed, bearded, handsome guy BuzzFeed had described as the ‘Brazilian hottie’ who was making them wish Harry and I would break up, just so they could ‘ship’ us guilt-free.

“And, you know how your grandmother is, she just wouldn’t take no for an answer, so we had to agree to spending next year’s Christmas there instead.” My father was saying, as we ate ice cream, a couple of hours after we had gotten there.

“I finished my book.” I blurted out, deciding I should say it before I talked myself out of it.

They looked at me, casually, not realizing the turmoil I had been carrying inside at the thought of telling them these words.

“That’s great, Jenny.” Said my mother, serving herself more of mint-chocolate chip.

It felt like the subject was over, and I didn’t know how to clarify I still had some other things to say. Harry cleared his throat significantly, shooting me intense looks.

“I wanted to talk to you about it.” I went on, and they looked at me expectantly. “Because, well… Well, I say many things in the book. As you know, it’s an autobiography. So I talk about my life. The goal was to tell the story of how I got to Hollywood and became an actress and the journey until the Academy Award in 2014. But…” I sighed, feeling my mouth dry and playing with the ice cream in front of me. “But I ended up speaking about a lot more things. Things that happened to me. Things that no one knew about. I did it because I was tired of waiting for it to come back, to have someone ask about it in an interview without me being ready for it. So I decided to talk about it myself.”

My parents had stopped eating now, probably sensing the subject was a lot more serious than they had anticipated.

“I talk about Tara, you know, you remember her-“

“Your first talent agent.” My mother said, and my father let out a bitter snicker at the thought.

“Yes. I don’t mention names, my lawyers say it could get me sued… so I just talk about her indirectly. About how she manipulated us and made me get the plastic surgery-“

“You talk about the surgery?” My father interrupted.

“…Yes.” I told them. “I talk about how they made it sound like it was so necessary, even though it wasn’t and I was fifteen. And I talk about how none of us knew any better and so we fell for it. I don’t blame you!” I explained, quickly, seeing the guilt take over their expressions. “And I talk about that thing when I was sixteen, and how I had the accident on set.”

“Now, see here, Jenny-“ My father started.

“I know what you’re gonna say.” I stopped him. “And, yes, I’m sure I wanna talk about it. I wanna talk about how I drank in secret at sixteen and injured myself and a stunt person on set and how
social services removed me from your guard for a weekend. And I wanna talk about how I kept
drinking after it, even though I promised I wouldn’t.”

I looked down again, at my melting ice cream, crushing the chocolate flakes with my spoon
avoiding their glance.

“I talk about college and, well…” I took a deep breath. “I talk about how I… I dated my college
professor who was a lot older than me. And married. And how we had this months long
relationship without anyone knowing. And I talk about how I was so ridiculously infatuated by him
and it made me not realize how abusive and manipulative he was and how he…”

I paused, clearing my throat, trying to remind myself this was a casual conversation and therefore
there was no need for me to cry.

“I talk about how I willingly slept with him many times,” I said, fast, “And how he wasn’t the first,
before you ask. And I talk, too, about how he-“

Sensing I was getting to the difficult part, and probably hearing how my voice was breaking, Harry
leaned back in his chair and reached over to me, holding my hand in his tightly.

“He ignored me once when we were having sex and I asked him to stop.” I said, remembering the
night nine years ago that I had tried to forget for so long. “I want you to know because I describe
this in the book and I don’t want you to read it if you don’t want to. But, you know, basically he…
he wanted to do something and I didn’t want him to, and I said no and he did it anyway-“

I sighed again, trying not to wonder if my parents were understanding me. I didn’t want to throw
too many gruesome details onto them all of a sudden, so I thought I should sugar coat it. There
was, I discovered, no easy way to talk about how a guy once had decided to fuck me in the ass
against my protests.

“All right.” I said, shaking my head, trying to keep my voice casual even though my heart was
beating painfully fast in my chest. “That’s, you know, technically rape. Not really, because it was a
consensual relationship, and we were having sex regularly, so just that one time was rape, really.
But, you know, it’s enough. And I don’t want you to think he forced me to do all of it, because he
didn’t. I wanted most of it. I wanted to be with him. I was a kid and I was an idiot, but I did. But
that one time, well… The media will talk about it, so I thought you should know.”

I tried to look up quickly. My mother had her hands covering her mouth, looking more tired than I
had ever seen her. My father was leaning against the back of his chair, staring sadly into the ice
cream in front of him.

I forced myself to go on, knowing if they started to speak, I wouldn’t be able to.

“One day his wife found me in his apartment.” I went on. “And she beat me up and that’s how I
looked at the small, thin white line in the skin right under my ear. “He never
talked to me again after it and I was so upset I couldn’t stay in Manhattan anymore, so I took the
job on The Mediator and moved back to California.” I took in a deep breath. “I kind of…
overcompensated. You know, I was hurt. And immature. And I went out with my friends and
partied, and drank, and… well, I don’t want you to freak out, because I don’t do it anymore. But I
did some drugs.”

Now I was making a point of avoiding their glance, and speaking loudly so that if my mother was
crying I wouldn’t be able to hear it. I didn’t know if she was, all I could hear was the blood
pumping in my ears.
“Weed, speed. Coke a handful of times, but I stopped, I swear! I haven’t done that in years and I won’t anymore. And, well… A couple of times I was drunk while I drove home from these parties and the police stopped me, so I have a record for DUI. My license got suspended for a while and I paid a fine, but mostly I got out of it okay and the press didn’t find out, which, well… now they will. Because I want them to know.”

I couldn’t keep talking. My mouth was completely dry, so I had to stop to clear my throat.

Harry let go of my hand, quietly, and stood up. He walked towards the kitchen and got me a glass of water, that he placed next to me on the table before sitting down by my side again and holding my hand between his.

My parents eyes had followed his every move as he did.

“I talk about how I met Richard and Janine, and Monica later on, and how they helped me get my act together. And, before you ask, I talk about why I didn’t tell you any of this. I didn’t want to worry you. I know you love me and you would want to help me, but you would want to do that by making me move back here, and I wouldn’t want that. So I didn’t tell you. And I’m sorry if you feel bad, but it’s just how I was able to deal with it…” I sighed, trying to remember what came next. “Anyway. I managed to let it go. And I talk about how I got over it in the book. I do it so that I can help people who might be going through the same things. And I talk about… well, I talk about David. Who was… a different kind of abusive and manipulative. He didn’t hurt me, you know, physically. It was more a… mental kind of control that he had over me. And I don’t mean to sound like a vindictive ex-girlfriend or anything, but, you know… it was hard. And I talk about that, too. And I talk about… I talk about…”

I looked at Harry, inquisitively, wondering what was the next bad thing I needed to tell my parents about.

Harry smiled, and I realized that was it. It was over.

“Well, that’s it.” I told them. “That’s all the bad stuff, anyway. I talk about other things in the book, too, about sexist casting directors and drunk famous people I met at award shows, and how I managed to get where I am today. I talk about good things, you know… not just the bad stuff. I…” I sighed. “I talk about us. About you, and Lucas, and Livia, and Arthur, and how you helped me become who I am, and how you made me stronger even though you couldn’t be there in person. Through all of it, I knew I had to be strong because I wanted to make you proud. I wanted to be the best person I could be, because that’s the girl you raised. Someone good.”

I straightened up now, and looked up at them feeling stronger than I ever had before. Knowing that now there was no secrets holding me back.

“I know you disagree from most of the things I told you, but, the thing is… this isn’t who I am anymore. I’m not the girl who did those things, I’m the girl who got over them. This is who I am and I am really proud of myself and I wanted you, and everyone else, to know because I want you to know the real me. I’m happy with me. I’m… I’m okay. And I haven’t felt that way in so long!” I smiled, sighing. “I hope you understand that even though I’m not who you wanted me to be, I still love you and I’m still the person you raised. And I hope you can understand.”

My parents were nodding slightly as I spoke. My mother even tried to give me a weak smile as I waited for their reactions. For their screams. For their praying. For questions and judgment. I waited for it, with my heart beating fast on my chest and Harry’s hands still clenching on to mine.

“Oh, I almost forgot.” I added, before they could say anything. “Harry and I are moving in
YOU HEARD HER DAVID CAN JUST GO SUCK IT!!!!!!!!!!! Jen is getting famous now for offending people with her speeches, good thing they all deserve it. Thanks for reading! What do you think? What will her parents say?! Come talk to me!

Next chapter: J’s parents try to have the talk, her book comes out and the world is falling, and Beezus has news; ALSO: someone is getting married! See you then!
Chapter Summary

Jen’s parents react to her shocking news; her book comes out and someone is getting married.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Harry, would you excuse us?”

Harry looked at me when my father spoke. In silence, I saw in his look that he was wondering if he should stay. I knew how much he wanted my family to like him and how much it must pain him to try and do something that would make them think he was rude, so I smiled, and nodded.

He kissed my forehead before leaving the kitchen table with Vodka jumping excitedly after him as he walked to the living room.

“Listen, honey,” my father said, “I love you. Okay? We’re your parents, we always will. You could kill a person and that wouldn’t change. We love you…”

I waited, my heart in my hands, for the but.

“But,”

And there it was.

“But we also believe in God, and that guides who we are in the world.”

“Please, don’t bring Him into it.” I asked. “I believe in the same God you do, dad, I just believe in it differently.”

“And that’s your business.” He said. “You’re an adult now, Jenny, that’s a fact. There’s only so much your mother and I can do for you. We’ll always love you, and we’ll always be here for you. But you need to understand that whatever you do that goes against the Christian principles we taught you growing up, well, that’s between you and God and you’ll have to answer to Him for it.”

“I know.” I said, mostly just to get him to move on from the subject. “So, you know, I’m your dad. I’m not happy you’re having sex. I’m not happy about it now, I’m not happy that you’ve been doing it for so many years, and I probably wouldn’t even be happy about it if it only happened thirty years from now… and I don’t know if God is happy or not about it.” He shrugged. “That’s between you and Him. What I care about is this,”

My dad sighed, a sigh so sad and long it broke my heart.

“You were suffering.” He said, his own voice breaking like mine did a few minutes before. “We are your parents and you were suffering and we weren’t there to help you. You didn’t want us to worry, honey, but the thing is, we’re parents. We worry. Either we know about your pain or not, we worry either way. Because we love you. And because we love you, I hate that we weren’t there
to help you.”

I felt a tear running down my cheek as I bit the inside on my lip strongly to try and contain a cry.

“And, you know, Jenny,” my mother said, “you are a strong, polite, kind, generous, beautiful young woman that sometimes we can’t even believe came from us. We are proud of you. Oscar or not, Tony or not, we are proud of the person you became much more than the awards you win or the money on your bank account. We are proud of you. The you you are that gives money to people without even needing to ask why they need it, that buys everything for everyone in this family, that built us this house even though you weren’t going to live in it, that created a charity to help people who didn’t have what you did. We are proud of the you that smiles so pretty and talks about things you believe in even when Richard and Janine tell you it wouldn’t be beneficial to your career.”

I nodded, drying another tear in my eyes.

“Either people talk about you or not in the news,” my dad agreed, “we know you and you’re the kind of girl that changes the world, honey, and we are proud of you. I would rather you had waited ‘till marriage, but I’m not stupid, sweets, look at you. You’re beautiful. I had imagined it would be too wishful thinking to hope you would.”

My mother and I laughed, rolling our eyes.

“Harry, he…” my mother started, “he knew?” I nodded. “Since when?”

I shrugged. “Years. I told him in 2013.”

My mother sighed, and she exchanged a knowing look with my father, who smiled.

“What?” I asked.

“Well, he knew.” She whispered. “And he still wanted to be with you. He still loves you.”

I smiled. “Mom… not everyone cares about my hymen as much as you think they do.”

“No, not about that.” She said, rolling her eyes as my dad giggled. “Well, maybe that too… but… you know, about everything else. He knew and, even with his family and everything…”

“He’s been through some shit too,” I told them, “he knows how hard it is.”

“Yes, but,” my dad shrugged, “I guess we just always saw him as, you know… I mean, we like him!” he justified, and I gave them a disbelieving look.

“You do?!”

“Of course we do,” mom replied, “he’s courteous and nice to everyone and he makes you laugh, what’s there not to like?”

“Sure, we were a bit unsure at first,” my dad said, and I snorted in sarcasm, “I mean, can you blame us? After David we didn’t have much faith in your taste in men.”

I didn’t have a good enough answer to that, so I stayed quiet.

“And the way he looks at you…” my mother said, dreamily, “and the way you look at him, too, honey… we know you love him. And he loves you and, honestly, that’s more than enough for us.”
“Yeah, except we used to worry about his, you know…” my dad shrugged. “Standoffishness.”

“Standoffishness?!?”

“Well, he is a prince.” My mother said. “And we worried that with his family, and everything that happened with his mother and how they made her erase everything that was different about her, we worried he might try to do the same with you. But… he’s here. He’s with you. He’s standing beside you through all of it. I like that.”

“And…” I started, knowing it was pushing my luck to bring their attention back to the other part of our conversation. “So you’re okay with us living together?”

They sighed, together, looking like that didn’t make them happy at all.

“Just tell me this,” my father asked, “you plan on getting married one day, right?”

I tried to think of a way to answer that question without lying to them, or explaining too much of how complicated the topic was.

“I don’t need a date, Jenny. I just need to know if that’s the plan. Is that still the plan?”

“That’s the plan.” I told him, honest. “I wanna get married and have babies, the whole thing. I do! I just… I don’t really know when or how I’ll be able to make that work… with my job and Harry’s, you know… everything.”

“But he’s the one, then?!?” My mother asked, enthusiastically all of a sudden. “I mean, sure, you might change your mind in the future,” she said, quickly, not sounding like she really believed that, but rather as that was something she was forced to say. “But he, you love him, right? You wanna marry him? He’s the one you see yourself marrying one day?”

Shocked, I blinked. I took in a sharp breath as I realized that’s what I had said. Dad asked if I wanted to get married one day and I just talked about me and Harry as if it was understood that he was the one I wanted to marry. Was that understood? Was that what I had meant? When did that become something I could talk so easily about?

Before I could answer, probably realizing I didn’t know what to say, my father went on.

“You know about condoms, right?”

I shook my head in disbelief to get myself out of my ‘marriage’ trance.

“What?!” I asked, exasperated.

“Condoms.” My dad repeated, a bit louder. “You just told us that you know a whole lot more than we wish you did, so I’m assuming you also know what you have to do so you don’t give us a grandkid before you’re married. You do, right? Do you?”

I sighed, suddenly feeling very tired.

“Yes, I had a talk with her.” My mother told him when I was silent again.

I wondered if she meant the talk when she had found out I wasn’t a virgin in 2014, because I wasn’t sure that counted as I had blocked her words out in utter awkwardness.

“And condoms aren’t all there is, okay?” Dad went on. “They don’t always work, you know? There’s pills you can take too.”
“Yes, okay, thank you.” I said, trying to end that conversation from hell. “I’m on birth control. I’m fine.”

“You know, I read IUDs are actually the best contraceptive method.” My mother said. “They’re this thing you put on your vagina-”

“Oh, my God!” I shouted, covering my face with my hands.

“And some guys like to pretend their penises are too big for condoms, but that’s bullshit, Jenny.” My father added. “If Harry ever comes up with some excuse not to wear one you run for your life, okay? This is serious. You should always wear one!”

“Please, stop!” I begged, mortified.

“Is everything okay?”

We turned to the kitchen door, where Harry stood, walking in probably attracted by the noise of my shouting.

“Yes.” I told him, though my head shook negatively in disbelief.

“You know, Harry, I was just telling Jenny, but I should tell you too.” My father looked at him. “Condoms-“

“NO!” I shouted, getting up immediately. “Thank you! That’s enough. We’re good. We’re…” I looked at Harry, who seemed confused. “We’re going for a walk. Enjoy the fact the paparazzi don’t know we’re here yet. Let’s go for a walk, Harry, get Vodka.”

My parents protested, but I just walked towards the kitchen counter where I had left my purse.

“Here,” I said, handing them two copies of the manuscript of my book. “Read at your own risk now you know what’s in it. I love you. Thanks for the chat. I love you.”

Awkwardly, I waved goodbye and pushed Harry out of the kitchen as fast as I could.

About half an hour later, Harry and I – plus Vodka and our security detail -, had climbed the hill up to the little catholic church where we once had sat and talked when he had come to the country for the first time for my brother’s wedding.

He was laughing as I told him about the contraceptives talk.

“At least they didn’t try to convert you, like you thought they would.”

I laughed, watching the view of my neighborhood below, and wondering how we had managed to come this far since the first time we had been there.

We were sitting in the low, thick walls surrounding the church as we were in 2013. The guys were keeping watch nearby and we had let Vodka out of her collar to sniff and play around the grass. Harry had his arm around my back and I rested my head on his shoulders.

“The worst is over, though.” I said, in a sigh. “They now know about Adam and David and the DUIs and so I can publish the book guilt-free.”

Harry sighed, with a smile on his lips.

“That’s Not My Name, by Jenifer Silva.” He recited. “You’re gonna take the world by storm.”
He wasn’t completely wrong.

It was a few weeks later that my book came out to outstanding reviews by the critic and taking over the top spot on the New York Times Best Selling List. I had already arranged a break from the movie in Brazil so I could properly promote it, so I traveled back to America and went on a book tour.

Before the book came out, however, I had sent signed copies for everyone that I knew in hopes they would help me promote it. The girls, my closest friends, all posted pictures with their copies on social media. Also a lot of Youtube stars that I had met through Ash Artchet – and him, too – and a lot of journalists I had become friends with in the last few years, like Ellen Degeneres and Jimmy Fallon, whom I was interviewed by when I went to their shows to also talk about the book.

At those interviews, they would read the critics that were coming out, and I had to brace myself not to burst out laughing in excitement.

“The Times Review said,” read Ellen when I was in her show, “Silva’s autobiography is more than just another celebrity’s gossip of stardom, it is a poetic, thrilling narrative of life on the limelight, of manipulation and victory, the kind of plot that rivals some of the best blockbuster movies out there. Without using a ghostwriter, Silva managed to make her hardship and survival sound like an epic tale of adventure.”

Poetic. Concise. Thrilling. Every word in the critics – that I read eagerly during the breaks in shooting – made my heart fuller with joy.

I had tried, in the past, to find justifications for my success, telling myself I had had luck, or that I got what I did because of my relationship with Harry. I told myself maybe they had given me an Oscar and all my other awards because of politics or ulterior motives, and that at some point I would end up running out of luck. But I knew there was no way around a book’s truth: bad books sell all the time, sure, but bad books don’t get good reviews. My book did. So, as much as I tried to be pessimistic about it, I was forced to admit my book must be good!

I stopped by Barnes and Nobles in Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Miami, Dallas, Washington and New York. In every single one, hours before the scheduled time, there were lines so big they circled around the block. I gave a half an hour Q&A, talking about the book and things I discussed in it, being careful not to mention anyone’s names, from the rape part to the ones about Hollywood and how many times I had been told to lose weight or change my name for something more American.

I talked about drugs and driving under the influence and how much I regretted it.

I talked to girls about abusive behavior in men and how to make sure you’re not being manipulated. I talked about the dangers that came with pursuing a career in acting and how I had managed to keep myself whole. I talked about my hopes for the future and what I had learned and every time, at every smiling teenager that asked about things I wouldn’t have thought to wonder about at their age, I felt my heart jump in excitement in my chest.

I felt accomplished. Like I was finally using my mistakes for something good. Like I was helping people.

The media had wasted no time in reading the book to pick through whatever they could use against me, of course. All through that week of release – and weeks afterwards – I saw articles online and tabloid covers on stands about things I had said in the book.

I read everything: people doubting they could call what Adam did to me ‘rape’, since it had happened during a consensual relationship, to calling me a ‘whore’ for dating a married man and blaming me for his wife’s beating. I read a particularly detailed report someone had made about my surgery and how talent agents paid doctors to convince parents that their kids need unnecessary procedures. I read a tabloid that had managed to find the stunt person that was injured on set when I was sixteen to interview him, who said in the big schemed of injuries he had suffered at work, the one I caused was by far the least worrying one.

I read, or course, all of the British media’s attempt to profit from it, from saying the Queen had a problem with my book to saying Harry was ‘scared’ of my issues, that he now knew were much bigger than his own and was thinking of breaking up with me. ‘The Palace’s Royal Pain’, one of them read, using my Bad Blood character’s nickname against me. ‘How Jenifer Silva is Making Kensington Palace Officials Scheme End of Prince Harry’s Relationship’.

People called Harry’s spokespeople so much for a comment that they had had to release a statement to say the palace didn’t comment on the personal life of private citizens. Harry, however, had different ideas.

He was on a royal engagement one day, greeting the public that had appeared to see him, shaking hands and smiling to kids and making chitchat as much as his time allowed. Someone in the crowd had a phone out filming the whole thing as they asked Harry what he thought of ‘Jenifer Silva’s book’.

Harry, who avoided talking about our relationship as if his life depended on it, smiled to the well-wisher as he said: “I think it’s brilliant. I think she’s amazing and very talented and I’ve always been proud of how she handles herself.”

That in itself was another storm of headlines, but no one else dared try and make a case that he or anyone that worked for him was angry at me.

I felt long nails scratching my hands, but in the middle of the excitement, I didn’t care.

“Go, Jen! Come on! What is this?! You can do better!” I heard Austin Swift, Taylor’s brother, shout from just outside the pool.

“You traitor!” She shouted as she tried to pull me out of Harry’s shoulders where I sat, facing her in a chicken fight. “What side are you on?! I’m your blood!”

“Jen! Jen! Jen! Jen!” Austin lead the others in a chant, completely ignoring his older sister.

I tried to resist the urge to laugh as I pulled her harder, twisting her arms around so she’d fall from Adam’s shoulder.

“How long you reckon this will take?” Harry asked Adam, at his eye level, at a tone that was almost of boredom.

Adam yawned slightly. “I don’t know. I’m tired.” He looked up at Taylor. “Come on, love, get it
We had been at it for a while now. The first fight had happened almost spontaneously, between Gigi on Austin’s shoulders and Beezus, on Kit’s – who won. They had been so cocky about it that Lily Aldridge and her husband immediately challenged them, but unfortunately, they lost. Bee and Kit were getting dangerously snobbish now. Well, Kit was. Beezus, as the adorable ray of sunshine she was, merely blushed in his shoulders, laughing as he kept spinning in the water singing We Are The Champions.

Then, Selena got on Karlie’s shoulders and challenged them and, after they lost and Taylor couldn’t handle it anymore, she called Adam and they beat them.

“I would still like to point out,” Kit said, loudly, so we could hear him over the chorus of ‘Jen! Jen! Jen! Jen’, “That it’s really not a fair fight to put me and Beezus, who are one and a half, and one-seventy meters tall, against you lot, who are almost two meters!”

“Shut up, hobbit!” I shouted, laughing now, and with one blow, enjoying the moment Taylor laughed at the sore loser expression in Kit’s face, I threw her down.

“Yes!” Harry and I screamed, in victory, as the others cheered.

“Thank you!” Adam said, as he emerged from the water. “Come on, you, let’s play football.”

Harry gave me a big, smiley kiss before he followed him out of the pool for the field nearby with some of the other guys and girls. Taylor went to check on lunch and Beezus got on an inflatable swan and paddled herself with her feet to where I was.

“Scouch!” I told her, before jumping and sitting with her. “Hey, Karlie, take a picture of us, will you? My phone is right there!”

The blonde grabbed my phone and pointed it at us.

“Okay, ready?” she asked.

Bee shifted in place behind me and we smiled.

“Say… youngest EGOT winner!”

“Oh, my God!” I complained, rolling my eyes as Bee laughed. “Just take it!”

She did, and reached her arm as far as she could to hand me the cellphone carefully so I could edit and post the picture.

“So, how is life now that the world doesn’t hate you anymore?” Beezus asked conversationally.

“Oh, a lot of people still hate me.” I assured her. “Especially now that they actually have reasons to, you know, DUIs, plastic surgery, partying… It’s just that now it’s the normal amount of hate.”

“Is there such a thing as a normal amount of hate?” She asked.

“In my career field, yes.” I said, typing a caption in our picture.

‘This is how a Brazilian and an Australian celebrate a holiday that has nothing to do with them! Happy fourth of July!’, I wrote, before hitting send.

“They might now think I’m irresponsible and a whore,” I told her, “But at least they’re talking
about me. It’s sad, but it’s good for business.”

Fourth of July felt weird now that I didn’t have to worry about keeping my distance from Harry or achieving things in my career that felt too out of reach. As of July 4th of 2016, I was the youngest EGOT winner in the world and was close to moving in with my long-term boyfriend.

Sure, the world knew all of my dirty secrets and were using them to profit as much as they could. But the simple truth was: I didn’t care! It felt good not having anything to hide. Not having to wonder when I might lose everything I fought so hard for. It felt amazing, in fact. It felt like I could finally enjoy the things I had worked for, like a simple summer day by the pool with my friends.

Not even Agatha, the tragic character I was currently playing, could damper my mood. The book out, Harry, my family and friends, my Tony Award… it all helped me separate her pain from mine. It helped me understand she was fiction and I couldn’t stain my joy no matter how righteous her fight was.

“I know I keep saying this and you’re probably sick of hearing it, but I’m glad you and Kit got back together.” I told Beezus, who laid lazily behind me in the inflatable swan while we overheard our friends laughing and talking all around.

A big group of us had reunited at Taylor’s house in Maryland to celebrate, as it was our tradition – even though I hadn’t been able to be there the last couple of years. Besides Harry and me, I had been happy to know Beezus was coming.

As I had made her tell me in details, after we wrapped Heathers in May, Beezus flew back to England where her doctor had given her a pager.

“People still have those?!?” I asked, disgusted at the sight of such ancient technology.

“It’s my lung pager.” She told me. “It’ll beep when they have a new pair of lungs for me, so I can know I’m gonna have a transplant.”

“Well, now I feel like a dick for dissing out at it.”

Beezus giggled. “It means I’m high on the list, you know?” She went on. “You don’t get one unless your name is close to being called, so if they gave me one is because I’m close. It just made me feel so… so…”

Smiling, I recognized the emotion in her eyes.

“Hopeful.” I completed.

“Yes!” She breathed out. “And I just… Well, if I have a chance. Then… then it means we also do, you know?”

I hugged her, tightly, before she even knew what I was doing. I did it because I knew the feeling she had inside of her, the feeling of trying to believe that there’s a happy ending for us even though we have learned to doubt it. And I hugged her because, once again, I realized that I had forgotten once more what Beezus carried around with her: a diagnosis. A fate too fatal that dictated her whole life around her.

She was so lively and smiley that I kept forgetting by all accounts she could drop dead at any minute.

She didn’t have her cannula with her on the pool. It was resting near the oxygen tank inside her
leather backpack nearby by the chairs.

“Me too.” She said, smiling, as the summer breeze made us spin in the water. “And I can’t believe that in less than two months you’ll be moving to London!”

I smiled. “Me neither!”

“Where are you guys gonna live, anyway?” She asked. “The palace?”

I giggled. “No… We’re looking for a place. Actually, it’s been harder than I thought it would.” I turned around a little to look at her. “I hate to say this, but Harry’s taste for real estate sucks.”

She laughed at the despair in my voice.

“I wish you guys would live near us, this way we could hang out all the time…”

“Babe, we will.” I told her, matter-of-factly. “We’ll be in the same zip code, there’ll be no excuses. I mean, I’ll have to work, but we get to see each other on weekends and we can even grab lunch sometimes during the week!”

She smiled, excitedly. “I can’t wait!”

“Seriously, though, every single place Harry finds it’s either too simple or too grand or in a terrible neighborhood.” I complained. “I mean, I don’t need a mansion, but a good neighborhood and three bedrooms with a terrace and good security is not too much to ask for, is it?”

Beezus seemed unsure she could give me the answer I was looking for, but she quickly smiled.

“So you’re…” she started. “Okay? With it? I mean, have you stopped freaking out?”

I allowed myself a moment of honesty, remembering she had been my confident during Heathers, and heard me freak out about it incessantly during breaks.

“I’m still… nervous. You know?” I asked. “I mean, I’m happy. I’m excited. But… I can’t shake this feeling that I might be making a mistake. After all, I’ve only managed to not sabotage this relationship because I’ve focused only on the present, and moving in with Harry it’s a… well, I don’t wanna be dramatic, but it’s a step closer to planning a future… You know, living together is pretty much rehearsing being married.”

Beezus sighed, longingly.

“You have such hard problems,” she said, and I could sense an unusual amount of sarcasm coming from her voice, “with your handsome boyfriend who wants to commit and your healthy pair of lungs…”

I giggled, realizing she had a point. In comparison, it was almost offensive to complain about my issues to her.

“You’re right.” I said. “I know it’s all in my head and I have to let it go, so I’m trying. I’m embracing it, you know? The panic. The commitment. I promised myself I’m not gonna run from it anymore.”

“Oh, thank God you came to your senses fast!” she let out, exasperated. “Sorry about saying that, it was really uncalled for. I feel so rude!”

I laughed at how guilty she was about a little bit of necessary tough love.
“You know, Beezus, you’re a beautiful cinnamon roll.” I joked. “Too good for this world. Too pure.”

She rolled her eyes.

“I can’t wait to introduce you to James!” She said. “He’s a friend of mine, from Australia, but he lives in London now. He’s gonna freak out when I do, he loves you.”

“Yes, please, introduce me to normal people.” I begged. “Harry is dying for me to start hanging out with his friends, who are all… you know…”

“Aristocrats?” She asked.

“Well, yes.” I said. “I’m gonna need you to remind me there are good people in the world.”

“They can’t be that bad.” She said. “He’s posh and he’s cool.”

“Yes, but I’ve met some of them.” I argued. “And with one exception they are all dicks.”

“You’ll be fine,” she said, “you’re great. They’re gonna love you!”

I smiled. “You’re sweet… But the only thing keeping me from insanity is remembering I still have a lot of time to prepare for it.”

“Jay?!”

I heard Harry’s voice from nearby and raised my sunglasses to look at him.

“It’s been two hours, where did you put V’s snacks?”

“Oh, ah.” I started, before realizing he would never find it in the mess that was my bag. “I’ll see you in a minute, Bee. Have to go feed the dog.”

Jumping out of the swan, I swam to where Harry was.

He reached down to hold my hands and pulled me from the water in an instant.

I grabbed a towel and patted myself as we walked up towards the house.

“Is the game over?” I asked. “Did you win?”

He gave me a smug smile. “Do you even know your own boyfriend?”

After I was dry enough, I wrapped the towel around my waist and we walked inside, quickly finding Vodka playing – or, should I say, annoying - Taylor’s cats in the living room. I picked her up and we went for the room we were using, the same one Taylor had given us in 2013, with the light blue walls and the view of the sea.

“There you go, lovely.” Harry said, as he laid the dog snacks I handed him down to Vodka and she began to eat, happily.

I sat on the bed and laid down, enjoying the breeze from the ventilator on the ceiling.

“God, it’s so hot today.” I complained. “I know it’s summer, but, come on, it’s Maryland. Since when is Maryland actually hot?”
Harry walked towards the bed and kneeled on the mattress to lay on top of me, quickly thrusting himself against my skin.

“Hi.” I smiled, wrapping a leg around his.

“Hi.” He smiled back, tracing my collar bones with his lips as he placed a trail of kisses until my chest.

I felt myself tingle at his touch, and his hands gripped my thigh strongly.

“Soon enough there’ll be no skin left with no marks on it.” I commented, already feeling a little breathless as he started to kiss my breast, pulling my bikini off slightly. “People are noticing, Mr. Prince.”

I felt his smile against my skin, that grew hotter as I started to feel his bulge growing against my hips.

Just earlier that day, as I had left the room in my bikini I had had to endure the girls’ teasing about the hickey marks all over my neck and chest – I was able to hide the ones in my thigh.

“You’re one to talk…” Harry grunted, sighing before he licked my nipple gently. I suppressed a breathy moan. “You don’t think anyone noticed your nails’ marks on my back?”

I laughed, “Don’t pretend you don’t love to show those off…”

He smiled, wickedly. “I do… But it makes for interesting headlines.”

I laughed again, remembering an article online from that very day that Edward Lane-Fox had email Harry, in warning. It read: ’50 Shades of Royal: Prince Harry and Jenifer Silva Exhibit Love Marks That Show They Might Be Doing BDSM’.

“Before I forget, I have something to ask.” He went on, sliding his hand up my legs under my bikini bottoms.

“Yeah?” I breathed, running my fingers through his hair.

“It’s still months away, but I have to RSVP so I need to know…” He added, and I felt his fingers starting to slid down my crotch.

“Okay.” I said, realizing he could say pretty much anything at that moment and I wouldn’t protest.

Feeling much more awake, I suddenly wondered if that was his intention.

“About the time you’ll be arriving in London, there’s a friend of mine who’ll be getting married.” He said. “And I have a plus one, so…”

He slid his fingers down on me as his lips kissed my neck. I struggled to pay attention.

“I know you said being each other’s dates for weddings it’s too serious and all,” he continued, between kisses, “but I was wondering if you would like to come with me and, you know, meet my friends.”

I opened my eyes, realizing what the request was about.

“Sure.” I said.
He raised his head, stopping everything he was doing, and I felt my body ache in protest.

“Really?” He asked.

I smiled, remembering Beezus’ words about how my problems were so hard.

“Harry, we’re moving in together.” I told him. “I can’t pretend we’re not serious anymore.”

He gave me a gorgeous smile before leaning down to kiss me so strongly I forgot what we had just been talking about.

We heard Vodka scratch the door of the room and suddenly remembered where we were. We smiled breaking the kiss and he stood up to let her out.

“Jen! Harry!” Taylor’s voice reached us from downstairs. “We’re gonna have lunch!”

I stood up, adjusting my bikini in place, laughing at the painful expression in Harry’s face.

I gave him a kiss on the cheek. “Later.” I whispered in his ear, before holding his hand and pulling him back into the hallway so we could go back downstairs.

“So, who’s getting married?” I asked.

Harry sighed before answering.

“Chelsy.”

Chapter End Notes

Well, children, the book is out. All Jen’s secrets are out in the open. It’s a brand new world. Chelsy is getting married. Next chapter we’ll take a break from that subject, but we’ll come back to it, don’t worry! Jen will properly question Harry about how he feels about it.

I just wanna say how amazing it is to read your messages and know you like this story! So please if you liked it, let me know!

Next chapter: Jen and Harry look for a place to call home. Can’t wait to show you!

Have a good week, see you!
Home is Where the Heart Is

Chapter Summary

Jen and Harry look for a place to call home.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Seven bedrooms, detached house,” April was saying, excitedly, as she walked us in, “three floors and underground parking with a car lift!”

Harry looked around, impressed, but his eyes quickly fell to me. I tried to make my expression as blank as possible as I walked across the pretty marble floors to the big windows in the living room. It had a view of a pretty garden and high, thick brick walls guarding it from onlookers.

“It has everything on your list.” Harry told me.

Look, I wish I could say I’m an easily pleasing woman. Unfortunately for me, after knowing me for almost four years, Harry knew me far too well.

As August rolled along, Harry and I were on a mission to find a place to live.

We had, as it had grown to be so typical of us, made headlines earlier that month when we attended the 2016 Rio Olympics. Rio was as it usually is when we got there on that August 5th: sunny, crowded and absolutely gorgeous. Though it was winter, the sunny sky ensured a warm day even though it was only 24ºC. As a result, I was sweating as I ran, smiley and fiercely, through the packed streets with the Olympic torch tightly grasped on my right hand.

As one of Brazil’s International Olympic Ambassadors, my job was to ‘make the bridge between Brazil and the world’. Or something like that. Apparently, it involved carrying the Olympic torch for a few miles in front of a sea of well-wishers and press. In the weeks before the Olympics were due to start, that job involved giving countless interviews about my country to national and international news and websites and participate in official ceremonies related to the event.

In many ways, I grew to love this job. Not that I had the time to go looking for more jobs as I had my plate full with acting, directing, designing a sunglasses line to Dolce and Gabbana, promoting Human Rights for the U.N., and handling my friends, family and boyfriend. Nonetheless, there I was on that August 5: sweaty and running for my life carrying an Olympic torch through the streets of Rio de Janeiro.

Harry had arrived earlier that day and was waiting with my family at my arrival point, in the Lapa arch, one of Rio’s postcards, under a tent with other VIP guests and politicians. After I had been photographed arriving with the torch and passing it on to another Brazilian actress, I gave a couple of interviews and went to meet them so we could go to lunch.

Later that night, we attended the opening ceremony. We had been making the world go nuts ever since the elevator video on Ophelia’s party, all through the Invictus’ speech, my Tony speech and book, so the fact we were there together was just another way for the world’s press to write about
us which, by now, we were getting used to.

I had arranged two days off my movie on a weekend a couple of weeks later to fly to London and help Harry house hunt since, well… he was really bad at it. Or maybe the problem was, as we have already established, I’m hard to please.

April Collestone, the tall, skinny real estate agent Harry had hired, who had a fake tan and wore bright pink lipstick, eyed me nervously as I stared, emotionless, at the perfect mansion she had taken us to – what felt like our millionth house of that Saturday.

The thing was, I had arrived that morning and I had to fly back to Brazil the next morning, so we were pretty much running out of time.

“This one has seven bedrooms.” She told us. I had asked for five. “Though, you know, that’s a lot of room for one young couple!” She joked.

I smiled, knowing she was just trying to do her job as she went on and on about how great the bedrooms were, all huge and recently redone. But, the thing is, it wasn’t a lot of room for one young couple.

I wanted her to try finding a place to live when you have four extra people you have to take with you everywhere and let me know how many rooms she’d need! Harry and I weren’t sure we wanted to live with our security detail, but we had to have them around. It’s not that we didn’t like them, we did. We loved them. But, you know, the whole point of living together was having time for each other which is hard to do when there’s four men walking around all the time.

Besides, it was palace protocol that if Harry wasn’t living in the royal properties – where they had an already implemented security scheme –, he had to have at least three protection officers nearby besides a whole other ordeal of bulletproof glass and security cameras and such. That made the search harder as well.

“We have cameras in every room and the windows aren’t bulletproof, but the owner isn’t against altering if you’re paying for it.” April told us, as if reading my mind. “Don’t you love the garden?! Harry told me you want a garden! This one was designed by Amelie Claire, the famous French decorator who specializes in exterior environments.”

She walked us out to the garden and I immediately turned to Harry before a black marble fountain with a little child angel spitting water.

“No.” I said, and turned on my heels to walk out.

“Explain to me why the garden was wrong?” Harry asked, as he drove following April to the next house twenty minutes later.

“It’s not my garden.” I told him. “It felt… cold.”

“Love, it’s London.” He said. “I’m sorry to break this to you, but chances are it will always feel cold.”


“It’s a house. It was a great house. Huge and beautiful and secure.” He sighed. “In fact, every one we saw today was. The one in Brick Street? Six bedrooms, sixteen thousand square feet with an inside pool and gym! What was wrong with it?!”
“It didn’t have a backyard!”

“It had a terrace.”

“It was almost a big porch, I couldn’t have a garden in it.”

“Okay.” He said, resolute. “And the one in Holland Park?”

I remembered the big white period villa that made me feel in an episode of Downton Abbey.

“Twelve bedrooms?” I asked him. “Who are we? Royals?”

The ghost of a smile graced his lips at my bad joke, but he went on, inquisitively.

“And the one in Hampstead? Seven bedrooms and bathrooms, electronic gates, gym, outdoor swimming pool, off street parking—”

“Oh, that one was beautiful.” I said, dreamily. Harry shot me a desperate look. “On the outside. The inside was so tacky! I don’t know what is it with British houses and those horrible curtains.”

“We can change the inside!” Harry said. “Redecorate! You love that!”

“I don’t wanna pay for a house that I’ll have to fix.” I argued.

“What about Frognal?”

“It wasn’t Central London!”

“Carnegie Street?”

“Not pet friendly.”

“Herbert Crescent?”

“Not nearly enough closet space!”

“Queen Road?”

“It wasn’t…” I struggled to put the feeling into words. “Exciting.”

Harry sighed. “Bathurst Street? You said the décor was beautiful yourself!”

I couldn’t argue against that. The house we had seen in Bathurst Street was, indeed, by all effects, perfect. It had the most gorgeous backyard and was decorated like a Los Angeles celebrity’s mansion. It had eight bedrooms inside, plus a cottage for staff outside with four more where our security would have been greatly comfortable.

I looked at Harry, who had his sunglasses on as he drove with one hand, always looking at the rearview mirror to make sure it was just the boys following us in the car behind, and not paparazzi, who were still unaware I was there.

He looked so handsome I couldn’t help but sigh.

“It didn’t feel like home.”

He drove slower on a narrow, busy street next to the Oriental Hotel behind April, who was signaling we were going to enter a building on the left.
Harry turned to me as we waited for the gates to open.

“It won’t feel like home until we’re living in it.” He said, turning to face me and holding my hand. “I mean, it’s a new house, it’ll feel like a new house until we make it a home.”

“I like what you’re saying.” I said, smiling. “But this is too important. We’re too important. I don’t wanna mess it up.”

He stared at me for a long time until we heard a honk from the security car behind us. We looked ahead, and April had drove in already. He followed her.

The thing was, I knew myself. After years of therapy trying to get over my issues I would be the first to admit I had problems with commitment. So I knew, as I embraced my fears and jumped headfirst into a more serious part of my relationship with Harry, that at any given minute I could start freaking out again and come up with ridiculous reasons why it wasn’t working. I could almost see myself using a house I didn’t like as an excuse as to why I had to move out in a few months, so, as we looked for a place, I wanted it to be so perfect it would be one less excuse for me to risk.

This building, like most in London, looked old and classic, in orange hard bricks. It had a flower shop on one side of the gate and a bakery on the other. In front, a huge Burberry store and a other fancy boutiques. As we drove in, I realized the building was shaped like a square and the empty middle served as a very private parking space.

“This is nice.” Harry commented, as we stepped outside. “Central London, but a lot of privacy to drive in and out without being bothered by the paparazzi.”

He was right. The nosy vultures would have to gather by the small dark gate we had drove in from, which stood on a narrow, busy street that would make their job a lot harder.

We followed April to the big glass doors that opened after she flashed a card in, like a hotel door. Inside, behind a desk, sat a man in his fifties with an impressive mustache.

“Good afternoon.” April smiled at him, who nodded politely at us as we made our way to the pretty, vintage-looking elevators. “It just looks old for the aesthetics, but it’s top notch technology.” She told us, with a smile.

In the elevator, she took out a key and turned it in a keyhole beside the button that had the letter P on it, which lighted up as she did, allowing her to press it. I understood that without the key, it wouldn’t be possible to press it.

“A penthouse?” I asked.

“Yes, I know what you’re thinking!” She told us, quickly, as we moved up. “You wanted a house, not an apartment.”

“I didn’t say that.”

“I did.” Harry told me. “You said you wanted to live in a proper house.”

“Well,” I said. “Yeah, but seen as it’s been difficult, we might have to broaden our search.”

“You know…” April started. “I’m a big fan!” She smiled. “I wonder, if it isn’t too much trouble, you would mind taking a picture with me later? I know my son would love it!”

I smiled, avoiding Harry’s glance knowing he was probably trying to contain his laughter, and
nodded. “Of course.”

“Oh, thank you.” She said. “I mean, you’re a wonderful actress, but on top of that, with everything else you do, you’re like a superhero!”

Though I had spent months during the hate wave hating that analogy, now that things felt better I could properly appreciate it.

I had spent weeks working at the U.N. headquarters earlier that year, learning about humanitarian work and the biggest mistakes made when charities ignore the necessities of the communities they are trying to help when thinking they have all the answers. With the help of the UN specialists, we developed a campaign called Borderless, which as of August was at full speed.

It had been created to stand up against the recent wave of criticism against immigrants in the US – which started after Trump kept on talking about mass deportation if he was elected and, what was worse: the amount of people that agreed with him.

The campaign consisted of positive propaganda with famous people the general public wouldn’t often have known were immigrants - or descendants of -, with pictures of them around cities and online, saying things they had achieved and their accomplishments to the country. The slogan came underneath, in big letters: ‘Talent is Borderless.’

We wanted to work on the Syrian refugee crisis, and on finding ways to relocate those that migrated around Europe – including by pressuring the American government to take on more refugees than the mere ten thousand Obama had decided to accept. I had met him in the white house and he had expressed support of the campaign, which made many headlines and improved the impact of it.

Our long term goals included creating a series of lectures to be delivered in schools about the theme and why it was so important to be receptive of the people who needed aide.

Then, I joined forces with Emma Watson, the Goodwill Ambassador for Women, and together we drafted a plan called ‘Women’s Spring’ – based on the protests known as the ‘Arab Spring’. That was the name the media gave the Brazilian female protests of the previous year that took over my country against the prohibition of the Plan B pill and other horrible laws against women’s rights.

The focus of our Women’s Spring Plan was to protect women’s reproductive rights, fight against the wage gap and the exploitation of children in Bangladesh, who were forced to marry older men against their will at young ages, like twelve, sometimes younger. It was the plan we would be working on the following year, after we were done making the reports of how the situation was now.

Somehow, when people didn’t hate me, being called a superhero felt less like an insult and more like a compliment.

The elevator doors opened into a bright foyer, and April lead the way out.

“This one has seven bedrooms, eight bathrooms, gym, cinema room, sitting room, living room, dining room, a huge kitchen, separate kitchen nearer the guest bedrooms- well, we’re here, I’ll just show you.”

She used the same key as the elevator to open one of two big, white double doors, which stood between huge flower arrangements. She opened the double doors to reveal a handsomely arranged, high ceiling, hardwood floor sitting room.
I noticed the ceiling was mirrored, which made it look even bigger than it already was, and that the aluminum on the door frames to an outdoor area and the windows had the same mirror effect.

“The furniture is merely illustrative.” April told us. “But it’s for sale, so if you like something…”

There wasn’t a lot of furniture, and not all of it was good. But I could see some things I would want to keep if I was to live there. The paintings, for one, would have to go. But the big piano, transparent, that looked like glass, would definitely stay.

April guided us through the room, as we watched the outside of the windows, which looked like a small porch. Another pair of double doors – these were dark wood with long and thin metal handles -, and we walked out into another room, with two levels.

The first, where we were, was small. It had more windows to the right, to the same porch, which looked to be very long, and a big dinner table with a bookshelf that went from the floor all the way to high ceilings and pretty, dark hardwood dinner table.

To our left, we saw more double doors, but straight ahead six hardwood steps that looked like they were floating in the air lead to the second level, a bigger living room, with floor to ceiling windows in the entire wall up front and a huge white couch in L shape, with two chairs closing on the other side.

The columns and a few wall corners, I noticed, were covered in floor to ceiling mirrors, which amplified the space. Looking up, I noticed a beautiful chandelier hanging just above the dinner table below. The second level was secured with a glass half-wall, so no one risked falling.

“And over here…” April said, as she lead us to the double doors to the left on the second level. “The cinema room! I know as an actress you’ll appreciate its commodity!” She joked.

I couldn’t laugh. I could barely listen to what she was saying. This room was dark, with carpet floors and velvet walls and a huge plasma TV attached in front of a big, comfy looking purple couch that seemed to fit comfortably a good number of people.

April walked us out, talking about the place, but I barely registered anything she said. I just followed her back to the first level, with the dinner table, as we walked through the double doors to the left. They lead to a hall with more mirrors and ugly paintings that I was already planning on burning, and to more double doors - these marble white.

She pushed them open with ease, even though they looked heavy, and we were entering the most beautiful master bedroom I had ever seen.

The ceiling was white, which was the color of the texture in the wall across from the windows, which looked like a pillow. The windows also covered the whole other wall, floor to ceiling like in the second living room, but they had gorgeous pearl-pink silk curtains.

Gesturing towards them, April was telling us they were covering the doors because the bedroom had a porch with a view to Hide Park.

Something in my brain clicked even though I was barely listening to her. I didn’t know much of London, but with all the house hunting – and coming to see Harry with some frequency – I had come to learn that Hide Park was next to Kensington Gardens and Kensington Gardens was where Harry lived, Kensington Palace. Also very close to Clarence House, where his dad lived and Buckingham Palace, where the Queen lived.

“I’d be close to my family.” Harry said, his voice the only thing that got through to me, as he
uttered my exact thoughts. “And I know you like parks to work out!”

I recognized the hope in his voice, the same tone he had been using all day.

The floor of the master bedroom was hardwood as well, but it held a huge fur rug in place, so big that at first it had looked like a carpet. It was the same pearl tone of the curtains, which I liked.

There were two extra sets of double doors. The first one, across the room, lead us to the gigantic closet.

“Talk about closet space.” Harry said, after letting out one long whistle.

The closed was all in black marble, but well lit, and it had a big wall with a floor to ceiling mirror, which was always useful in closets. It also had the same amount of hangers, drawers and shelves in the two walls across from each other. In the center, a round couch would allow us a place to sit down to put on or take off shoes and I could see a big boudoir mirror, with more lighting and storage space for makeup and hair products.

I made to head out, but April lead us to the back of the closet, where more double doors lead us to the huge master bathroom, in all white marble and mirror ceiling, that looked like extended itself behind the bedroom, and probably had, I assumed, an exit to the other set of double doors there.

The bathroom had a big shower with glass doors, and his and hers white sinks that looked like bawls on top of a mirrored thick shelf with big drawers underneath. A smaller door that April opened lead to the toilet, out of sight. In the middle of the floor stood a magnificent white tub and behind it, more mirrored cabinets.

“For steaming clothes!” April squealed, noticing I was looking at it.

She walked us out through the other double doors, which as I had guessed, lead right to beside the bed.

I walked across the marvelous rug, which felt so soft under my heels, and stared out the windows. Reading my mind, Harry approached behind me and opened the sliding glass doors behind the curtains.

A soft, warm summer breeze hit us as we stepped into the stone porch. The rails were white stone, but they had glass behind them, something it took me a while to notice because I was too busy noticing the, well… everything else.

The view ahead was a sea of bright green treetops. Ahead only the magnificent blue sky. I could hear the London noises now that we were outside, and I liked that it was quiet with the windows closed. Even out, the noises were soft. Civil. Looking down, at the double two way streets I knew were one of the busiest in town, since they were around the park, I realized it wasn’t as chaotic as I would have imagined. Cars coming and going, and eventual passersby, but no traffic. No screaming. No car alarms going off. I could actually hear birds, probably in the park, and a soft sound of kids laughing.

I had always thought of London as a European, more civilized, version of Manhattan, but it just felt unfair to compare the two now. We were in central London and yet there was no skyscrapers. We could see the sky and threes and hear kids laughing.

“You love a good view…” Harry mumbled, by my side, following my glance into the horizon. “And if we swapped this glass for mirrored glass, even if the paparazzi tried to get shots from the street down there, they wouldn’t be able to unless we leaned in from the rails.”
We made our way out of the room, my head snapping in every direction trying to catch all the
details: the columns, the steps, the lights, the storage room, the shape of the rooms, the mirrors…

Instead of walking out through the same hall we had walked in for, and exiting in the two levels
dining and living rooms, April lead us back to the bathroom, to show that there was another door at
the back of it that lead straight to the kitchen. We could also get there through the sitting room.

The kitchen, as April explained happily, was the biggest room of the whole apartment. Its floors
were black marble, which made the room look darker as it reflected in the mirror ceiling, though
the lighting was good. It had two big windows and a round table on a corner with three chairs and a
corner dark green couch. The big isle on the center, which was hardwood, held the double sink, the
stove and oven, as well as a big marble counter. The big aluminum fridge stood on the other wall
beside what looked like a stained glass cabinet.

“Wine cellar!” April squealed.

Down the kitchen, through another hall, we saw the laundry room and made the way back to
another big hallway.

“This is a guest bath, and this leads to the big guest bedrooms.” April told us, and she opened the
first door, to the first guest bedroom.

This room was half the size of the master bedroom, which should tell you how big the first was
because that guest bedroom was huge. As big as my room in the Manhattan apartment I used to live
in when Harry had moved to the city. It had a window and door to a shared porch, huge closet –
though it wasn’t walk-in -, and a huge bathroom with a bathtub and double sinks. The porch here,
to the opposite side of the one in the master bed, didn’t have a view as it had a vine covered wall
right in front, but it looked like a good place to hang out.

The second, third and fourth guest bedrooms were slightly smaller, though just as handsome and
with equally huge bathrooms. All the rooms had plasma televisions and what looked like a small
tablet attached to the wall near the doors.

“The system connects the whole house!” April told us. “You can communicate with any room,
control the lighting, the temperature, and activate the security systems or see the feed from the
security cameras.”

“Central air?” Harry asked, impressed, picking on what she had said about temperature, and April
nodded.

“The central air conditioning was just implemented.”

We walked forward down the hall, which now was starting to feel really long as I realized we were
probably walking the extent of the building. April opened another set of double doors to reveal a
smaller kitchen.

“This is for the guests.” She said, before turning to another set of door around the corner. “And this
is the gym.”

The gym was a big room, with an elliptical, bicycle, treadmill, punching bag and a lot of room for
more stuff to be added, besides floor to ceiling mirrors.

Out of the gym, down the end of the corridor, April pointed out the last two guest bedrooms and a
door that lead back to the foyer and exit elevator.
I looked at Harry and, with no words, I knew we were thinking of the same thing: we could put doors in the middle of that hall, separating four of the guest bedrooms with the smaller kitchen and gym and make it an extra apartment for our security details. They could live there comfortably, we could use the gym when necessary, and we could communicate through the speakers if need be.

We walked back the long corridor, through the sitting room and dining room, up the six steps to the second level living room, where April lead us to the glass windows, which were also sliding doors that lead to the terrace.

Here is where I lost my breath.

The terrace had wood floors and it was about ten meter for ten meters, with a huge patch of earth by the edge where I could see someone a long time ago had tried to plant something. Just beyond it, I could see the next building and… nothing else. Just the blue sky and, to the left, the Hide Park treetops.

It felt open and private at the same time, which, with the lives we lived, was rare.

“What way the terrace becomes a porch in front of the second level living room.” April said, guiding us to the side of the Hide Park view, where, indeed, the terrace narrowed into a porch. There was a round table and chairs to watch the view.

Now that I looked more attentively, I could actually see a handful of skyscrapers scattered at a distance, but I could still hear the birds and the laughter and the soft noise of life going on below.

“So, this concludes the tour.” April said. “Of course, it comes with two parking spaces in the parking lot where we arrived, and you can purchase more if you’d like and if they are available. And the gate has twenty-four-seven security.”

“Would you give us a moment?” Harry asked her, who bowed graciously before making her way back inside.

There was a long silence as Harry allowed me to walk around the porch. I could feel his eyes on me as I observed every single detail my eyes could catch.

“So,” he started, finally, a while later, “this one has… enough bedrooms for us and the security, a cinema room that if I’m not mistaken almost made you cry, a master bedroom that looks bigger than my apartment in Kensington,”

I giggled, but he just went on.

“A master walk-in closet and bathroom that looks bigger than my apartment in Kensington, a kitchen that’s bigger than my apartment in Kensington, central air conditioning, security cameras, and a terrace with space for a garden for you to call yours.” He sighed. “Did I forget something?”

“The view.” I said, the first I spoke since we had walked in. “You forgot the amazing view.”

He took three quick steps towards me. “So… you like it?”

I smiled. “This, this…” I sighed, looking at him. “See, this is what I was talking about! I’ve never been here, but this place, Harry, it looks like us. And it feels like home!”

He hugged me, smiling, and let out a long breath.

“Thank God! I was starting to think you were sabotaging every place we saw because you were
secretly regretting this decision!”

“No.” I giggled, wrapping my arms around his waist. “No, I don’t. I love it.”

“Really?” He asked again. “It’s an apartment.”

“Really!” I replied. “It’s an apartment, but it feels like a house. It’s so huge! I mean, some of those painting have got to go, but…” I backed away, turning to the glass windows and staring into the living room, “but I can work with this couch, and that piano! I really like the piano! And I can work with the rug in the room and I- I-“ I sighed. “I wanna live here.”

Harry smiled largely before pulling me into another hug.

“I guess we found our home.” He said, his voice muffled against my neck.

I sighed, happily, as I smiled at him. “I’m just a little scared of asking the price.”

He laughed, before grabbing my hand and pulling me back into the living room after April.

“It’s the first place you’ve liked in months.” He said. “She can have our firstborn child if she wants.”

Laughing, we walked down the small stairs to find April sitting in the dining table.

“We’ll take it!” Harry told her, excited.

“Woah, hold your horses!” I stopped him, laughing. “I still have some questions.”

I ignored his exasperated expression and turned to April.

“Pet friendly?”

“Absolutely.” She smiled.

“And the glass? I’m assuming it’s not bulletproof.”

“No, but that can be arranged.” She said. “And you’ll notice you’re in one of London’s most high profile addresses! Next to everything you might need.”

“Yes, we love the location.” I said.

The place was close to where I would be shooting my movie and to the palace where Harry had offices where he sometimes had to work from.

“Can I say it now?” Harry asked. “We’ll take it!” He repeated, throwing his arms up in a grand gesture making us laugh.

“Rent or buy?” April asked us and we exchanged a confused glance.

“I thought we were only seeing places to rent.”

“Yes, but this one is up for either.” She told me. “Here, this is the asking price for sale, and this is the asking price per month to rent.”

She opened a file and pointed at the numbers: six digits to rent, seven to buy. I felt my heart sink a little and looked around the place, realizing that the price made sense for such a beautiful
I was ready to tell April to keep looking, but Harry spoke before I could and said:

“Can we think about it?”

“You wanna think about it?!” William shouted, that night, as we had dinner in Kensington Palace with him and Kate and told them about our house hunting nightmare.

“What?” Harry asked, looking confused. “It’s a financially smart decision to buy.”

“Harry, please!” His brother argued. “It’s millions in an apartment near a place where you can live for free!”

“You know that’s not the point.” Kate told her husband. “They would have a lot of criticism if Jen were to live here.”

“And no offense, but I don’t like Harry’s place.” I told them. “I mean, this is great!” I added, quickly, gesturing around to their dining room. “But Harry’s place is, you know…”

“Jen can be snobbish when it comes to housing.” Harry told them, and I shot his a stern glance.

“Excuse me?!”

“Love, we’re looking for places with at least five bedrooms and a terrace in central London!” He told me. “The price is gonna be horrible, whatever we find. So… instead of paying a huge amount per month for a place we’ll move out of in a year, why not pay the same amount to buy it, and after a year we can sell it for a profit, or rent, and split the cost.”

There was silence as we thought about it.

“He has a point.” Said Kate. “What you would pay in a year of rent is enough to pay off more than half the buying value.”

I looked at Harry. “But I’ll have to move out. In about a year.”

“Well, yes.” He nodded. “But you’ll still come back later, right? To see me. Not as frequently, but you will… I’m assuming.” He winked, though I could recognize the note of worry in his voice and I saw the look his brother and sister-in-law exchanged. “So, you know, we could even…” He sighed, faking casualty. “…Keep it.”

“There we are.” Said William, as if his point had been proven. “You’re trying to trick her into being stuck with you!” He joked, but Kate kicked him under the table and Harry gave him an angry glance.

“Well,” Kate said, suddenly, “let’s get desert. Will, help me?”

“We have desert?” He asked, following her out of the room.

About half an hour later, my fingers were intertwined with his as we made our way from his brother’s place to his under the summer starry sky of London.

“Let’s buy the house.”

He stopped walking and pulled my hand so we were standing facing each other.
“What?”

I shrugged, feeling my skin warmer and butterflies in my stomach.

“What the hell?” I asked, smiling. “Let’s buy a fucking house!”

“Jen,” he started, cautious, “Will was kidding. You know that, right? And I just suggested it because—“

“Stop.” I said. “Stop trying to downplay this. You don’t have to anymore.” He eyed me suspiciously. “I know I’m…” I sighed. “Broken. And you’ve always made an effort not to scare me off, but honey… It’s time I got a little scared. You don’t have to tell me that this is just a smart decision, and that it is not a big deal, and we will just sell after a year. This is a big deal. We’re moving in together and we’re buying a house and it is a big deal.”

He blinked, and I saw a smile tugging into his lips.

“We’ve now been together for almost two years.” I said, feeling myself get more and more excited at every word that left my mouth. “And I…” I sighed, smiling at him. “I’m in love with you.”

He smiled larger now.

“So let’s buy a goddamn house!”

He quickly wrapped his arms around my waist and raised me in the air, spinning us around, making me giggle excitedly.

Later that night, when his arms cuddled me to sleep, I felt it.

We were in his ugly staff apartment, laying in his lumpy mattress, but when his warm breath hit the skin on my neck, I was home.

Chapter End Notes

Hey you, beautiful people! How are you today? Hopefully things are going well! I made a personal blog recently, called nataliawritesstuff.tumblr.com. If you have a tumblr, follow me maybe? I’ll reblog personal stuff and stuff about Harry and Jen and in the future when I write other fanfics, I’ll post the link to it there. So give me a follow if you’d like! I made a playlist with the most important songs of this story on 8tracks (http://8tracks.com/nataliac57/fake-it-until-you-make-it-a-prince-harry-fanfic). Let’s talk about the chapter! Harry and Jen have found a home!!!!!!!! And how great is it?! It’s sort of a hobby of mine to look up pictures of houses I could never afford, so when I saw that one I knew it was meant to be Jen and Harry’s! You can see pictures here: http://fakeituntilyoumakeithfff.tumblr.com/post/138732419609/jen-and-harrys-london-apartment

Next chapter: Jen and Harry attend Chelsy’s wedding and Jen is completely confused by Harry’s reaction to this.

Thank you so much for reading and for all your love! Let me know if you like it and seriously, THANK YOU!
The Deal

Chapter Summary

Jen and Harry move in. She’s his date to Chelsy’s wedding and meets his friends.

Chapter Notes

Wedding outfit:

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There was a song playing in my heart. For a long time I hadn’t known which one it was, but as I carried boxes inside a seven bedrooms apartment in central London, I was starting to recognize it.

It sounded a little like Home, by Phillip Phillips. My heart kept leaping at the sound of ‘I’m gonna make this place your home.’ Then, before I knew what was happening, it started to sound like A Great Big World’s Already Home: ‘Don’t you know that I spend all my nights counting backwards the days till I’m home? If only New York wasn’t so far away.’ With my heart skipping a few beats, I started to hear I’m Yours, by Alessia Cara. ‘Cause I’ve had my heart broken before, and I promised I wouldn’t let me hurt anymore. But I tore down my walls and opened my doors and made room for one, so baby, I’m yours’.

I had been hearing that ever-playing song for almost four years now – ever since, I realized, I had fallen for Harry. But moving in with him made the song get louder. It made it get clearer in my head as I felt some kind of knot, that had once been in my throat, dissolve. It’s not that I didn’t feel the anxiety anymore. I just wasn’t scared of it. I welcomed it.

Suddenly, the song in my heart sounded like Paramore’s ‘it’s not that I don’t feel the pain, it’s just that I’m not afraid of hurting anymore’.

On my last days of filming in Brazil, I had endured the hard torture scenes I had been stressing about for the past three months and, in between breaks, called Harry to wonder about the furniture we had bought. A decorator had helped with most of it, and all the big stuff had been delivered and set up for us.

But, after the wrap party for the movie, when I flew to London, we still had to buy a number of things, such as towels, sheets and pillows, not to mention artwork. We had had to set up shelves and rearrange things that the moving people had placed wrongly, and, at the end of one exhaustive weekend, the house finally started to look like we wanted it to.

When I had finally flown in definitely, in early September, Harry greeted me at the door of our house smiley and excited. He hugged me tightly before hurriedly helping Eddy and the other boys drag my luggage across the foyer into the sitting room.
With living alone since I was seventeen, and with all the traveling around I did – not to mention the free stuff I kept getting from brands and designers -, I ended up having a lot of luggage. I didn’t bring everything I owned to London, of course, as I had stuff in many places, in my apartment in Los Angeles, Carmel, Brazil and Manhattan, but I brought most of my clothes and shoes, which in itself was already a lot.

And then there was the small Louis Vuitton bag that was the first I opened, still in the sitting room, to excitedly place in the glass shelves Harry had had Nathan’s help to set up there.

“Oh, nice.” He said, staring at the inside of the bag as I did. “Can’t forget that.” He teased.

I grabbed and lifted, carefully, my Academy Award and placed it in the center of the glass shelf behind the big couch.

Best Leading Actress - Jenifer Silva – Wild & Free - 2014, it read. Harry followed me, bringing the other awards. I placed the Emmy, Grammy, Tony and Golden Globes about the shelf as well, noticing the shelf below and the awards there.

“What are these?” I asked, interested.

“My awards.” Harry said, puffing his chest. “Polo, polo, polo…” He mumbled, pointing at his trophies. “And I think you will like this one.”

He handed me a smaller, old looking trophy and I read the label:

Eton. Presented to Mr. Henry Wales for outstanding talent in dramatic arts.

I laughed. “What?!”

Smiling – and blushing – Harry put it back in his shelf. “Seventh grade, I got it for a Christmas play at school. Clearly you’re not the only artistic one in this relationship.”

I laughed some more, and about half an hour later we had managed to drag all my luggage and boxes into the master bedroom.

The curtains were wide open and the windows had a different glow than I remembered. Harry had had them changed for mirrored, bulletproof glass as I was away, as well as the windows all over the house.

As I rested after the effort of carrying the luggage, I looked around the room. Harry had opened and placed the picture frames in the small, white coffee table between two white armchairs in front of the bed, and over the white wooden chest by the window and nightstands.

“Who are all these losers?” I asked, jokingly, about the stock pictures still inside the frames.

“My friends, of course.” He replied, cheekily. “I do have friends, you know.” After I laughed, he went on. “We don’t really have many printed photos. I have a few of those Polaroids from when I lived in New York, but they don’t fit.”

“I’ll print some out.” I said.

He was watching me, leaning against the wall beside the bed with a mysterious smile on his lips, but before I could ask about it, I laid back in the mattress and my heart stopped.

“What is this?!” I asked, shocked, looking at the ceiling.
What had previously been white was now a beautiful sky. The entire ceiling had been painted with magnificent clouds in shades of sunset pink, orange and blue, and I had a feeling I had seen it before.

“Do you like it?” Harry asked, walking over to lie by my side.

“It’s…” I mumbled. “It’s beautiful.”

“I had it done to look like the New York City Public Library.”

With a smile, I remembered the Sunday after our first date when we had sneaked out to brave Manhattan by ourselves and I took him to the Library where I used to work when in NYU.

“During long hours studying for tests when everything seemed too hard or too painful I used to lay back in my chair and take a deep breath looking at that sky…” I told him then. “…it made it feel like it would be okay, like it would be all over soon… It was so hard caring about schoolwork; I just wanted it to be over. But that sky made it a little bit better.”

“I love it.” I said, soft, turning in the mattress to lie on my side to look at him, who did the same.

The bed, our California King, still didn’t have bedding on it. It was tucked away at the corner waiting for us to have the energy to put it on. I was exhausted from having to work late until the very night before, and from the long flight and luggage carrying. We still weren’t completely familiar with the house, and there was still an unbearable amount of things to get done before I had to go into work on the new movie on Monday, but when I looked into his eyes, I felt more at home than I had in years.

After the big stuff was out of the way, the next thing we had to do was buy the small things we didn’t have: such as toiletries and kitchen utensils. In toiletries, we just went all out and bought everything that looked and smelled good. In the kitchen department, well, Harry took the lead. Unsurprisingly, that was one area I had no experience in. I didn’t know how many pans we needed, or what kind of blender was better, or why we seemed to need so much Tupperware.

And then there was the grocery store trip, when Harry had to stop me from buying way more stuff than the two of us could possibly eat before it went bad.

“I just feel so adult!” I squealed, excitedly, making him laugh as he took the spinach from my hands and returned them to place, claiming none of us liked it, so there was no need to buy it.

Harry took care of the cooking in the first few weeks since, despite my exhaustion, I also had no time to take the lead. I left the house Monday through Saturday at seven, after an hour of gym at home, to work on different locations around town for the movie, which was keeping my as busy as ever.

The honeymoon period was quickly shortened by something Harry told me as we had pizza while watching The Blacklist one night, still in my first week in London.

“I talked to Kate today.” He started, as we laid in the large, comfy, purple couch in the cinema room. “She said she can help you get a hat for the wedding if you’d like.”

The thing is, with my book coming out and the Olympics and the whole stress of finding a place to live, we hadn’t talked about ‘the wedding’ since the day Harry had asked me to be his date, still in early July on Taylor’s Maryland house.

Back then, as we walked downstairs to have lunch with our friends, I came to a sudden stop,
looking at him with my mouth dropped open.

“Your Chelsy?” I asked. “Chelsy Davy?”

“Yep.” He confirmed.

“Your ex, Chelsy Davy?”

“Yes.”

“Your ex-fiancé, Chelsy Davy?! The same Chelsy Davy that broke up with you because she didn’t want to get married?!”

“That would be the one.” He said, sounding a little annoyed, finally. “And she didn’t breakup with me because she didn’t wanna get married, she did it because she didn’t want to be a royal. There’s a difference, apparently.”

He walked away, to the kitchen, and I followed still shocked and now a little confused.

“Harry,” I started, “Are you okay?!”

He looked at me. “I’m fine. Why?”

“Your ex is getting married.” I said.

“Yes.” He nodded. “So?”

“Harry, you wanted to marry this girl and she said yes and then broke up with you, and now she’s up and turned and decided to marry some other loser! Aren’t you…? I don’t know, mad?!?”

“Thanks for the recap. And he’s not a loser.” He said. “Engineer. Works in Ferrari, in Formula 1 or something like that. A lot of money. And his father is a lord.”

“You’re a prince!” I argued, now more confused at his calm than anything else. “How aren’t you freaking out about this?!”

“Because I’m not you.” He said, with a grin that drove me insane. “You’re Latina, Jenny. You freak out and shout naturally, and on top of that, there’s your anxiety controlling how you deal with things. But where I come from we’re very much used to bottling our feelings deep inside and pretending there’s nothing wrong.”

“Well, don’t.” I said, and he laughed at the utter disgust in my face. “It’s weird and unhealthy. If you’re mad, shout. You deserve it, you’d be right! This is bullshit!”

“The thing is,” he went on, “I’m not mad. Why would I be? Sure, I’d have been cross if it was two or three years ago, but now? I’m over it.”

“There’s a difference between being over someone and being immune to their bullshit.” I said. “I’m over David, but sometimes I read about stuff going on in his reality show and it’s like, get over yourself, you know?”


To my utter amazement, his cool attitude towards the matter did not shiver. However, as I mentioned, with the craziness of work and moving in I ended forgetting about it. That is, until I learnt I would have to wear a hat.
“Why do I have to wear a hat?!”

“It’s morning dress.” He told me.

“Ugh,” I groaned, “it’s like she’s trying to piss me off!”

“Most weddings in Britain are morning dress, babe.”

“Yes, but…” I sighed, wondering if I should go into it. “I mean, the nerve of her! She breaks up with you because she suddenly realizes she doesn’t wanna get married and now she invites you to her wedding! To someone else!”

“Jen, we’ve talked about this.”

“Well, clearly we need to talk some more, because I still haven’t seen you react appropriately!”

But he wouldn’t have it.

Even when the day of the wedding came, and we drove together ‘up north’ to Norfolk where Chelsy was getting married, he was still as calm as could be, driving in the right side of the car in his tail coat, light yellow vest and pink cravat tie matching the tone of my dress, hat and heels.

I was wearing a Zuhair Murad light pink dress, with lace bodice and long sleeves and a peplum skirt that went all the way down to my knees. My heels were the same shade of pale pink, as was the fascinator on my head, which fell as a disc to one side of my face, and had roses on the other, hiding my hair up in a bun. I matched the ensemble with big Channel drop earrings and a gold bracelet, and a white lace Alexander McQueen clutch. I had been so worried about meeting Harry’s friends officially and making a good first impression – not to mention Harry had told me more than probably there would be paparazzi there – that I had sent countless pictures of my outfit to Kate on the days previous to the ceremony asking if they were okay. She was gracious enough to patiently answer, every time, that I would look beautiful, and so I was trying to stay calm.

But on his part, Harry was too calm.

“Jen, calm down.” He said, noticing how I was fidgeting on my clutch with my unrest fingers, nervously.

“I am very calm. I am super calm. I mean, I don’t have a reason not to be calm.” I said. “You, however…”

“Here we go…” he mumbled, rolling his eyes.

“Listen, I don’t think I’m being unreasonable!” I told him. “Speaking as someone who probably freaks out way more than she should, I think this is the one time where it is very appropriate to be a little angry!”

I though he would, finally, buy my fight. But, instead, he merely laughed.

“What?!” I asked.

He shook his head, dismissively. “Why are you so offended by this? It’s me that she left, not you. And why aren’t you… you know, happy that she’s getting married?”

“Happy?”

“Yeah… I mean, I’ll probably be happy when Tyler gets married, ‘cause I’ll know he’s left you
alone for good."

“He did!”

“Well, yes, but getting married sort of makes it official, doesn’t it?” He argued. “And instead of
being happy that now it is really over, you’re… angry. Why? What would you rather she did?
Ignore me forever and always be this bitter person who left me?”

I didn’t know what to say to this, so I thought about it.

“I mean,” he went on, “we have a lot of friends in common, so it’s good that we keep on good
terms, you know? I don’t miss having her in my life, but for the good of the group I like that we’re
able to be civil.”

I didn’t like that he could so mature about this whole thing while I just felt revolted. And I
especially hated knowing that he was right.

“I just…” I sighed, crossing my arms, watching the green fields we drove by, “I know that you
usually hide what you’re feeling as not to freak me out… and I don’t like that. I mean, I love that,
in a way. You’re… sweet. But…” I sighed, looking at him, who seemed confused as he looked
ahead. “I don’t think that’s fair. I don’t want you to have to. Because, well… at some point, you’re
gonna get tired of it. I don’t wanna be some kid you have to shield away because she would lose
her shit knowing how you really feel…”

“That’s not-“ he started.

“I want you to be able to tell me how you feel.” I interrupted. “Even if it scares me. I wanna help
you.”

“I just don’t wanna freak you out.” He said. “We both know I’m a little more… intense in the way
I feel for you, and I don’t want you to have to deal with this until you’re ready.”

“That’s the thing.” I told him. “I wanna be ready. But I won’t know if I am until we try.”

He sighed, and there was a silent pause.

“And in this scenario…” he started, carefully, “what am I supposed to be hiding from you?”

“That you’re angry!” I said, and he rolled his eyes, looking frustrated, “And you don’t want me to
know, because you think I’ll think you’re jealous and think you still have feelings for her-“

“Jenifer-“ he tried to interrupt me.

“And you need to know that I won’t!” I spoke over him, louder. “It’s okay, you can be angry. I
know that it doesn’t have anything to do with how you feel for her.”

Harry slowed down, honked to let the guys in the car behind us know he was going to stop, and
parked by the road.

He turned to look at me, sighing, and held my hands in his.

“Jenifer, I promise you,” he started, staring into my eyes, “I am fine with this.” He paused, tugging
a strand of my hair behind my ear. “Do you wanna know why?” I nodded, feeling a little
overwhelmed by how intensely he looked at me. “Because of you, silly.” He smiled. “I’m in love
with you… and I’m glad Chelsy left me! I’m glad I didn’t marry her! I thank God every day that
we didn’t go through with that wedding, because I know I was never half as happy with her than I am with you-

I leaned forward, taking two fistfuls of his hair so I could kiss him - strongly, eagerly, feeling his tongue on mine as my body tingled both because of the kiss, and because what he said had made me so, so happy. I kissed him, for a long time, feeling his hands grab my arms and him struggle against the seatbelt to come nearer, until I finally, reluctantly, pulled away. I sighed, melancholically, and smiled, feeling my own cheeks blush.

He looked at me, apparently a little surprised, for a long time, before his hand cupped my cheek and he gave me another quick kiss. Leaning back, he took in a deep breath, adjusting his seatbelt, and turned the car on again.

I touched his lip, and he turned to look at me, allowing me to clean the nude lipstick stain on his skin for a little while. Then he held my hand and placed a kiss on its back, before smiling to me and driving on.

I was so busy feeling happy about what he had said that I didn’t remember to think of Chelsy until we were at the church.

“Paparazzi zone, just over there.” Eddy told me as he helped me out of the car after we had parked there.

We stepped out of the line of parked cars and, sure enough, I could see all the way down the road a group of men with big cameras pointed at us. I reminded myself of walking with my shoulders back and a slight smile on my lips. Harry held my hand, and we made our way inside.

The church wasn’t big, just your typical white little country side church. I could tell we were one of the last guests to arrive because everyone else seemed to be finding their seats and the groom was already standing up front.

“Bride or groom?” A lady asked at the door, and Harry gave her a confused look before answering.

“Bride, I suppose.”

I bit my lip to try not to laugh, and we walked towards the side she had pointed us to.

Harry stopped to shake people’s hands in the way, saying a quick hello with a smile on his lips, but, telling them they’d speak later, he didn’t introduce me. I could, however, feel their eyes on me as they talked to him, noticing everything from my hat to my shoes, with expressions that were far from friendly.

“Hello, you two.” Harry smiled at the couple sitting next to us, and, finally looking, I realized they were Lizzy and Guy.

“You look beautiful!” Lizzy told me, sounding a little shocked, and I wondered if she had imagined I’d be wearing one of the skintight, slutty dresses I usually wore for Hollywood parties.

“Thank you, so do you!” I told her, glad that she was also wearing a fascinator.

As I looked around, feeling a little more comfortable in my own skin, I was glad to see all the women were.

“Haven’t seen you in a while, how are you?”
“Same old, same old.” She smiled. “You remember my husband.”

Unfortunately, I did. Guy Pelly had, on the one time I had seen him, tricked me into admitting I was sleeping with Harry even though we were trying to keep it a secret.

“Hello, Jenifer.” He smiled, with a polite nod on my direction as he leaned beside his wife to look at me.

“Hi.” I said, sounding a little more bitter than I had intended.

“Now, now, Jenifer, don’t tell me you’re still mad about the last time we saw each other.” He said, mockingly. “It was a human mistake. You’re not holding a grudge, are you?”

“I don’t know, do you still have the world’s stupidest name? What is it, Guy? Man? Boy? Human?!”

Guy looked appalled at how I dared make fun of his name, but his wife laughed. When she did, he looked even more outraged.

He was about to call her on it when she interrupted.

“Hush, now, the ceremony is going to start!”

It was a pretty wedding. There was a string quartet playing church hymns that I didn’t know, and the bridesmaids were wearing pastel brown long dresses with long sleeves. Chelsy had her hair in a high bun with a single string of diamonds as a tiara, holding a long veil in place.

I felt a knot in my stomach as I was forced to admit to myself that she looked pretty.

“Lord Moray’s family tiara.” I heard a dreamy whisper in the row behind us. “She’s so lucky.”

I rolled my eyes, and a good forty minutes later, we were making our way out of the church with the other guests as the loud bells ringed for Mr. and Mrs. Stuart – which confused me.

“I thought he was a lord?” I asked Harry as we walked out. “And isn’t his last name Moray?”

“His dad’s tittle is Lord Moray, but their surname is Stuart,” he told me, “He’ll inherit the tittle once his dad dies, but until then he’s just Earl Stuart. Which makes Chelsy the Countess Stuart, or Lady Stuart.”

“Who would have guessed?” we overhead the high pitched voice coming from behind us, “She breaks up with you to avoid living like a royal and still becomes one.”

In my head, I was shouting ‘exactly!’ , but I suppressed saying it aloud as I looked back and saw the pretty, ginger, long faced girl who was rolling her eyes at Harry.

“Let it go, Bea.” He told her, in the same tone he had been using with me every time I expressed my distaste of Chelsy’s nerve.

“Don’t tell me what to do.” She said, though her voice sounded laid back through her big front teeth. “Now be polite and introduce me to your girlfriend.”

“Don’t tell me what to do.” Harry replied, teasingly.

Ignoring him, she turned to smile at me. “Hello. I’m Beatrice.”
I shook her hand, unable to take my eyes from her big round green ones, which I felt I had seen before.

“Jen, Bea is my cousin. You’ve met her sister, Eugenie.”

Suddenly, it clicked in my head and I remembered the brunette I had lunch with when Guy had annoyingly made me tell him I was sleeping with Harry. Eugenie had agreed with me that I would never be fully welcome into her family, which made me have a bit of a grudge against her.

“You look beautiful.” Bea told me, her eyes hovering over my dress. “The downside of having an actress around is it reminds us how poorly we all dress.”

I laughed, blushing, and realized her dress, though beautiful, was quite simple, not the lace and peplum of mine. As I looked around I realized every dress looked simpler than mine. I started to wonder if that was the reason why everyone seemed to me shooting me death stares.

“Excuse me, I see Clara, I must ask her when we’re going to play tennis again…” She trailed off, walking out without as much as another look at us, “Clara!”

I looked at Harry and smiled, taking in a deep breath starting to feel a little overwhelmed.

“So that’s another princess, huh?”

“Her Royal Highness Princess Beatrice of York.” He recited, putting a hand in my lower back and leading me out of the church with the rest of the guests. “Seventh in line for the throne.”

As we made our way to the church gates, a group of young girls in pretty hats were loudly snickering about something when one of them, a brunette with childish features, stared at me through her anger. Harry didn’t seem to notice this, but turned to talk to Guy who was standing near them with some others.

“Why are so many of them here?” Another girl, this one taller, with dirty blonde hair and a long nose, was asking in her posh accent. “That’s so invasive.” Suddenly, her eyes found mine and she looked back at her friends. “Oh, of course… The actress is here.”

I didn’t quite know how to handle this. First, there was the fact that she didn’t seem to mean ‘actress’ as a compliment. Secondly, I could hardly pretend I didn’t hear her as I was very close to them.

“As if we needed any more attention.” The first girl, the rather childish looking, tanned brunette, added, looking at me quickly as she did, as if it were my fault the paparazzi were there.

Which probably was.

“Who—” Lizzy Pelly, part of the group, turned around to see who her friend was talking about and saw me. “Oh, Jenifer. Of course. We were just wondering why there are so many paparazzi here today.”

Now she was officially inviting me into the conversation I turned away from Harry, noticing the first two girls didn’t seem so pleased with my presence.

“Isn’t it usually like this?” I asked.

“High society events usually attract about a dozen of them, but,” the dirty blonde girl looked at the group of paparazzi at a distance, “today there’s, what? Twenty? Thirty, maybe?”
“Does it ever get tiring to make such a spectacle out of everywhere you go to?” the first girl asked, squinting her eyes at me.

“You get used it.” I told her, more because she needed an answer than because I actually meant what I said.

“Oh, I’m so rude.” Lizzy said, though she was the politest of them. “Jenifer, these are Natasha Rufus Isaacs,” she pointed at the brunette, “and Susannah Warren.” The second girl smiled, slightly, as if moving her lips caused her physical pain. “Girls, Jenifer Silva, as you know, is Harry’s girlfriend.”

I noticed a very gentle eye roll as Natasha looked away, but Susannah kept looking at me, seeming interested as she stared, judgmentally, to my outfit.

“So nice of you to come.” She said, in a weird tone that I wouldn’t have been able to explain if I had to. “Not many girls would be big enough to go to the ex’s wedding.”

I felt my insides twirl with anger at her… well, it was hard to explain. By all accounts, they seemed perfectly polite. They smiled, and didn’t particularly said anything that could be misinterpreted as rude, but something in the way they looked at me. Something in the way they spoke to me felt very… unwelcoming. I knew that if I tried to explain it would make me sound very immature and paranoid and it made me wonder if that was their intention.

Before I could come up with a good comeback to give Susannah, Natasha turned to look at me again, with a bored expression on her face.

“Haven’t heard of you since that… nasty Oscar speech.” She said. “Are you… retired?”

I could feel a vein pulsating in my neck when she had said the words ‘nasty’ and ‘retired’, as if they were good euphemisms for the pity words she actually wanted to use.

I hated to sound so full of myself, but I knew that unless she had been living in a cave it would have been very difficult for her not to have heard of me – with the book and the EGOT and everything else. So it was obvious she was saying it to undermine me.

“I actually just won a Tony Award.” I told her, before I could stop myself, feeling immediately very snobbish, but now that I had started, I couldn’t seem to figure out a way to shut up. “And a Grammy before that, and an Emmy before that. Just directed a movie in Brazil and came here to shoot another one with Tom Hardy. I’m designing a sunglasses line to Dolce and Gabbana and released a bestselling book in the summer. What do you do?”

I hadn’t meant for it to sound so… snarky, but Natasha and Susannah had a way of making me feel very inadequate, so I felt an urge to overcompensate.

As her friends still looked taken aback by my sudden outburst, Lizzy answered my question instead.

“Susanna’s grandfather is the Earl of Carnarvon, she and her brother are set to inherit Highclere Castle, you know, Downton Abbey. Their family has run the Queen’s stud farm for generations.” Lizzy said, “And Natasha’s brother, Julian, is a viscount, heir to the Marquess of Reading. She is in modeling and works in many projects for the homeless.”

“Jen?”

Thankfully, as if sent from the angels, Harry’s voice found me before I could give any sort of
answer to the three girls in front of me. He was a few steps behind, and I gave Natasha, Susannah and Lizzy a polite smile.

“Excuse me. It was nice to me you.”

“I’ll come with you.” Lizzy said, enlacing her arm on mine before walking me to where Harry was with Guy and a few others. “You’re doing fine.” She said, under her breath as we walked. “Just breathe.”

I liked Lizzy. I really liked Lizzy. I might even love Lizzy, and how normal she seemed in comparison to the others. And I liked that she didn’t try to tell me that I had no reason to be nervous, but rather understood what I was feeling before I even needed to explain.

Maybe it was the fact she was the only one with an American accent in the middle of all the poshness.

Harry smiled as we approached.

“Don’t worry,” Lizzy added, still whispery, “I’ll be your guide in the underworld.”

Suppressing a laugh, I smiled at Harry.

“Ah, Jenifer, these are Jake and Skippy.” He said, pointing out the guys in front of him.

Jake Warren was as tall as Harry – very tall –, and had dark brown hair and kind, dark eyes. He gave me a charming smile as Lizzy leaned in and murmured in my ear, so that only I could hear:

“Harry’s mother’s godson and Susannah’s brother.”

I could see the snobbish dirty blonde’s eyes when I looked into Jake’s.

“Nice to meet you.” I shook his hand, returning his smile, but he pulled my hand up to give it a kiss on my knuckles.

“Harry speaks very highly of you.” He said. “Good to put a face to the name.”

“Not that we didn’t know your face already.” The other guy, Skippy, said. “Kind of hard not to when it’s everywhere.”

Harry, Guy, Jake and Lizzy giggled, so I smiled assuming he hadn’t meant it badly, as I would have thought if one of the girls had said it.

“It’s nice to meet you…” I started, shaking his hand. “…Skippy, is it?”

The others laughed at my uncertainness, and Lizzy enjoyed the distraction to murmur in my ear again.

“He went to Eton with Harry.”

Skippy just smiled at me, without knowing this.

“It’s Thomas Inskip, actually.” He said, his cheeks getting almost as red as his curly hair. “We already know too many Thoms, so the lads started calling me Skippy.”

Besides his intriguing curly red hair, Skippy had a long forehead, thin lips and a protuberant chin.
“I was looking forward to meeting you,” Skippy said, giving me a wicked grin, “I have so many embarrassing Harry storied to tell you!”

“We should go.” Harry interrupted, making the others laugh. “We’ll see you lot at the reception.”

He started pulling me to the car, and, with a sad glance at Lizzy, I turned to follow him, wondering how was I supposed to survive that hellish day without her.

“Don’t worry. I’ll see you there.” She told me, with a wink, before I left, and I felt better.

When we took to the street, to find our car, I could hear the clicking sound of cameras at a distance. Harry’s jaw clenched slightly, as it always did involuntarily when the paparazzi were around.

I reached for his hand, and enlaced our fingers together as I walked by his side, head held high on my pale pink fascinator, which I was now getting used to.

Harry looked at me, and I noticed his jaw wasn’t clenching anymore. His expression softened as he gripped my hand tightly. He smiled as he opened the car door to me.

I put on the seatbelt, waiting for him to turn on the car and go as our protection officers took to their car beside ours, but Harry’s hand froze on the keys.

He sat back, took a deep breath and looked at me.

“I was thinking about what you said earlier.” He started.

We were hidden away from the paparazzi since they were at the end of the street and our car was between many others.

“Okay?”

“About how I never completely tell you what I’m thinking or feeling.” He explained. “And I was thinking that the problem with me doing that is that you will never tell me when you’re freaking out.”

I blinked, letting his words sink in.

“Because, see, you’ll won’t want to hurt me. And so you’ll try to deal with it yourself, and, let’s face it, you’re terrible at it.” He attempted a smile. “So I’ll make you a deal.”

“…okay?”

“I won’t protect you anymore.” He started. “I’ll always tell you what I want and what I’m thinking and feeling. If you promise to tell me when you’re freaking out so that I can try and make you understand why you shouldn’t.”

There was a pause as I thought about his words, and considered the risks of it. I considered that he might finally realize that I freak out a little too much, and that he might be the one to decide he has had enough.

But I wanted to know how he felt. I wanted him to tell me. Though I was scared of the future, I also wanted it.

“Okay.” I said, nodding slowly. “It’s a deal.”
“I’ll start.” He smiled, leaning forward excruciatingly slowly until his breath was striking my lips, causing me to smile. “…I don’t mean to scare you, Jenifer Silva, but I might be trying to find a way to spend the rest of my life with you.”

Before I could answer, or freak out, he kissed me, and suddenly that felt like an amazing idea.

Chapter End Notes

OMG, what is this ending? How are they not the cutest couple ever? They are, aren’t they? They totally are. Don’t worry! The wedding is not over, it continues on the next chapter, when Jen gets to know Harry’s friends a little better and starts to realize why some of them aren’t her biggest fans. Also: she learns a secret about Harry, all courtesy of Skippy =) Chelsy also makes an appearance and Jen explains why she’s so mad at her. I’M EXCITED!

Hope you’re having a good week! Thanks for reading and for being so wonderful!
Chapter Summary

Jen gets more acquainted to Harry’s friends during his ex’s wedding reception and has a surprising realization.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first thing I did when we got to the handsomely decorated salon for the wedding reception was to look frantically for Lizzy Pelly. I noticed Harry smiling sweetly as I did, probably glad to see that I did like at least one of his friends, before he held my hand and took me to a big round table in the center of the room.

There, I quickly found her, though she was busy talking to a pretty, blonde girl I didn’t know.

“Jenifer Silva!” The pretty blonde said as she saw me sit next to Lizzy, who had her back to me.

She could have been a Los Angeles aspiring actress, with her perfect smile, perfect perky nose and perfect, straight blond hair, but when she spoke it was with as much of a British accent as the others.

“Hello!”

“Hi.” I smiled, confused at her niceness. Did I meet her already?

“Oh, good, you’re here.” Lizzy said, turning in her seat to look at me, with a smile. “This is Zoe Warren, she’s Jake’s wife.”

I noticed the dark haired hottie was sitting by her side, and considered what a handsome couple they made as I smiled at Zoe.

“Nice to meet you.” I said.

“Big fan.” She smiled back, blushing slightly.

“Oh, hey, Zoe.” Harry said, by my side, after saying hello to the other guests sitting on our table – Jake, and the curly haired ginger, Skippy. “How are India and Zalie?” He asked Zoe.

“Starting to sleep through the night.” She told him. “Which means we are starting to sleep through the night again.”

“Your kids?” I asked, and she smiled, nodding.

“Twin daughters. They’ll be one in November. Harry is their very absentee godfather.”

“I have work!” He justified, and I though how odd it was that I didn’t know he had goddaughters. I mean, he knew I was Kidd Archet’s godmother.

Then again, this was the first time I was meeting most of his friends, so it was clear I hadn’t been
making as much of an effort as I thought I had.

“Zoe is a yoga instructor.” Lizzy said.

“Or I used to be, before the babies.” The blonde smiled. “Harry told us you were moving in, what have you been thinking of our little island?”

“Well, the accents are obviously the biggest change.” I told her, honest.

It was very weird to be suddenly surrounded by brits. I had been used to the accent, as I knew many English people in America, but in London it wasn’t a matter of the eventual, exotic accent anymore. Now I was the eventual, exotic accent. The whole film crew, the barista at the Starbucks where the coffee was very week, the lady who scanned our items in the grocery store, the doorman in our building, the cleaning lady we hired, everyone was British. Which, sure, was an obvious change, but it made more of an impact than I thought it would.

“And driving has been a challenge.” I went on, to their delighted expressions.

“Have you even tried to drive since you got here?” Harry asked, with a grin.

“Not really.” I said, shrugging, as Lizzy and Zoe laughed. “I just make Eddy drive me. My bodyguard.” I explained, to the other two, who had seemed confused, as I pointed to Eddy standing nearby looking uncomfortable as he watched the brits around him.

“A party girl reputation and a bodyguard…” Zoe mumbled, playfully, looking at Harry. “It’s like you and Harry were made for each other.”

Harry rolled his eyes, though he was smiling.

“And, of course, there’s the television!” I added, resuming their question. “British TV is a weird thing.” They laughed. “I mean, it’s… colorful? And… loud? And way out there!”

“Oh, so you have time to watch TV, huh?” A deep voice interrupted, from Harry’s other side, and I turned to see Thomas Van Straubenzee taking one of the empty chairs with a glass of cognac on his hand. “Not as busy as Harry made you sound, I guess. Are you just avoiding us, then?”

“Dude, come on.” Harry said, lightly, but I could see Van Straubenzee’s words were more of an accusation than a light joke. Stealing his glass, Harry took a sip. “Where did you get this? We’ve just been given wine.”

“Perks of being in the wedding party.” He said.

“You’re not in the wedding party, Melissa is! She is the maid-of-honor.” Skippy told him, sitting across from me.

“And I’m her husband.” Thomas shrugged. “Which puts me in the wedding party table, which gives me access to the good stuff. Now, let’s go back to the subject.” He looked at me, with renewed interest. “Why have you been avoiding us poor mortals, Ms. Movie Star? Too good for us?”

“What?”

“Thom, don’t be a dick.” Jake told him, resting his arm lazily around his wife’s shoulders. “If you want an autograph, just say so. I’m sure Jen wouldn’t mind signing a napkin for you.”
Though the others laughed, and I smiled despite myself, Thomas was still staring at me with some sort of… bitterness.

“Intriguing, isn’t it? How long you two’ve been together? Two years? And it takes Harry’s ex getting married for us to see you. What, were you scared to let him come by himself? Afraid he wouldn’t be able to control his wish to stop the wedding?”

His tone was just light enough that it could be just a joke, but I still felt my stomach twist in anxiety as Harry gave him an angry look.

“You heard Jake, Thom.” He said. “Don’t be a dick.”

“So no one else is bothered by the odd timing of this meet and greet?” Thomas asked the table.

“Nope.” Skippy told him, so casually that it made the others laugh. Then, enjoying the fact Thomas had been silenced, at least momentarily, he leaned in his seat to look at me. “So, where should we start?” I gave him a confused look. “With Harry’s embarrassing stories, of course!”

“Oh, yes, please!” Lizzy squealed, and Zoe nodded. “I’ve never had the chance to hear them!”

“You see, Jen – can I call you Jen?” Skippy went on.

“Sure.” I said, surprised, and a little happy, that, unlike Van Straubenzee, he seemed to like me.

“It’s a man’s job to make sure that when his mate’s girlfriend is way out of his league, that she knows about all his embarrassing secrets so that she knows what she’s getting herself into.”

Harry sighed, despite the grin in his lips, as the others laughed, agreeing.

“So far we’ve never quite needed to do this, because Harry’s only ever dated girls from our little circle, who already knew him from years before…” Skippy said. “But you, I feel like I need to warn you that despite his tittle and current status as the world’s most eligible bachelor-“

“And best facial hair!” Jake added, looking very serious. “Don’t forget the best facial hair!”

“And the world’s best facial hair,” Skippy added, nodding, and I had to giggle, “the truth is, deep inside…” he shrugged, “he’s just a big loser.”

“When you reckon they’ll start serving dinner?!” Harry asked, loudly, over the sound of laughter from his friends and me.

“You might be too late.” I told Skippy. “I think I already knew that.”

They laughed some more, as Harry shot me a mock, offended glance.

“For instance,” Skippy ignored him, and so did I, as this conversation was too good to be distracted from, “Did he try to convince you his favorite movie is Pulp Fiction?”

My smiled faded. “Yes. It is. Isn’t it?”

“Okay!” Harry said, louder now, and blushing as he shot Skippy a warning glance. “Let’s move on. Thomas, how is work? Thom is a city broker.” He added, looking at me over-casually, which made me raise my eyebrows in suspicion.

Lizzy didn’t need to add any sort of explanation, as I already had a pretty definite opinion of Van Straubenzee formed from when I had met him at Harry’s 30th birthday party, but she still leaned in
to whisper in my ear.

“His family has served the British Crown for 150 years.” She said, but I remembered something else she had told me, when I had met Van Straubenzee.

His wife, the maid-of-honor Skippy had just called Melissa, was Chelsy’s best friend, which might explain his determination in hating me.

“Good.” Thomas answered Harry, still looking at me. “But more importantly, Jenifer, you didn’t answer my question. What have you been up to that made you too busy to come meet Harry’s pals?”

“I have a job.” I told him, a little brisker than I had intended. “But I’m here now. Meeting Harry’s pals.” I rested my chin on my hand, as my elbow sat on the table, and looked at him closer. “So, who are you, Thomas? What are your hobbies? Tell me your deepest secrets.”

Harry, Skippy, the Warrens and Lizzy laughed, and I saw a little smile show up even in Thomas’ lips.

“Well, then, let’s do something!” He said, daringly, looking around at the table. “Let’s hangout. Who’s in?”

“We are hanging out.” Zoe reminded him.

“Actually, I was gonna say that,” I said, but turning to Lizzy now, “I’m going to take you up on that shopping invitation, I just need to find the time.”

She smiled. “Sure. Let me know.”

A few days after I had moved in, Lizzy had texted me that she wanted to take me shopping to show me the best stored in London fashion, which I was excited about.

“There’s a huge Burberry right in front of our building that I still need to make time to go see.” I added.

“Where do you guys live?” Skippy asked.

“Knightsbridge.” Harry told him. “Just beside those number one Hide Park buildings.”

“Impressive.” Guy said, making his way to the table with two glasses of wine. He handed Lizzy one as the others each jumped a chair so he could sit by her. “How much did that cost?”

“Our firstborn child.” Harry joked, downing the rest of Van Straubenzee’s cognac as they laughed.

Zoe smiled at me. “Are you guys going to have a house warming party?”

“Oh, no.” Harry answered before I could. “We’re working too much, we haven’t had much time to get the house in order, by the time we do it’ll be Christmas already.”

They laughed, but I had a thought that I did not like very much: Our house was pretty much set up already, so why, I wondered, did Harry feel the need to shut down that idea? I knew the answer to that, of course: he was protecting me from having to spend more time with his friends than I was ready to.

“Love,” I said, smiling at Harry, “will you get me some ice?”
“Sure.” He smiled, grabbing my glass and making a quick exit.

I had just had an idea and, before I could talk myself out of it, I turned to look at the Pellys and Warrens.

“Okay, so, Harry doesn’t know this,” I said, on a low tone, and they all, including Skippy and Thomas, stopped their conversations to look at me, “But I was actually planning a surprise birthday party for him next Saturday, which would be a nice way for you guys to see where we live, like a house warming party. What do you think?”

Jake seemed surprised, but nodded appreciatively, as did Skippy and Guy. Zoe and Lizzy smiled at me. I didn’t dare look at Thomas.

“Of course!” Lizzy said. “How can we help?”

“Well, obviously, don’t tell Harry,” I joked. “And, uh… well, as Thomas mentioned, I don’t know many of his friends, so… just invite whomever you think he’d like to see there.”

“Done.” Skippy said, and with a determined nod, he took his phone out of his pocket and started typing what I imagined was a group text.

“I’ll go invite some folks from around here.” Jake added, looking at the guests around. “Hey, George!” He said, before standing up and going after someone.

“Don’t forget it’s a surprise!” Zoe shouted, after him. “Oh, I better go with. He doesn’t know how to keep his mouth shut.” She smiled and followed her husband.

“Should we bring something?” Lizzy asked. “Besides a birthday gift, I mean? Food-wise?”

“No, I can handle that.” I told her. “Just be there.” I smiled, knowing that would be enough to make Harry happy.

It was a good hour later that we finished eating, all feeling a little fuller and slower, after all the food and alcohol. The annoying brunette from before, Natasha Rufus Isaacs, took the last empty seat on our table, beside Harry, after Van Straubenzee made his way back to the wedding party. She was far nicer to me after a few drinks – or, at least, didn’t shot me any snarky remarks, but rather ignored the fact I was there.

I couldn’t help but notice she seemed like a delightful person to everyone else, and especially Harry. Sitting by his other side, she’d constantly look to him to make a joke or ask about something, just casually enough to sound like she knew what she was talking about, which probably meant they were in constant contact with each other.

I enjoyed a moment when they were all too busy with separate conversations to lean in to ask Harry, under my breath, giving Natasha a quick look:

“What’s her deal?”

He seemed confused. “What do you mean?”

“She hates me.”

“She doesn’t hate you.” He murmured, before pausing to think for a moment and sighing. “She just… you know.” He shrugged, and seemed to change his mind about whatever it was he was about to tell me.
“Yes?”

“I’ve known her since I was a kid.” He told me.

“You’ve known most of these people since you were a kid.” I argued.

“True.” He nodded. “But it’s mostly the boys. Tasha is one of the few girl friends I have. I can actually talk to her, you know? The boys don’t wanna hear about touchy feely stuff, you know how it goes.”

I thought that was weird, so I considered that as Harry looked at Tasha, who had just called his attention to point out some other guy nearby whose date was apparently the wrong sort of person. They laughed.

“What kind of touchy feely stuff?” I asked Harry again, after Natasha had turned to answer Skippy’s question about her husband, who couldn’t be there due to a work trip.

Harry frowned looking at me, and suddenly his lips became a mysterious grin.

“Are you… jealous?”

I scorned, suddenly feeling very nervous, and my stomach felt heavier and sickly.

“No.”

Harry smiled. “You are.” He sounded surprised. “You are jealous of me.”

“I’m not.”

But he wasn’t listening, he was intently looking at me, heavily interested, not even blinking.

“Oscar winning, Brazilian actress, former Victoria’s Secret Angel, Jenifer Silva is jealous… of me.”

I rolled my eyes, sighing, and crossed my arms over my chest, avoiding his glance.

Harry laughed. “Jen,” he started, pulling my hands to hold them in his, and coming nearer. “She’s married.”

“I know!” I said, but something was wrong now, and I couldn’t avoid it.

I thought of Harry here, across an ocean from me, needing to talk about things his guy friends didn’t get, and finding comfort in the pretty brunette’s shoulder. “…but she’s very pretty.” I added, hating myself.

Harry looked like he was struggling to suppress a laugh. “…Yes, she is.” He agreed, and I felt as if someone had punched me in the guts. “I’m sure her husband would agree.”

I rolled my eyes again, pulling my hands from his.

“You know who I find very pretty?” he went on, “My girlfriend. Whom I’m in love with.”

Against my will, my lips curved into a little smile as I still avoided his glance.

I turned to him, after a defiant pause.
“…you think I’m prettier than her?” I asked, feeling as childish as Natasha’s eyes looked.

Harry beamed. He took a deep breath, trying to contain his smile, and leaned in to whisper in my ear – the one that wasn’t covered by my fascinator.

“Wait until we get home and I’ll show just how much.”

I bit my lip, trying to contain a giggle as I felt myself blush. His stubble and breath in my ear sent a sudden wave of chills all over me, and he had raised his hand under the table to stroke my inner leg with his finger, very gently.

I looked at him, starting to feel very tingly, and he sustained my stare intensely for a long time.

I was wondering why there was suddenly such a silence around our table, and had started to wonder if his friends had noticed our little exchange when a waiter showed up, asking if we wanted more wine.

We leaned back from each other, awkwardly, and he served us. Sure enough, as I looked around the table, all his friends had knowing grins on their lips as they seemed to make an effort not to look at us. Lizzy and Zoe were exchanging excited glances.

I took a deep breath as the waiter left, and gave Harry one last smile as I drank some wine.

As the others resumed their conversations, I noticed Natasha calling Harry again, and they talked for about a minute as I tried to remember what I had been talking to him before things had felt suddenly very hot.

When he paused to drink, I leaned in again.

“What did you talk to her about?” I asked, whispery, and he looked confused. “You said there were things you could only talk to her… like what?”

He took in a deep breath, looking regretful that he had told me that.

“She was the one I talked to mostly about Chelsy… I mean, the others just thought we would end up getting back together and even tried to make it happen, which drove me nuts. But she took my side and told me I deserved better.” He gave me a quick look before going on. “And then there was you.”

“Me?”

He smiled, slightly. “Yes. When we… when I left New York. When we broke up… I talked to her about you.”

I couldn’t take my eyes from him no matter how hard I tried which, admittedly, wasn’t very hard.

“What did you talk about?” I asked.

Harry blushed, and turned in his seat to come nearer, making sure no one could really hear him.

“…missing you. Hating that I couldn’t be with you. Wanting to leave everything behind and just go and find you.” I felt my heart beat faster in my chest, inhaling his inebriating perfume as he spoke. Then he looked at me, his eyes piercing into mine. “About how I didn’t think I had ever loved someone that much. About how I hated the thought of having to let you go. Of watching your life through paparazzi pictures, seeing you get with some model guy who was so clearly hotter than
Our eyes locked on each other, as none of us could figure out what to say, I stuttered:

“Wha-what did she say to that?”

“She said if I thought you loved me I should fight.” He replied. “And I told her about how you made up Plan A, you know… about us finding other people. About how you thought it could never work… She told me about her and her husband, and she thought I needed to find someone who could love me in the same way I loved them. She seemed to think if you were so reluctant to be with me, it wasn’t worth it because… because you probably didn’t love me.”

Suddenly, something felt very familiar about his words and I took my eyes from his blue ones to look at Natasha. Her long dark brown hair falling graciously on her back, her perky nose and childish dark eyes shining excitedly as she talked to Skippy.

I knew where I had heard those words before, the advice she gave Harry: from me. That was the advice I had written in my book. That was the advice I kept giving Ophelia, and Payton, and every other young girl I knew. About not seeing things where there weren’t and finding someone who will love you the way you want them to, not their own misguided, broken way.

In this scenario, I realized, to Natasha’s perspective, I was Oscar. Harry was Ophelia. Natasha was me. She was the one who had to watch her best friend love someone who just couldn’t seem to get a grip and love him back the way she wanted to. The way Natasha knew, as I did, he deserved.

Of course, I realized, with a wave of understanding, she would tell him to let me go. She would look at me as someone who is hurting him because, through all my brokenness and issues, I had been very difficult to love. Harry had very rarely gotten proof that I loved him back. If it was one of my friends telling me about a girl who spent months wanting to be just casually together and who couldn’t seem to stand to hear the words ‘I love you’, I would tell them to run for the hills.

I looked at Natasha, noticing, finally, that that was the reason she didn’t like me: she didn’t think I loved Harry enough.

“Are you okay?” Harry asked, still looking at me as I watched Natasha, sadly.


He grinned, but looked disbelieving. “Really?”

I giggled. “Yes. Well, I like Jake and Zoe, they’re nice. And I love Lizzy. Guy is…” I sighed, frowning, and Harry chuckled. “…tolerable. I’ll get used to him, I think. He must have some good qualities if he managed to make Lizzy fall in love with him…”

“Skippy?” Harry asked, whispery, giving his curly haired friend a quick look.

“I love Skippy!” I whispered back, to Harry’s delight. “He’s fun…” Then, remembering the earlier conversation, I asked, “what is your favorite movie?”

“Pulp Fiction.” He answered, a little too fast.

“I have ways of finding the truth, Mr. Prince.” I told him, grinning. “Skippy seemed very interested in telling me.”

Harry sighed, his smile fading. “Fine.” He said, adjusting in his seat to come nearer, looking
around seeming embarrassed. “It’s not my favorite movie. I just said something once, and he now makes this joke. But it isn’t, it’s not like that.”

“What you’re gonna say won’t be as bad as what I’m imagining.”

“It’s a Wonderful Life.” He murmured, before turning to the table again and downing his wine in one gulp.

“…Really?” I asked, genuinely interested.

He shrugged, and took in a deep breath, probably deciding it was better to just explain that before I spent the whole night asking.

“We were drunk once and we played truth or dare and I talked about how I loved Pulp Fiction, but it wasn’t as good as It’s a Wonderful Life, and he never let it go.”

“Okay, but… why?” I asked. “Why do you think is better? What do you like about it?”

“It was my mother’s favorite movie.” He said, and I felt my stomach sink heavily as I realized why he suddenly looked uncomfortable. “After the divorce, we could never spend Christmas with her, because we had to be in Sandringham with dad and grandmother and the rest of the family. So we only ever saw her afterwards. It didn’t feel like Christmas anymore, but she’d put on this movie, that she made us watch every year,” he smiled, “even before she and dad separated, and we’d watch it and, you know,” he shrugged, “it felt like Christmas.”

I smiled. “It’s a good movie.”

He nodded, his eyes drifting into space, with a smile. “She always let out this really loud, excited squeal in that scene with George and Mary, when George asks her,” and Harry did something I had never seen him do before: he made an American southern accent as he quoted, “what do you want, Mary? You want the moon? Just say the word and I’ll throw a lasso ’round it and pull it down!”

I smiled, watching him, and he looked at me. “Hey, that’s a pretty good idea,” he went on, in his own voice, and I finished the line with him:

“I’ll give you the moon, Mary.”

We smiled at each other, intense, for a long time, until he cleaned his throat.

“And what about him? I know he’s a bit… difficult.”

He was looking at Thomas Van Straubenzee at a distance, and I scorned, frowning.

“Well…” I sighed. “He’ll just have to get used to me, I guess.”

“Thomas’ wife is-“

“I know.” I stopped him, with an eye roll. “Chelsy’s maid-of-honor.”

“Well, yes.” He went on. “At one point in our lives we were best mates whose fiancés were best mates, it was sort of perfect. He was a little upset when the balance was broken.”

I nodded. “I suppose his wife will hate me too, then.” I said, looking over at the wedding party table, where the blonde Melissa Van Straubenzee was talking to Susanna Warren. “Like Susanna.”

Harry shook his head. “No, I don’t think so… See, Melissa loves Chelsy. And Chelsy loves her
now husband… so I suppose Melissa will just be happy for her. She’s not as close to me without Chelsy, so she doesn’t care.” He paused. “Though I don’t see why Susanna would hate you. Well, we did go out a long time ago, but it was so long ago.”

I straightened up in my chair, giving him a shocked glance. “You what??!”

“No, but it couldn’t be it!” He said, dismissively. “It was a long time ago!”

“Harry, of course that’s it!”

“Jen, she has a boyfriend!”

“Which wouldn’t stop her from judging her ex’s new girlfriend.” I told him. “Of course, ugh. Well, she’s just gonna have to get used to it.”

He smiled, watching me. “And Natasha?” He asked, now a little more seriously.

I looked at the brunette, who at this point gave Harry and me a quick curious glance before returning her attention to Skippy.

“She’s worried about you.” I said. “I get that. I would be too if I were her.” He nodded, seriously. Frowning, I went on. “Also, I might not have made the best first impression on her and Susanna. I was a little… snobbish. I’ll have to fix that.”

He smiled, seeming entertained. “I’d love to see that.”

Ignoring the subtext of his line – which I intriguingly thought sounded like he was saying I was indeed snobbish – I went on.

“But she cares about you.” I told him. “That makes me like her a little more.”

He smiled.

Natasha only gave me her attention a few minutes after that. She smiled at me – though it was a very ironic smile – when Chelsy took to the microphone to call ‘all the single ladies’ to go try and grab the bouquet that she was about to toss.

“Oh, Jenifer, you’re single.” She said, loudly, as herself, Zoe and Lizzy – the other girls on our table – were all married. “You should go, you don’t wanna miss any chance of trying to snatch a prince.”

I was trying to remind myself that she was just worried about Harry so I wouldn’t give her a very impolite answer when Chelsy herself appeared right behind us.

“Hey!” Harry smiled, a little surprised, standing up to give her a hug. “Congratulations, Countess Stuart!”

Chelsy laughed what sounded like a very authentic giggle. “Thank you! I’m glad you could come, I was afraid you’d be traveling.”

“No, I’m gonna be staying here a little more now.” He told her. “Chelsy, you remember Jen.”

At this, I had to stand up and give the blushing bride my best fake smile.

“Congratulations, Chelsy.”
“Oh, look at that, you learned my name.” She said, and Harry giggled at how I had purposely misunderstood her name when we met at a bar in 2013, when our relationship was still just a publicity stunt.

“It was in the program.” I justified, jokingly.

I thought I was being unnecessarily rude again, but Chelsy just laughed some more.

“Come on, come try to catch the bouquet, I know how much Harry would like to be the next to get married!” She joked. “I’m going around the tables calling all the single guests, though you’re one of the few ones left.”

She walked out, to find more single guests, and I was left standing awkwardly beside Harry staring at the dance floor where some girls – mostly a lot younger than me –, were gathering to try their luck with catching the bouquet.

I realized, suddenly, that she was right. Of all his best friends – with the only exception of Skippy – Harry was the only single one. And he had been ready to marry Chelsy in 2012!

Why was he so patiently waiting for me?

I looked at him, trying to push this thought out of my head, and rolled my eyes dramatically.

“Can you believe the nerve of her?!?” I asked, in a whisper, so his friends wouldn’t hear us.

“Ok, enough.” He said, serious, holding my hand and pulling me to the bar. He didn’t stopped walking until we were leaning against the counter, out of anyone’s earshot. “Why are you so upset about this?”

“Because!” I said, a little louder than I had intended. “It’s you!”

I sighed, deeply, starting to understand, for the first time myself, why was it that I was so upset about Chelsy having invited us to her wedding.

“I can’t understand her.” I told him. “She could have had you. She did have you. And still, she… she let you go. Why would she? I just can’t believe she was so lucky to have you and then just… ruined it. Why would she throw this out? You’re…” I looked at him, letting his eyes calm the turmoil inside of me as they usually did. “…you.”

Harry smiled, slightly. “Well, yeah. That’s the problem, isn’t it?” He shrugged. “I’m me. She’s always wanted to get married, she just didn’t wanna do it with me. She wanted me, she just… didn’t want what I come with. The problem was she didn’t seem to realize, as I didn’t either back then, that what I come with is me. It’s who I am.”

“That’s the thing.” I shook my head, unable to understand it. “Why? Harry, you’re…” I let out a dreamily sigh. “You’re amazing. She would be so lucky to have you… Who- who wouldn’t want to marry you?”

He stared, for a long time, at the confusion in my face, and the same confusion started to make way into his expression.

“…Would you?”

A long silence fell as I felt all the air escape my lungs. His gaze was intense and shocked and I realized that so was mine.
Because, as I thought about it, I realized that was exactly what I had said. That’s why I was so angry at Chelsey.

“I have to go catch the bouquet.” I blurted out, suddenly, and turned on my heels to dance floor to join the other single girls to try and catch my boyfriend’s ex-fiancé’s wedding bouquet, not because I wanted to, but merely because I couldn’t stand another second with his blue eyes staring into mine.

Not when it felt like he could see all of my secrets. Not when I thought he would be able to see the answer to his question, that I could hear being shouted so loudly with every beat of my heart.

Yes. I would want to marry him.

Chapter End Notes

TALK ABOUT AN ENDING. Look what Jen just discovered! The question now is: BUT HOW???? Wait and see, sweet ones. Wait and see.
Thank you for the love and support and for reading (sending a comment, maybe?). Send me questions or whatever, let’s freak out together! I love talking to you. Hope your week was good! See ya soon!
Chapter Summary

Jen goes for coffee with friends and learns she has an intense dinner coming up.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

On September, the world woke up on day to the shocking news that Prince Harry of Wales had bought and moved into a seven bedrooms penthouse apartment in central London with his long-term girlfriend, Emmy-Grammy-Oscar-Tony winning Brazilian actress, Jenifer Silva.

To be honest, Harry and I had expected them to find out a lot sooner.

We weren’t taking any extra precautions to hide the fact we were living together. Sure, I hadn’t exactly tweeted about this new phase of my life, as I knew I would if my boyfriend was any less scared of social media, but we had been coming in and out of the building every day since the start of that month.

The press knew I was in London, as the paparazzi kept following me around locations all over London during the week to try and snap pictures of me filming my new movie, Broken, a romantic drama with an immigrant thematic that I was excited about, but I guess they assumed I was staying in a hotel.

Written by an Australian writer, it had first been offered to Ophelia, who decided it was more the kind of thing I liked and had passed it on to me. My love interest, playing bulky UFC fighter Tommy, was Tom Hardy, whom I was pleased to see again after auditioning opposite to months before for the part.

He was friendly and coy, despite his scary-looking appearance, and we had fun talking about my getting used to London and his interesting love life – he had a crush on a friend who was not an actress and, by all accounts, seemed completely immune to his six-pack.

“Has she seen you shirtless?” I asked him, only half-jokingly one day when he asked for advice on how to charm her. “I mean, you’re Tom Hardy, I’d have figured if you just dropped your pants she’d be all yours.”

The first scenes were mostly of us in gym gear running around a park in London. Our characters met in a gym, where his character trained and mine, an aspiring musical actress, kept in shape, and they quickly became running buddies, so there had to be a lot of footage of us running in the early hours of morning.

That meant for the first few days I had to wake up extra earlier to shoot before the sun came out, which might explain why the paparazzi hadn’t seen me leaving our place in Knightsbridge, though the production team had been having a hard job of keeping onlookers and paparazzi away from location as the day progressed. They all tried to hang around to see us and snap pictures of us shooting or entering our trailers.
After those scenes were done, I would have another many scenes in the actual gym before moving on to a West End Theatre and the studio, but that would be on the course of the next three months.

I wasn’t sure how I felt about not directing anymore. I had grown used to making decisions and having the final say in when we started or finished shooting, or when something was good enough or not. I found myself bitterly disagreeing with the Broken director, even though she was a lovely and talented person, and if it wasn’t for the fact I enjoyed having a little more free time, I would have been much more dissatisfied with this.

Of course, free time is not how I would actually put it. The hours I had left from being just an actress in this movie, were spent in phone calls with the UN, meetings with Emma Watson about our Women’s Spring projects, or designing the sunglasses line I had been hired to do with Dolce and Gabbana. Not to mention the countless email and phone calls I had to return about the company and charity in Brazil, and the usual issues with upcoming auditions, promo tours, interviews, and scripts I had to look over with Richard and Janine.

On top of that, the Brazilian movie I had directed was now on post-production, which was being lead by my co-director Camillo, though I still tried to have a big part on it, calling him every week for progress reports and giving him my opinion on the changes he had been making.

All my empty timeslots left were spent at home, with Harry, putting pictures in frames and laughing at another of his house warming gifts to me: a gigantic print of the picture of the moment I had finished my Academy Award speech, with my smug smile and my hand raised in the air, head held high. He hanged it in the hall between the sitting room and the dining room, where I wouldn’t have to be seeing my own enlarged face so often.

Still, it wasn’t until after the first three weeks of grocery store trips and coming home late at night that the press finally found out we were living together. Somehow, someone had leaked the copy of our contract with the real estate agency – a blurry picture of both of our signatures and the final price we were paying.

All we heard about that week was ‘Prince Harry and Jenifer Silva Buy Penthouse Worth Millions in London!’, ‘Jenifer Silva Has Moved to London to Live With Prince Harry’, ‘Jenifer Silva and Prince Harry Secretly Married: exclusive pictures of their intimate ceremony!’, ‘Traditional Queen Appalled at Unmarried Prince Harry Moving in With Jenifer Silva!’.

That’s when the paparazzi started camping on the gate to our building. It was ridiculous, but we were so busy we barely had time to register any of it.

On top of everything I had going on on my job, I was also busy getting used to England. The accents, the weather, the driving in the wrong side of the road, the weird daytime television shows, everything felt different and weird. And, magically, better.

I had imagined it would be hard getting used to the country; I had imagined I would find many things to complain about, as a result of how nerve-wracking moving in with Harry was, but both turned out to be a lot easier than I was prepared for.

Quickly, my usually LA-Manhattan obsessed heart found itself admiring the misty early mornings in London, and the way the green treetops in Hide Park, that we could see from our bedroom window, were turning yellowish as fall came round. I found myself enjoying the fact I could see the sky, as a result of the rare existence of skyscrapers. I found myself enjoying the accents and the fact I was discovering new things every day. I found myself actually loving poor, dull, damp, sunless, expensive, conventional, over-traditional England. I could see its faults – like the fact they seemed to not need good coffee, as no barista even knew what mocha was -, but they felt very little
in comparison to the fact I could put on makeup without worrying about sweating it off.

I quickly found that living with Harry twenty-four-seven wasn’t nearly as difficult as my anxiety would have me believe. Even the little weird things we didn’t know about it each other felt nice.

For instance, he quickly found that my showers were a lot longer when I didn’t have to get out quick to go explore some new country we were visiting that weekend. And I found out, on the first week I had been there, after a particularly exciting night of sex, when we both laid heavily, panting, on weird side of the bed, something a little too interesting about him.

A little exhausted, we climbed to the pillows and, after I was already almost asleep, I felt Harry standing up, walking around the bed, and laying on my other side, quietly asking me to scooch to the side he had been on.

“What?” I asked, waking up, looking at him confused.

He seemed embarrassed. “You’re on my side.” He said, looking at the side of the mattress I was laying on.

I blinked a few times, in silence, trying to understand what he was saying.

“What?” I repeated.

Harry sighed. “I can’t sleep unless I’m on the left side of the bed.”

I felt myself smiling now, but tried to suppress a laugh as I sat up to look at him. “…what?”

He looked down, frustrated, and even in the dark I could see his cheeks getting as red as his hair.

“I have a problem. I can’t sleep unless I’m on the left side of the bed. Can you just…? Scooch over?”

As it was late, and I was feeling both tired and still satisfied, I let it go and just fell asleep on the right side of the mattress, feeling his arms wrap around me as I pushed the confusion out of my mind and embraced my exhaustion.

On the next morning, however, it was the first thing I thought about. I woke up at six, went to the bathroom, leaving Harry on his side of the mattress, and then got my hour of workout and took a shower. When I got to the kitchen, around twenty past seven, already dressed for work, Harry was making French toast.

“Morning.” He smiled, sleepily, pointing at the floral cup of coffee on the kitchen counter.

I took a sip, happy that it tasted how I liked – I had been having problems finding good coffee shops in London -, and smiled at him.

“So…” I started, sitting in the stool in front of him, who was stirring his tea. “You can’t sleep on the right side of the bed?”

He sighed, putting a toast on a plate before sliding it to me. “Seriously?” He asked. “Not even good morning before you start teasing me about it?”

“Come on, you were kidding, right?!” I asked, grinning. “I mean, you’ve slept on the right side before.”

He nodded, quietly, for a while, as he went to the fridge to get jam and cream cheese. “Nope.”
“Yes, you have.”

“No, I haven’t.” He repeated, looking a little embarrassed as he passed me the cream cheese and kept the jam. “…I always move to the other side without you noticing.”

I was having problems trying not to laugh now. “But, Harry, no… I would have noticed.”

He grimaced. “No, you wouldn’t. You never do… I once actually pushed you to the other side in the middle of the night. You didn’t even think it was weird that you went to sleep on one side and woke up on the other.”

I laughed now. “What?!”

“Look, I don’t know why!” he blushed. “I just can’t sleep if I’m on the right side… I don’t do it on purpose. It just happens…”

I gave him a shocked grin. “You are weird!”

He sighed. “Too late, Silva. Now you’re stuck with me.”

On the very Sunday after Chelsy’s wedding, while the paparazzi still didn’t seem to realize I wasn’t just living in a hotel, I left the house on the afternoon to go meet Beezus on a coffee shop called Kaffine.

I had had to talk to her on the phone until Eddy and I finally found the small little place hidden away in a quiet alleyway just outside a street market called St. Christopher’s Place, where we got from Oxford Street.

Kaffine was rustically decorated with exposed brick walls contrasting black, heavy looking furniture and industrial hanging lights.

I hugged Beezus just outside the door, where she had been waiting for me, and she introduced me to the tall boy standing next to her.

“Hi!” He smiled, nervously, “Miss Silva. You are Jenifer Silva. I am so honor-“ Beezus thrust her elbow on his side and he quickly cleared his throat. “Nice to meet you.” He said, quickly, with a respectful nod, and I noticed his voice had suddenly gotten very deep.

“Nice to meet you too.” I told him, smiling, as I gave him my hand for him to shake. He stared at it incredulously. “James, is it? Beezus told me about you.”

James, who had curly dirty blonde hair and blue eyes, suddenly let out a nervous giggle.

“She did?!” He squealed, as he grasped my hand with both of his and gave me an enthusiastic handshake.

“Let’s go get coffee.” Beezus said, louder, giving him a weird look before she grabbed his elbow and pulled him away so he’d let my hand go.

“Yes, let’s!” I said, leading the way through the old looking glass door into the small coffee shop. “The only time I’ve drank good coffee since moving in was when I made it myself. Or when Harry did. He’s surprisingly good at it for a brit.”

“Does she mean Prince Harry?! She means Prince Harry, right?!” I overheard James murmur to Beezus.
She sighed, ignoring him. “Welcome to England.” She told me, sounding annoyed. “We’ve both had the same issue. Oh, and have you tried ordering a mocha?!”

I stopped, turning to look at her, taking my eyes from the black board on the wall behind the large black counter, which had the menu on it written in pretty letters.

“Yes! It’s like I’m talking Portuguese! Don’t they have mochas here?!”

“No!” She exclaimed back, her eyes widening. “Can you believe that? It’s just coffee and hot chocolate!” Then she lowered her tone so only we’d hear her. “You’d think the people who gave us The Beatles and Shakespeare would be able to grasp the concept, but apparently not!”

“Do they have it here?” I asked, gesturing to Kaffine.

“Sadly no.” She told me. “There’s a limit even to their power.”

Deciding to test the limit of mine, I smiled, making my way to the counter, and took off my sunglasses to order, so the barista could see me properly.

“Hi, do you have mocha?” I asked.

“Oh, they don’t do that here-“ James told me, apologetically. Through the corner of my eyes, I saw Beezus pull James back a little.

“Let her.” She told him, whispery. “She has super powers.”

The barista gasped looking at me.

“Oh, my God! Are you… Jenifer Silva?” He asked, smiling.

“That’s my name.” I said, smiling. “Do you think I could bother you for something not on the menu?”

The boy jumped on his feet, excitedly. “Well, if we can manage it!”

“Oh, it’s easy!” I told him. “It’s just half coffee, half hot chocolate.”

“Oh, we can do that, sure.” He told me, nodding enthusiastically. “No problem at all! I can’t believe you’re here!”

I smiled. “Thank you! You’re so kind… Here, keep the change. Oh, make it three.”

“Of course, thank you!” He said, getting the money I handed him. “It’ll be just a minute!”

“Oh, they don’t have waiters.” Beezus said.

“Don’t worry, I’ll take it there for you!” The barista told me, and I avoided her shocked look as to suppress my laugh.

I lead the way to a table on the back, and sat with my back turned to door so it would be harder for people to see me. Eddy ordered a simple black coffee and sat at a table nearby, keeping an eye on me and on the people around.

James had his mouth half opened when he sat, staring at me intently.
“Marry me.” He uttered, suddenly, making me laugh.

“You’re gay.” Beezus reminded him, looking embarrassed.

“Details.” He told her, dismissively, sounding a lot more confident in himself now. “We could conquer the world, you and I.” He added, leaning on the table to look at me intensively. “Well, you and I and your brilliant Tony Award.”

Beezus sighed as I laughed. “James works in the West End, he’s a little obsessed with musicals.”

“My kind of man!” I told him. “Unfortunately, I’m taken.”

“Right.” He nodded, dreamily. “Prince Harry…” He sighed. “I’m not sure if I wanna marry you or be you.”

“You have a boyfriend!” Beezus told him.

“It’s Prince Harry!” He replied, matter-of-factly. “Like you wouldn’t trade Kit for him in a heartbeat! I mean, sure, he’s Jon Snow, but he isn’t a prince!”

Beezus’ shocked expression made me laugh even harder.

“No!” She shouted, blushing. “I wouldn’t, actually.”

James rolled his eyes. “Of course you wouldn’t. It’s Kit Harington.” He sighed. “How did I ended up having friends who all have famous, hot boyfriends?! I love Craig, but come on, where’s my meet cute with Jonathan Groff in the street one day?! He looks like he would be such a good kisser…”

“Oh, he is.” I told him. “I was his wife in a movie once.”

His eyes widened. “You were! Wild & Free! I forgot!” He sighed again, dramatically. “I watched that movie three times on the movie theatre! Cried every time.”

“So, Jenifer,” Beezus started, trying to change the subject, “how is living in England?!”

So I took a deep breath, and told her about the accents, and the weird TV shows, and the driving, and how adult I felt grocery shopping.

“You had never gone grocery shopping before?” James asked me, sounding surprised, as the barista brought us our mochas.

“Well, I had. But little things, you know? Salads and pads. Nothing that I would use to actually cook.” I told him, before smiling at the barista. “Thank you so much!”

“Oh, don’t worry about it!” He told me, and hesitated before leaving. “I was wondering if I could bother you for a selfie? Later, of course, when you’re leaving! I don’t wanna bother you!”

“Oh, don’t worry,” I said, standing up, “Give me your phone, I’ll take it. Smile!”

After he was gone, I sat down again, and tried to remember what I had been saying while I took a sip of my coffee.

“Not bad.” I said. “Definitely better than anything else I’ve had in London so far.”

But Beezus and James looked positively drunk on their mochas.
“This is the best thing ever.” Beezus murmured, her voice muffled because she had barely taken the cup away from her lips to speak.

“I’m having a mocha.” James added, staring at his cup in adoration. “I’m having a mocha in London!”

“Okay…” I said, after a while, realizing they had been struggling with the coffee problem way longer than I had. “So, anyway. Oh, and there was, of course, meeting Harry’s friends yesterday!”

Beezus finally looked at me, as if remembering I was there. “That’s right, the ex’s wedding! How was it?! I saw the pictures online, you looked nice.”

James scorned. “The sun looks nice.” He told her, before giving me another serious look. “You looked regal!”

Suppressing a smile, I sighed. “It was… interesting. I mean, his friends aren’t… you know… normal.”

James frowned, but Beezus nodded, knowingly. “A bit snobbish?”

“Actually, turned out I was the one who acted a little snobbish.” I told her. “It was stronger than me! They were acting like I was ruining their day for daring being Harry’s date and attracting so many paparazzi there! I couldn’t help it!”

“Fuck them!” James let out, passionately. “You’re Jenifer Silva, you have a birthright to be snobbish! You have a Tony! What do they have? Rich parents? Bitch, please!”

I giggled, hoping he was kidding to make me feel better, “Actually, yes. Most of them have dads who are lords or a brother who will inherit Downton Abbey, or whatever.”

“What?!” Beezus sounded scared.

“Yeah.” I nodded. “One of them, Jake, he’s in line to inherit the castle where they shoot Downton Abbey.” They looked impressed. “And the wife of this guy, Thomas, her brother is going to inherit a castle where they shot parts of Harry Potter!”

Beezus considered that as she drank more of her mocha, but James was staring at me, dreamily.

“So, let me see if I got this.” He started. “You are beautiful, rich, with an outstanding career and every award an actor can dream of, dating Prince Harry, of all people, and are now hanging out with the crème de la crème of British aristocracy.”

“Well… yeah.” I said, feeling the color disappear from my face as I realized how different my life was these days in comparison to just two or three years before.

“I wanna have your life.” James uttered, dreamily.

“I feel like things are changing so much.” I told them. “I mean, I’m here for my job. But it doesn’t feel like it. It feels like… like the most important thing I’m doing lately is trying to be…”

“Braver?” Beezus asked, giving me a knowing look.

As I stared into her eyes, feeling like she understood me, for the first time I noticed how much paler and skinnier she seemed. She looked… fragile. I wondered if she had managed to understand what I meant because she, too, was at a phase of her life where she was trying to be braver.
“Yes.” I said. “I am so proud of what I’ve done, what I’ve accomplished in my career, but the thing is, I got all of that while I destroyed my personal life, my faith in… everything. And now… now I have Harry and I wanna believe. I’m trying to be the kind of girl who will not be stupid enough to self-sabotage something this good. I wanna be the girl who falls in love and is loved back and manages to have a normal, exciting, happy relationship that progresses the way normal people’s relationships do.”

I sighed, and drank more, suddenly feeling very thirsty. James and Beezus stared, but they seemed to be lost in different parts of what I had said.

“I think…” Beezus started. “I think it’s very brave to do anything that the world tries to convince you is a bad idea… Loving is one of them. Jobs, well… they come and go and someday you’ll retire and die.” She shrugged. “But loving someone as everything seems to be pulling you away from them… that’s just as brave, I think.”

I nodded, giving her a worried glance. “But it makes me feel like I’m not who I used to be.”

James giggled, and I looked at him. The fangirl glow in his eyes seemed to have faded as he looked at me, knowingly.

“Honey, nobody is who they used to be.” He said, matter-of-factly. “We change. We evolve. We grow up a bit more every day and soon enough it’s been four years and you’re in a different country following a boy with a handsome smile whom makes you feel a little more at home when he hugs you.”

As I wondered how he knew that’s how Harry made me feel, I realized he wasn’t talking about me. He was talking of himself and his boyfriend.

“And sure enough, you’re a completely different person than you used to be, and you have things you never thought you would even want,” he went on, “But if you’re life has changed, and if you now want different things, what’s the problem in doing what you have to do to get them? You won’t be the same person next year. Or the year after that. And in ten years you might be a hippie backpacking through southeast India and deciding to be vegan. Who knows? We are just supposed to make the decisions that make us happy. If you’re happy, if your man makes you happy, I say screw it. You deserve to be happy.”

He sat back in his chair and crossed his legs, drinking from his cup, suddenly looking much more mature.

I took a deep breath, trying to memorize his words, because I felt like I needed them.

Beezus was looking at him with squinty eyes.

“How are you?” She asked. “And what have you done to James?!”

“How did you end up here?” I asked him, as he giggled at Beezus, “From Australia, I mean.”

“Oh,” he smiled, seeming excited about telling his story, “I met this boy, Craig, back home. Fell in love at first sight… He’s a musical theatre actor, I’m a techie, sound technician. Just as things were getting serious, he got a great job offer on Broadway, and I just knew he had to take it. He asked me to go with him, and so I did.” He shrugged, smiling. “We lived in New York for a few years, where I got a job on Chicago. Then he got another job to come work on the West End, and I followed again. Now I’m working on Rock of Ages and I love him more than ever. The end.”

He smiled again, and took another drink, and I couldn’t help but smile.
Beezus was frowning slightly, looking pensively.

“Did we all move to England to be with our boyfriends?”

James and I stared at her and thought about it for a while. Technically, only James did. Beezus had actually moved to England when her old dance teacher had offered her a position as a teacher at his school, and I was there for my movie.

But I think somehow, it felt funnier to think we had that strange point in common.

“Hey!” James smiled, “We’re the ‘moving for love’ club! High-five, girls!”

We high-fived him, laughing, and the conversation went just as fun from there.

“Oh, before I forget!” I said, later, “Next Saturday is Harry’s birthday and I’m throwing him a surprise party, sort of as a house warming party as well. So, I want you and Kit there, and I called Richard and Jenna as well. Oh, and Ed!” I smiled, and Beezus looked excited.

“Fun!” She said.

I looked at James, who seemed to be very intently admiring his own fingernails.

“And James, of course, you’re invited as well!”

He looked up, his blue eyes glowing again with the same fan girl sparkle as before.

“…Re-really?” He stuttered, whispery. “Sure, oh, my god! I’m there! What should I wear? Will the aristocrats be there? Will Prince Harry?” he shook his head, laughing nervously, “Of course he will, it’s his party! Oh, my god. I’m gonna meet Prince Harry!” His eyes had drifted away now, and he didn’t seem to remember we were there until he suddenly jumped, looking scared at Beezus, and I wondered if she had kicked him under the table.

He took a deep, calming breath before looking at me, serious. “I will be honored to attend.” He said, his voice deep.

I smiled. “Cool. And bring your boyfriend, I wanna meet the guy who’s handsome enough to drag you to three continents.”

James’ looked like I had told him he just won a million dollars in gold in a lottery ticket.

He looked at Beezus, pale and euphoric. “Craig is going to die!”

When I got home later that afternoon, I was carrying four to-go big cups of coffee I had bought on Kaffine. I planned on keeping them in my fridge and drinking them as slowly as I could, just in case I couldn’t find the time to go back to the coffee shop for more. Somehow, I didn’t think that would happen. I would just have to find a way to keep going back there, especially if it I could add Beezus and James to the mix – it felt amazing to have normal people in my life after trying to impress Harry’s blue blooded friends.

“Honey, I’m home!” I shouted, as I made my way through the sitting room.

“Kitchen!” I heard Harry’s voice, and Vodka came jumping to meet me, her high-pitched, excited barks telling me how much she’d missed me.

I picked her up with my free hand and let her lick my cheek as I walked towards Harry.
He was wearing a Darth Vader apron as he frantically chopped carrots in the kitchen counter, his unrest eyes constantly fleeing to the pans on the stove, which were fuming and emitting a delicious smell.

“Hey, how was Beezus?” He asked, giving me a quick smile and getting back to the carrots.

“Good. Tired, but good.” I said, remembering how pale Bee had looked. “She says she’s been working too hard…”

“Aren’t we all?” He asked, distracted, opening the oven and infecting the kitchen with an even better smell.

I laid the coffee on the counter and Vodka on the floor, and Harry used a spoon to get some sauce from whatever was in the oven and bring it to me.

“Is this too salty?”

“Woah. This is amazing.” I said. “What is it?”

“Roast.” He said, closing the oven again and taking a deep breath before looking at me, “We have…” his hands on his hips, he looked nervous. “Guests… coming for dinner.”

“Oh.” I said, distractedly, wondering if I could have more of the roast right away. “Cool. Who’s coming?”

Harry bit his lip, and shifted his weight on his feet before answering.

“My family.”

Chapter End Notes

Well, well, well, Jenifer, time to face the fam. Quick, anyone tell me: is it true theres no mocha in England? Cause a friend travelled there and she told me this was her experience!

Also, I hope you like James as much as I do, because he’ll be coming back! It makes so freaking happy that you like this story!!!! Cant wait for you to read whats coming!

Hoping you had a good week! Love, N!
Friends and Foes

Chapter Summary

Jen and Harry have dinner with his family, attend a surprise party and receive bad news.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

I started the first day of Harry’s 32nd year by lying to him. It was a good thing I was a good actress, because I did not like the feeling of having to do it. However, that unfortunately came with the territory of throwing someone a surprise birthday party.

On the previous Sunday to his birthday, we had hosted his family on our place for the first time – the first time I had seen his father since the polo match when we came out to the who world a year before and the first time I had seen Camila since meeting her in Scotland, a whole three years before.

As I had begun to feel used to having dinner with William and Catherine most times I had come to see Harry in London before moving in, I was glad to have them there as well, for comfort. The kids, a three year-old, curly haired George and one year-old, blue-eyed Charlotte, livened our penthouse the moment they walked through the door – George running in as if he had been there every day since being born, making Will run after him while throwing a short and smiley ‘hello!’ over his shoulder at me.

“Sorry.” Kate smiled, carrying Charlotte in her hips. “Woah, I love what you’ve done to the place!”

“Thank you! Come on in.” I smiled back.

Kate had been sent pictures of our place as soon as we signed the contract – as I wanted her opinion on how to decorate -, and she and William had come to see it with Harry while I was still away.

“It looks much more colorful.” She added, handing me Charlotte so she could take her coat off.

Charlotte, carrying a stuffed bunny, looked at me with widened blue eyes like a cartoon, inquisitively, before looking back at her mother as if ready to cry.

“There, there.” Kate soothed her, taking her back, and I got her jacket to hang on the coatroom. “But you better get used to Aunt Jenny, sweets, you’ll be seeing her a lot more now.”

Before I knew what was happening, I was smiling as I hanged Kate’s jacket, both at the words ‘Aunt Jenny’ and the thought of seeing the cute little toddler often, a sign of not having to endure a long distance relationship anymore.

“Sorry!” William said, panting, coming back into the sitting room with George’s coat on one arm and taking his off. “Hi, how are you?” He smiled, giving me a quick kiss as I took the two other coats from him. “I love the picture on the hall.”

“Oh, which one?” Kate asked, as Charlotte threw her arms at her father. William held her as Kate
made her way in. “May I?”

“Of cou-“

Before I could give them the tour, another knock on the door told me our last two guests were there.

“Hello, Miss Silva.” Smiled the Prince of Wales, standing beside his wife.

As I smiled back, I had to suppress the need to curtsy. I had talked to Harry about it and he seemed to agree that – as it was my house, and a casual dinner – there was no need for it. Still, looking into the tired eyes of the future king of the United Kingdom it was hard not to.

“Sir.” I smiled. “Welcome. And please, call me Jenifer.”

Camila hadn’t changed a freckle since the first and only time I had seen her three years before. Her hair was still short, blondish gray, still falling down her forehead in a curvy side-bang, her wrinkly, baggy eyes still scanned her environment as if trying to detect threats, her thin lips still looked like they had not been made for smiling.

“Hello, Jenifer.” She said, her posh accent struggling at my name as if it was Brazilian, which, of course, it wasn’t. “How long has it been. You look lovely as always.”

There was no emotion on her voice, and I wondered if that was an automatic greeting she gave people to try and seem warm and colorful.

“Too long, ma-am.” I smiled back, letting them in. “And I must say, so do you.”

My God, I deserved an Oscar for that.

“Oh, you’re here already.” Said Charles, greeting his son, granddaughter and daughter-in-law, with his wife following right behind.

“Welcome!” Smile Harry, walking into the sitting room and starting to greet his family.

I noticed he had had the sense of taking off the Darth Vader apron, and now just looked a little sweaty from being in the kitchen, though he still looked handsome in his blue jeans and gray shoes, with a casual, white, cotton shirt.

“Hiiiiiiiiii!” Screamed George as he ran back inside the sitting room.

His parents shushed him at the same time, as Charlotte twisted in William’s arms to look at her brother. Charles picked her up from him, kissing her forehead as he did.

“Hi, buddy!” Harry messed his nephew’s curly blond hair in greeting.

“And who do we have to thank for this wonderful smell?” Asked Charles, sniffing the air and giving me suggestive glance.

I felt a knot of guilt as I told them the truth. “Harry, actually.”

“What?!“ William seemed astonished.

“Since when do you cook?!” Kate agreed, looking just as puzzled.

Harry shrugged, casually. “I cook.”
“You didn’t seem to wanna cook when you were living in Kensington and stealing our food every
day.” She replied.

“Who wants to help me set the table?” Harry asked, smiling, to George, who raised his arm high in
the air before shouting:

“Me!”

“Alright, let’s go.”

Kate gave her husband a worried glance. “Better make sure your brother doesn’t give him anything
too breakable.”

William started following the two, and just before they disappeared through the kitchen door, I
heard him ask Harry: “Cooking, you? Is there no limit to the lengths you’ll go to in order to charm
that girl?”

Charles followed them, Charlotte still in his arms, and I was left in the sitting room with the other
two.

“Oh, wow.” Kate let out, watching the glass shelves where our awards laid. “I knew you had won
these, but seeing it just makes it feel so much more… real.”

I smiled. “I know. Sometimes I get startled myself. It’s easy to forget it happened.”

“I would have imagined this would help you remember.” Camila said, after having walked across
the room.

She was watching the big picture on the hall, of me accepting my Oscar, hand raised in the air and
a victory grin on my lips.

“Certainly speaks volumes.” Camila added, coldly.

“Oh, that looks great.” Kate said, giggling, following Camila to the hall. “You looked beautiful in
that dress.” She smiled at me.

“Yes, I suppose the Oscar’s don’t have a very strict dress code, do they?” Camila mumbled.

I sighed. “That is actually Harry’s version of a joke.” I told them, defensively. “The paintings I
chose were the other ones…”

Camila looked at the painting she could see hanging in the second level living room, just over the
hall. “What is that?”

“That’s a Portinari.” I told her. “By a famous Brazilian artist.”

“Oh, I studied that in school!” Kate told me, smiling, and I remembered she had an art history
degree. “It’s gorgeous.”

“Very… interesting.” Said Camila, and I wondered if that was a compliment.

“Surely not as much as this one.” I said, defiantly, pointing out the other painting by the dining
table on the lower level, where we stood.

Camila turned in her heels to see where I was pointing. “Oh. Yes, that’s… surely colorful.”
“I studied that too!” Kate said. “Britto, isn’t it?”

“It is.” I told her, smiling. “You know your Brazilian art.”

“I remember another, uh…” She struggled with the name. “Taarsla?”

“Tarsila?” I asked, “Tarsila do Amaral?”

She smiled. “Yes, I think so!”

“Yes, of course,” I smiled, walking up the steps to the living room. “We have one of those too.”

The other two ladies followed me, to look at my Tarsila hanging in the other living room wall.

“Again, so… colorful.” Camila opinionated.

“Gorgeous.” Kate added.

“Do you have anything particularly against art from other nationalities?” Camila asked.

“No, not really.” I said. “I just know more about Brazilian art, seeing as that’s where I’m from.”

“It’s not bad.” She added, sounding uncertain. “It’s just… an odd way of adding color to the house.”

“Which one is your dream artist?” Kate asked, with a smile, trying to shift the conversation topic.

“Van Gogh.” I told her, remembering how Harry and I still had a secret photo in front of Vincent’s self-portrait in the Met. “One day.” I smiled.

—

A few moments later, we were sitting in the dining room table, which fit exactly eight people comfortably in the black armchairs, eating Harry’s roast with roasted potatoes, steamed vegetables and Yorkshire pudding, which I had tried before, and so was now politely avoiding.

The conversation flowed from our housing arrangements to my adaptation of Brittan, and I noticed Camila was politer when her husband was there, which made me notice Charles seemed to be a lot nicer than the previous times I had seen him. He didn’t make any mention of my college professor this time around, as he had in Scotland, and he didn’t mention – to my great comfort – the condition in which he had found out Harry and I were back together in the previous year – one that was very similar to our elevator video. Another comfort: no one mentioned the elevator video. Or my book, in any way.

I felt terrible at the realization there were many topics that I was glad we were all avoiding, all of which were my fault, and remembered this was the reason why they had all been so reluctant to accept me.

“Are you going to the U.N. General Assembly again this year, Jenifer?” William asked, conversationally.

“Yes.” I smiled. “This year to talk about the early results of Borderless and Women’s Spring, the two projects I’ve been taking part on with them, one of which with Emma Watson, who will also be there.”

“Are you making another cute speech?” Camila asked.
“Not sure I’d classify her powerful speech last year as cute.” Harry chimed in.

“Yes, I am.” I said, before anyone could remark on the sternness on his look to his stepmother. “Though this year I have more meetings and will watch more speeches than last time.”

“So, Jen, how is work?” asked Kate, as she helped George with his carrots, the baby monitor by her plate so she could hear Charlotte from where she was napping in the guest bedroom, “Is it harder here than in America?”

“Not harder, no.” I told her. “In some ways, it’s actually easier. The previous movies I made where a lot darker. This one is more romantic, so it makes it easier.”

“Is it any good?” Asked Camila, and though her words could be easily mistaken for polite curiosity, I wondered what she meant by good.

“Yes, I quite like it. A girl falls in love with a guy who thinks he’s too broken to love, so she needs to understand how his mind works to approach him. It’s quite beautiful.” I said, noticing, for the first time, how similar that sounded to Harry and me. “It also narrates the struggle of trying to make it as an immigrant in a new country, which I find important.”

“You think you might get another Oscar for it?” Harry’s father asked. “Or was the only one you have just beginner’s luck?”

“Tough to be it when she won a prestigious award just three months ago.” Harry told him, sharply, about my Tony. “She’s hardly still a beginner.”

“I’m not sure.” I told Charles, trying to bury the awkward moment. “It might get a few nods from the critics, yes, the cast it’s excellent, the script it’s brilliant and I like the director’s work. But I can’t be sure, it’s not why I’m in this business.”

“Jenifer has a powerful Brazilian picture on the making.” Harry told the table. “Comes out next May, doesn’t it?”

“Yes, we’re premiering it during Cannes.” I said. “Long time to go yet, we’re still in post-production.”

“So we might see you winning more awards in the next Oscars, then.” William winked.

“Oh,” I smiled, blushing, knowing full well that Richard and Janine certainly hoped so, but that I didn’t wanna think about it, “I don’t know.”

“If you do, who are you planning on exposing this time?” Camila asked, with a grin. “In your speech, I mean. It’s your specialty, isn’t it? Offending people to go, how do they call it? Viral.”

I saw Harry clench his hands in fists under the table, and William and Kate exchange nervous glances, but Charles giggled as if his wife had simply made a funny joke.

“Maybe it’s Harry’s turn.” He said, still grinning. “Maybe we’ll see you telling him to go to hell!”

He and his wife chuckled together, and I gave them a nervous smile feeling the anxiety twist painfully in my stomach, trying to think of a way to distract Harry before he bought a fight with them, but my mind was completely blank.

“Harry tells me you have an interest in gardening, Jenifer?” Kate asked, loudly, probably trying to do the same as me. “I saw a patch of earth at the back of the terrace, are you planning on planting
something?”

I smiled at her, a bit forcibly, trying so desperately to turn her question into a conversation so that Harry would calm down.

“Absolutely!” I said. “I’m just struggling to find the time, with work and all, but it’s one of the reason I wanted this house, to try my hand at it.”

“I could help if you’d like.” She smiled. “I have a little garden of herbs in Kensington and a bigger one in Norfolk, though I don’t tend to that one as often as I should.”

“Are you any good?” Asked William.

“I don’t know.” I told them, honestly. “Never had the chance to try.”

“Charles has a gift for gardening!” Kate told me, smiling at her father-in-law. “Taught me most of what I know. You could help too, certainly, sir? Teach Jenifer the basics.”

She smiled expectantly at him, and William, Harry and Camila’s glance followed hers.

I took a deep breath staring at my own plate, trying with all of me to pretend that was a pleasant dinner and nothing in the world was wrong. ‘You have Harry,’ I told myself, ‘it’s all that matters.’

“All modesty aside, I do have some experience in the field.” Said Charles, and I raised my eyes to look at him. “Has Harry told you about our garden in Gloucestershire?” He asked, looking at me.

“No.” Harry said, taking a drink. “Just about the parties I used to throw there.”

William laughed. “Yes, that would be your priority.”

“It’s gorgeous!” Kate told me. “Absolutely beautiful! And so big.”

“Big?” Charles laughed, seeming more comfortable now. “It’s immense, I think it’s safe to say. We have it all, planted it all myself. With help, sure, at the start. We have some great gardeners there. We have hibiscuses, daisies, and an assertion of roses…”

“Sounds great.” I nodded, smiling.

“Wouldn’t you like to see?” Kate asked, tentatively, shooting another glance at Charles. “I’m sure it would inspire you! Would you give us a tour sometime, sir?”

Camila was busying herself with her glass of wine, as was William, as George happily sang in his own little three-year-old language with his mouth full of food. I pretended to have to cut my meat so I didn’t have to look at him, but I could sense Harry, by my side, was.

“…Sure.” Charles said, finally. “You should come and see when you have some time, I’ll show you around, and show you the basics, as I did with Kate.”

“Fantastic!” Kate smiled. “It’s a date!”

I smiled, too, still astonished at his sudden niceness. “Thank you, sir.”

“Of course.” He added, before returning his attention to his plate.

Before the meal was over, I showed Charles to the little patch of earth at the back of our big terrace. He examined it expertly for a few moments, mumbling as he did about earth and
shallowness, before telling me I should focus on flowers with shallow roots.

Over all, I had to admit it was one of the nicest encounters I had had with Harry’s family. At least nobody saw us making out, or compared me to Chelsy, or passive-aggressively mentioned my affair with a married man, as they had in the past.

Not to mention it was useful, as, while I was taking William to the guest bedroom to lay Charlotte down, I managed not only to extend him and Kate an invitation to Harry’s upcoming surprise party, but to plan how William could help me get Harry out of the house on Saturday so I could prepare everything.

The plan was simple: I told Harry we’d have to celebrate his birthday on Sunday, because I had to work on Saturday, and so William was free to make plans with him. He asked Harry to help him with the kids, as their nanny wouldn’t get in until late and Kate had to go to her mother’s, and so they ended up agreeing on having lunch together.

Kate was, of course, actually coming to our place, to help me set up. And their nanny was told to arrive just by the time they should leave Kensington to come to the party. What Harry would be told is that, since she arrived, William wanted to take him out to celebrate. They would stop by the house so Harry could change, and that was it: surprise!

I spent that week shooting my theatre scenes on the West End, with the secondary cast, and calling my friends on the breaks to invite them.

Harry spent that week on meetings about his next royal engagement, a visit to a center that aides homeless youth, and nervously trying to convince me his family did like me, they were just reluctant because of the book.

“Harry, I know.” I kept telling him. “It’s okay, I get it. My family has its issues too, you know that.”

“They just need to get to know you better.” He guaranteed.

“I think that’s the least Camila wants.”

Harry sighed. “She’s protective.” He said, but this argument sounded a lot bitterer than the previous one. “But she means well. I had a talk with her, she knows she needs to make more of an effort.”

I shot him a stern glance. “You had a talk with her??”

“Yeah.”

“When?”

“Before dinner, on Sunday, when I invited them.”

I sighed. “Harry, that’s why she was so aggressive. She thinks I asked you to.”

“No, she doesn’t.” He argued, and I rolled my eyes.

“You’re sweet.” I told him. “But seriously, stop trying to make your family like me. The more you force this, the worse it gets. Just let things happen naturally.”

He didn’t seem to agree that was the best course of action, but finally, he let it go.
Throwing a party to Harry’s friends was a lot different from throwing a party to my friends. For one thing, the décor was a lot less funny and, instead, more elegant. There was no wigs or karaoke, for example, as in Ophelia’s party, but fresh flowers and ambient music.

I was wearing a short and nude Chloé A-line, leather dress and the same tone was in my open toe Vince Sierra ankle boots when I hurried to open the door for what felt like the thousandth time that Saturday. To my comfort, it wasn’t any more of Harry’s friends, but Beezus, Kit, James and a very handsome boy I thought was his boyfriend.

“Oh, thank God you’re here.” I said, hugging both Beezus and Kit before I could stop myself. “You look nice.” I told Beezus.

As he usually did when people complimented his girlfriend, Kit threw his long, curly black hair back dramatically before saying, in an affected voice:

“Thank you.”

I giggled, but Beezus eyed my outfit before giving me a sarcastic smile.

“You look nice too.” She said. “Very casual.”

On our coffee date, after I had invited them to the party, Beezus had asked how she should dress, and I had proceeded to tell her it would all be very casual.

“Is this one of those times when you say something will be casual and then I get there in jeans and a tee-shirt and you’re wearing a designer dress and heels?!” she asked, then.

“Sweet Jesus, I hope so!” Had squealed James, and I was forced to tell them I was, indeed, probably gonna wear a dress and heels.

I gave Beezus a guilty look. “Sorry. I’m nervous. Fashion is my security blanket… but you do look great!”

She had dressed up for the occasion, knowing I would, but I noticed she still seemed tired and even more fragile than before.

“Why are you nervous?” Asked Kit, as he led the group in and I closed the door behind them.

“Because,” I started, whispery, taking their jackets to the coatroom, “Harry’s friends are here, and I both love and hate them.”

“How is that possible?” Beezus asked.

“Because a few of them are nice, and a few others are dicks.” I said, finally turning to look at James and his blonde, brown-eyed boyfriend.

“Hi, Jame-” I stopped, giving his boyfriend a second glance. “Hey, weren’t you in Les Miserables?”

The handsome blonde gave a big gasp as he looked at me with his mouth half opened.

“I- you- well- what?!”

James passed an arm around his shoulders. “He was.” He smiled. “Jen, this is Craig Mathur, the
handsome boy that dragged me over three continents.”

“Oh, I think I saw you. You were great!”

Craig looked pale. He stared at me for a long time, his mouth still half opened.

“Did you work with Carrie Hope Fletcher? I worked with her in Heathers, I know she was Eponine not long ago.”

Craig still stared in astonished silence, though I thought I saw his mouth drop even more when he recognized Carrie’s name.

James sighed, and looked at me. “Oh, God, was I like this when I met you?!”

I smiled, “Relax. Come in, everyone, I’ll get you drinks. Harry should be here soon.”

I guided them to the small minibar behind the second couch, across from the piano, and started serving them wine and caipirinhas, as they looked around, absorbing the chatter across the room from all the other guests already there.

“So,” Kit started, looking around, “who are the dicks?”

Smiling, I gave a quick glance to the tall, dirty blonde woman leaning against a wall, talking to her sister-in-law Zoe Warren.

“That’s Susanna.” I said. “She and Harry went out for a little while, and she seems to think he could do better than me.”

“Bitch, please.” James gave me a reassuring eye-roll. “You’re at least ten times prettier.”

I smiled, and now looked at the big, round-eyed brunette sitting in the couch talking to her husband.

“That’s Natasha.” I told them. “She’s known Harry since he was kid and apparently she’s the one he talked to about me when we were broken up. So she seems to think I don’t love him enough.”

“Well, that doesn’t sound like her business.” Beezus said, making me feel a little better.

“Oh, and that’s Van Straubenzee.”

“Bless you.” Kit joked.

I suppressed a giggle. “It’s his last name, his wife is Harry’s ex’s best friend, and he is still butt-hurt that they didn’t get married.”

“Oh, fuck that!” Speaking for the first time, it was Craig.

We all looked at him, a little surprised.

“I mean, come on, I still remember that Chelsy’s stupid smile as she stood by Prince Harry in the engagement interview, and then she ditched him! What does that guy want, that he just forgave her?!”

“…well, yes.” I said, after getting over the shock of hearing his voice for the first time.

“Is his wife a dick too?” Beezus asked.
I looked at the long, blond hair of Melissa Van Straubenzee, who was standing nearby talking to her brother, George Percy, whom I had just met that night. “Funnily enough, no.”

When Melissa had arrived, with her husband and brother, I had braced myself for just as much hostility as Thomas usually threw my way, but she had merely given me a polite smile as she shook my hand.

“Melissa, it’s nice to meet you.” She had said. “I loved you in The Big Catch!”

I looked at her a little shocked at the mention of a romantic comedy I had made a long time before, when I was still in The Mediator, about a girl who entered a dating reality show competition just for the participation money, and ended up actually falling in love with the guy she was supposed to be charming.

“Tha-thank… you?” I said, uncertain, and she giggled slightly.

“I’m sorry I didn’t get the chance to say hello on Chels’ wedding, but Thomas told me you were busy.”

“Really?” I asked, giving her husband a stern glance.

He shrugged. “Well, you seemed to be, you didn’t even let Harry talk to us right.”

George Percy, Melissa’s handsome brother and another of Harry’s longtime friends, was just as blond as his sister, and they both had the same eyes and lips. He grinned as he stared at his brother-in-law.

“Right,” he said, sarcastic, “I’m sure Harry would much rather talk to you than his hot girlfriend.” He looked up at me. “Sorry, I meant it as a compliment. I’m George.”

I shook his hand, smiling, and welcomed them in, thankful that Melissa and her brother, whom I knew after googling them after Chelsy’s wedding was also known as Early Percy, seemed to like me more than Thomas. Or to, at least, not have anything particularly against me, which seemed like a big victory at that point.

“Come on,” I told Beezus and the others, guiding them out of the sitting room, “I’ll give you guys the tour.”

I showed them to the kitchen, where the smell of food was intoxicating, pointing out the hallway that lead to the guest bedrooms, security detail’s apartment and gym, and quickly walked them through our master bathroom into our master room, excitedly pointing out the beautiful sky Harry had ordered for me. Then, through the corridor to the dining room, up the stairs to the living room, where more people – like Skippy, Guy and Jake, who gave us curious glances - had gathered. I showed them the cinema room, before guiding them to the terrace, where two dark brown marquises stood covering a bunch of patio armchairs and tables, where the rest of the guests were congregated.

Kit stopped to say hello to Ellie Goulding, an old friend of both Harry and me, whom he also knew, and to introduce her to Beezus and the boys, before following me to the living room porch.

“And this is the view that made us wanna buy the place.” I said, showing them the green treetops of Hide Park, just meters away.

They took it in, letting the chilly London breeze of September hit them as I loved to do, before Beezus turned to me and said, on a casual tone:
“So... you live in a mansion. Cool.”

“It’s not a mansion!” I argued, noticing Craig was still looking to where Ellie Goulding was sitting talking to her boyfriend. “I mean, the part we live in it’s just three bedrooms.”

“Please, accept the luck you got in life.” James told me. “You live in a mansion. Be happy about it. Baby, if you want a selfie, I’ll go ask it with you.” He added to his boyfriend, who blushed.

“You think she’d mind?” Craig asked me, referring to Ellie.

“I’m sure she wouldn’t.” I told him. “Besides, her boyfriend is friends with Carrie’s brother, so you sort of know him already.”

He seemed unsure that connection would hold, but accepted James’ hand either way and I guided the group back to the terrace.

“Oh, Jenifer, good, I found you.” Kate said, walking towards me quickly. “Will just texted me, they’re living Kensington right now, so they should be here in ten.”

“Great!” I smiled, “we need to get everyone to the sitting room.”

“Already told them to start heading out that way.” She smiled to the people behind me. “Hello.”

“Oh, Kate, these are Kit Harington, Beezus Quin, James Johnson and Craig Mathur.”

The four of them seemed startled as Kate gave them her picture perfect smile. I had grown so used to her it took me a while to remember why they, even Kit, looked so shocked. She was, of course, a big deal; the Duchess of Cambridge and all that.

Finally, the four of them managed to get out of their trance and give her smiley ‘hello’s.”

“We should go!” I told them, and we made our way back to the sitting room, where we also found Richard Madden and Jenna Coleman, who had just arrived.

“Jenifer?” Lizzy called me, and I left the others talking excitedly as I made my way to her, Zoe, Susanna and Natasha, who were sitting together in one of the couches. “Is that Jon Snow?” She asked, curiously.

I smiled. “Yes, that would be him. Well, that’s Kit Harington. He plays Jon Snow.”

I watched, amused, as the four women exchanged shocked smiles.

Natasha then gave me a look that was far nicer than any other she had allowed me since we met and asked, looking at the tall, bitched faced individual leaning against a wall who was now talking to Kit.

“And is that Tom Hardy?!”

“Screw Tom Hardy, is that the prince from Cinderella?” Susanna asked, interested, looking at Richard.

“Yes.” I told them. “Richard is a friend, and I work with Tom.”

That seemed to make them suddenly find me much more interesting than before.

“I can introduce you if you’d like.” I told them, knowing that wasn’t much better than bribe, and
They seemed to like that idea but, before I could make my way to Kit, Richard and Tom, the doorbell ringed.

There was a sudden hiss as everyone shushed each other, and then silence fell as everyone stood up, looking excitedly at the big double doors, which I opened, suddenly, to a big chorus of:

“SURPRISE!”

It wasn’t Harry.

“Wrong ginger!” I shouted, over my shoulder, to a mixture of disappointment and laughter. “Why are you so late?!” I asked Ed Sheeran, who stood, looking scared, in a pair of black glasses and a plaid tee shirt.

“Hello to you too!” he said, sounding offended, still looking at me a bit pale after the suddenness with which he had been greeted.

I rushed him and his two friends in. “I thought you were Harry, he is almost here!” I explained, giving him, finally, a proper hello as I kissed both of his cheeks and, finally, looked to see who his friends were.

“Jen, you remember Niall.” He said, pointing at the blonde One Direction member I had met in a pub after the double date with Beezus and Kit, and whom I knew was one of Ed’s best friends.

“Yes, of course, hi!” I smiled, quickly hugging Niall, who pointed at his long, dark haired friend to introduce us.

But he didn’t have to.

“Harry?” I asked, staring at Harry Styles’ world famous wicked grin with surprise filling me.

“Hi, Jen. Long time no see.” He said, not daring make much of an effort to hug me hello.

After the shock had passed, I leaned in and did so, trying to be polite, but so filled with confusion I barely knew what to say.

“Sorry to crash.” He added.

“Non-sense, the more, the merrier!” I said, automatically, smiling awkwardly, and pointing to the minibar. “There’s drinks there, make yourselves at home. Ed, can I talk to you for a minute?”

Ed followed me, waving hello at a distance to Kit, whom, I had noticed, was very angrily staring at Harry.

“Harry Styles, really?!” I asked Ed, sternly.

“Come on, it’s been years.” Ed argued, dismissively. “Taylor is happy with Adam, and they’re not even here. If they can let it go, so should you.”

“This isn’t about Taylor, Edward.” I told him, dismissively, and I saw Kit’s eyes follow Harry as he made his way from the minibar to Beezus, where she was talking to Jenna and James. “Did you know he came on to Beezus?”

Understanding flashed over Ed’s face. “Oh! That’s why he wanted to come!”
“Yes!” I told him, grinding my teeth together.

Early that year, when Beezus had been cast on a One Direction video, she had told me Harry Styles had pretty strongly come on to her. I remember she told me this as we shot Heathers because Styles had arrived in the country and wanted to meet her, something I knew – because Harry had told me – that Kit had not only seen in paparazzi pictures, but hated.

“For future reference,” I told Ed, “I’m gonna need a previous warning next time you decide to bring half of a boyband to my house.”

I let Ed follow his friends to the minibar, Harry had made his way back now. Embarrassed, I wondered if Susanna and Natasha’s sudden decision to think I was cool would flicker at the sight of Niall and Harry, who were much younger than all of them, but they seemed to be looking at the two just as excitedly as they were Kit, Tom and Richard.

Decidedly, I passed Kate and Skippy, who were catching up on the progress of George and Charlotte, and walked towards Beezus and Jenna, already looking apologetically.

They stopped talking to James to look at me, curiously.

“I’m gonna need to use your boyfriends to impress Harry’s friends.” I told them. “But I won’t do it if it’ll make you uncomfortable. I mean, they’re all married or have a boyfriend, so it’s nothing weird, but say the world and I won’t do it!”

They looked at the four girls in the couch, smiling as they looked between Ed, Niall and Harry, and Tom, Richard and Kit.

Jenna giggled, “Go ahead, you need him more than I do tonight.”

Beezus sighed at me. “She’s right. Go.”

I turned on my heels and grabbed Richard, from where he was talking to Craig. I dragged him to Tom and Kit, and dragged them too.

“Look handsome and be charming!” I told them, who all seemed utterly puzzled. I noticed Kit was still struggling to look behind him to where Beezus was.

He gave me a sharp look. “Why did you invite Harry Styles?!”

“I didn’t.” I said, defensive. “Guys, I wanna introduce you to my friends, Zoe Warren, Susanna Warren, Elizabeth Pelly and Natasha Rufuus Isaacs. Girls, these are my friends Tom, Kit and Richard.”

I left them amidst the whole niceness of smiles and greetings and went to Kate was pointing at her phone and giving me a significant look.

“They’re in the elevator!” She squealed, pointing at a text she had just gotten.

I gave a loud whistle and, as the whole room’s eyes fell on me, put my finger in my lips to ask them to be quiet. “They’re here!” I mouthed.

Then, in the deafening silence, we all stood, nervously, watching the door, which finally opened, revealing an unpreoccupied, casually looking Harry, whose eyes widened at the room full of people and the loud ‘SURPRISE!’ which greeted him.
He laughed, still a little shocked, with William joining the rest of the guests in applause behind him as he smiled. Harry turned to him, looking a little offended.

“You knew about this?!” He asked, outraged, but smiling and blushing.

“Of course” His brother shrugged, laughing, and pushing him into the room, closing the door behind them.

Harry finally shook off his surprise as his eyes found mine when I hurried to him. He gave me a smile with a mixture of confusion, excitement and shock.

“I thought you were working!” He said, as his arms wrapped around me in less than a second.

“On your birthday?” I asked, leaning back to smile at him. “Never.”

He smiled and quickly kissed me, making the room erupt in whistles and teasing.

“Get a room!” Shouted Skippy.

I stepped away, blushing, and Harry smiled at his friends. “Thanks for being here, everyone, I’ll just… go freshen up and I’ll come back to say a proper hello! Excuse me, please, make yourselves at home!”

Walking towards the master bedroom, he grabbed my hand and pulled me with him. Before we made a turn on the corridor, I heard William jokingly say to someone:

“They literally went to get a room.” There was laughter, and the noise muffled as we stepped into our room and closed the door.

Harry quickly changed into something fancier in the huge walk-in closet, while I leaned in the door, answering with a smile.

“Of course I planned all of it, it’s what I do!” I told him, who was still shaking his head in disbelief.

“I thought you didn’t like them!” He said. “You didn’t have to put yourself through this.”

“Harry,” I sighed, smiling, “I wanted to. I do like them. Or most of them. And I’ll get used to the others. I’m Jenifer Silva, I know how to charm people.”

He gave me a cheeky grin, and then frowned in confusion. “And did I see Harry Styles?”

I rolled my eyes. “Ed brought him and Niall.” I said, walking to him, to help close his buttons.

“I bet Kit is not very happy about that.” Harry mumbled.

“I won’t be blamed for that.” I told him.

Harry sighed, and then giggled. “Thank you.”

I looked at him. “You’re welcome… “ I got on my tiptoes and kissed him, gently, for a long moment.

He leaned forward, his hands pressing my waist, trying to deepen the kiss, but I stepped back.
“We don’t have time!” I said, pushing him back slightly, and regretfully. “We’re hosting…”

He sighed, painfully, rolling his eyes. “Suddenly I don’t like the party as much. Let’s just kick everybody out to be alone.” He suggested, which I hoped was a joke, as he stepped forward again to press me against a wall.

I giggled. “No.” I said, firmly. “Let’s go, you look nice and our friends are waiting.”

I stepped away, but before I could reach the door, he held my hand, spinning me back to him, hugging me by the waist.

He seemed to struggle deciding what to say as he smiled at me, his eyes leaving mine just to look at my lips.

“What?” I asked, curious, unable to contain my own smile at how sweet he looked, in his well-groomed beard and shiny turquoise eyes.

 “…You called them our friends.”

I smiled larger now, thinking back at Lizzy’s helpfulness and Zoe’s sweet smile. Thinking of Natasha’s concern to Harry’s wellbeing and Jake and Skippy’s jokes.

“Well…” I started. “They are. I told you… I like them.”

I felt shocked, realizing I wasn’t lying, and Harry finally let me pull him back into his party.

—

It was hours later when everyone had finally left, and I opened the door to the security’s apartment to let Vodka out – I had kept her there, so she wouldn’t feel frightened by the noise and rooms full of people. We had enjoyed our time talking to everyone and drinking, and answering questions about how we had come to be a couple – always exchanging worried glances as to which version we should give, the one we made up, or a heavily redacted version of the truth?

I kept looking at Harry, who was laughing excitedly with his friends, and watching as his personality shaped itself differently when he was around people he had known for years, instead of my friends, whom he was trying to impress and charm. With his friends, he sounded truer and carefree, joking more openly and laughing louder. I enjoyed watching his smile broaden when his eyes caught mine in his, and hearing the sound of his laughter, knowing he deserved each of those.

—

Just like that, we were officially living together, and I officially knew all his friends.

In the following weeks, I went shopping with Zoe and Lizzy a couple of times, before we started inviting Natasha and Melissa. Finally, we even called Susanna to have dinner with us, and as I got more comfortable with them, and stopped overcompensating as much, they started being nicer as well.

I kept on going for coffee dates with Beezus and James in Kaffine as often as every week, and they kept on making me feel normal and at home in a city I barely knew.

Harry’s arms kept on holding me tightly before we fell asleep, from the left side of the bed, and his drowsy smile kept greeting me every morning.
I would go to work on the movie, he would go meet Lane-Fox in his palace office. He would go
visit a charity, or make a speech, I would spend my morning in meetings, or answering emails or
on the phone with the UN. I would come home to a group of man talking about which places he
should visit on his next royal tour, and he would come home to a group of makeup and hair stylists
pumping me up, and Monica going over a list of things I should talk about on my upcoming
interviews.

Things fell into place and we embraced a comfortable and blissful routine, enjoying the fact we
didn’t have to say goodbye anymore.

It was a little more than two weeks later, in early October, when things took a turn for the worst.

I picked up the phone excitedly, in the middle of having breakfast with Harry, thinking it was
Beezus, as the caller ID had informed me, but Kit’s worried, exhausted voice greeted me instead.

His words, just four words, were the least I wanted to hear.

“… Something happened with Beezus.”

Chapter End Notes

Soooooooonnnnnoooom……….. bit of a cliffhanger there. The next chapter holds Bee’s fate
and a bit of Jen’s too, or the beginning of it. I hope you’ll understand. SO many
exciting things coming. Big twists and all. I’m excited to share it with you!

Thanks for reading!!!
When I walked into the room, my eyes quickly hovered between the grayish white walls, to the fake flowers on display and the gray view of London through the window, before falling in the hospital bed where a tired-looking Beezus laid.

“Hi.” She said, her voice muffled through the big oxygen mask, but I thought even through it, I could see the attempt of a smile on her lips.

I didn’t say anything. I couldn’t. I just smiled back as I closed the door and walked in, to her bed, unceremoniously letting my bag fall on the floor and jumping to lay by her side in the mattress. I heard her small, weak giggle as her arm rose to let me rest my head on her shoulder, wrapping around my back to pet it gently.

“I’m okay.” She said. “I’m alright.”

“We had coffee last week!” I said, feeling myself frown in confusion. “You looked tired, but you didn’t tell me things were this bad!”

She sighed. “I felt bad.”

“Which you should have told me!”

Beezus didn’t answer. She sighed again, staring at the ceiling.

“Kit told me on the phone when he called me this morning, to say you were here, that you stopped working a few weeks ago, because you felt too sick.” I went on. “Why didn’t you tell me?” She still didn’t answer. “Where is he, by the way?”

“He went to get lunch.” She mumbled. “I told him to go home, but he won’t hear of it.”

I scoffed. “Of course he won’t. It’s like you don’t even know him!”

“There’s nothing he can do here.” She said.

“Beezus,” I started again, raising my head to look at her, “why didn’t you talk to me?!”

“Because, Jen,” she sighed, with a humorless nasalized laugh, “you’re… happy. All of you, you and Jenna, and Richard, and James… I didn’t wanna worry you. This…” She sighed. “This is something I’ve been getting used to for years. But you, you don’t need this unnecessary pain in your life.”

I shook my head, in disbelief. “You’re right. We don’t need it. We want it, because, guess what,
Beatrice? We’re your friends. We chose to be your friends, because we like you. And so we want all that comes with you, even your goddamn diagnostic. So stop being the martyr and start sharing, alright?!”

I hadn’t meant to sound so harsh and angry, but I was tired of her fatalist way of dealing with her friends.

“I can barely walk without panting anymore.” She said, softly, apparently deciding to share for the first time in a long time. “Let alone dance… So I quit.”

“I’m sorry.” I told her.

I remembered the months we spent working together on Heathers, and how excited she always was while doing her job, which now had to leave behind.

She shrugged. “I never even thought I’d be able to do it. Even for just a little while. And I did it. I did the music video with Ed, and the One Direction video, and Heathers… It was nice. I liked it.”

“Well,” I said, raising myself higher on my elbow, “it’s not over! There’s the Heathers premiere on December that you have to come to! And, on April, I’ll be making the movie adaptation of Hamilton. They’re gonna need a choreographer, I’ll indicate you. You have to get better, okay? You have to be there, because it’ll be amazing.”

She smiled sadly, looking at me. Then, in the middle of all her own pain, I guess she decided to lie to comfort me:

“I’ll do my best.” She said.

I laid down on her shoulder again, and she hugged me.

“How’s life?” She asked. “Have you shot the kissing scene with Tom yet?”

“No.” I said, reluctantly letting her switch the conversation topic. “I’ll be Rapunzel in a live action version of Tangled.” I added, a little lighthearted, the news of the new movie I had been cast recently.

Beezus smiled, a little more authentically, for the first time that day.

“Jen, that’s amazing!” She said. “Didn’t you always wanted to do a Disney movie?”

“Yeah,” I smiled, “And this is even better, as I’ll get to actually be a princess.”

“You’re basically one already.” She said. “With Harry, and everything.”

I smiled. “Yeah… I guess. But not really.”

“Staying in the hospital with nothing to do really gives me a lot of time to catch up on useless stuff, like celebrity gossip magazines.” She started. “Is it true the palace is giving you princess lessons for when you get married?”

I laughed, and Beezus joined me, the sound breaking the tension around the room.

“I also read that Harry is jealous of you and Tom Hardy, and that you’re planning on ditching him to hook up with that hot Brazilian actor you were with in Master Chef.”

“Stop stalking me!” I joked, and she giggled.
“It’s hardly stalking when you’re the one who keeps popping up in every magazine Natalie brings me.” She said.

—

She wasn’t completely wrong. As October rolled along, it was hard to escape my face – even I failed as I tried. I gave a cover interview to Harper’s Bazaar magazine that they had decided to title ‘Jenifer Silva’s Year’. As much as things had begun to feel more normal than they had in years, I knew, even without the constant reminding of my management team, that that was no longer true.

For one thing, Richard was convinced I needed to hire a second bodyguard.

“There’s more paparazzi on you than ever before!” He kept saying. “They’re more viscous in London, it’ll make me calmer if you hire someone else to help Eddy!”

But that is where I drew the line. Eddy was perfectly fine taking care of me on his own, and when I was home, I also had Harry’s guys and all his protective measures, so I was okay with the protection I had.

The battles I had lost included an insurance policy on myself – which meant my face was apparently worth thirty-five million dollars -, and hiring a second personal assistant, Clara, a blonde young girl, fresh out of ‘Uni’, who would be helping me organize my life now that Monica was going on to bigger and better things.

Even before I moved to London, Monica had expressed her desire to work with PR instead, and after training for a while with Janine, she was confident she was ready to make the move. It was decided she, who was moving to England with me – bringing her son along -, would now be sort of Janine’s PR correspondent, making sure I did everything I had to do, in what came to my publicity, coordinating with Janine, who was still in Los Angeles with Richard.

Monica, after having struggled through a long-distance relationship herself, with Harry’s senior aide Thomas Hill, was excited, just as I was, to spend more time with him, and having a chance of seeing if the relationship would go as they wanted it to. Her son, Max, now a handsome sixteen year-old with his mother’s dark skin, and his father’s dark, round eyes, seemed excited to go to school in London, and pursue a college career in Oxford or Cambridge in the future.

Monica and Clara were restless in that late 2016, trying to keep as much out of my plate as they could, as I had too much going on already. I finally got the Dolce and Gabbana line done, which got the brand’s director’s seal of approval and went into production. We started preparing the promotion campaigns, which I would be modeling, as I kept on working on everything else.

We were starting to shoot the UFC fighting scenes, which needed more of Tom than me, though I was still needed for reaction shoots – one of the most boring and challenging parts of my job. As Monica kept coordinating my interviews, Clara kept bringing big boxes of products into the house, all gifts from brands that wanted to hire me for promotion.

Promoting stuff was one of the easiest ways celebrities made money, but I was careful not to do it with anything I didn’t particularly, actually liked. Not to mention Janine and Monica had very specific ideas of what I should and should not be associating myself with.

I generally posted pictures of makeup products and tech stuff to Instagram and Twitter – each picture earning me around a hundred and fifty thousand dollars -, and sometimes modeling things when the offer – and the product – was good.
Harry seemed constantly surprised at that part of my life. He would come home every day to another three or four boxes on the foyer, usually filled with clothes, shoes, makeup and sometimes even chocolate, though he wasn’t complaining, as company’s now started sending guys’ stuff as well, probably knowing we were living together. We didn’t necessarily have to accept promoting them, but we could keep whatever we wanted, so that worked out great to both of us.

“Jenifer is a big deal now!” Monica told him, grinning, after he had joked about more boxes one night. “Everything she associates herself with turns to gold, she’s a cultural phenomenon. It’s like she’s Midas!”

She wasn’t wrong. It was weird, but there was very little closed door to me anymore. My name was on top of every list, from ‘30 Celebrities Under 30’ to ‘Most Influential Actors’, to Forbes’ highest earning TV and movie actresses. I had actually topped both!

One of the perks, besides all the free stuff, was that I no longer had to audition as much as I used to. Directors now got in touch with Richard – instead of the other way around – trying to book me for movies, claiming they had seen me in this movie or that one, and knew they wanted me without the need for an audition. The ball was now on my court; now I was the one reading scripts and deciding if I wanted them or not, instead of having to charm directors and producers. In more than one occasion, these directors flew to London to take me out for lunch and try to convince me to do their movies – I’m talking big names, here, which made it so much more difficult to play it cool.

I was giving interviews left and right, and having to dodge Harry questions more than ever before, as British interviewers were keen on finding out if I liked their country and if I intended on making the move definite in the future.

That was the month I ended up signing another contract, for a movie to be shot during award season, January to March, which I knew would be completely exhausting, but couldn’t help accepting as it was one of the items on my – now very short - bucket list: a Disney movie!

“You mean you’re voicing an animated character?!” Harry asked, smiling, when I told him.

“Better!” I corrected. “I’m going to be Rapunzel in the live action adaptation of Tangled! I’m going to actually be a Disney princess!”

I wasn’t the only one progressing in my career. Alessa, whom I had loved like a sister since high school, had finally gotten her Doctorate from Sorbonne University. With her shiny doctorate, she received a handful of job offers, including many to teach literature, which is what she wanted to do. She had, however, flown back to New York, determined to get back together with her ex-boyfriend, Josh, whom she had dated throughout college. Unfortunately for her, she soon found out Josh had not only moved on, but was engaged.

She had been so sad about ‘missing her chance’, I had insisted she took one of the job offers she had been made, this one in London, of all places. She flew back to Europe, filled with a mixture of sadness over Josh and excitement over going back to teaching, the job where her heart truly laid, and over living in the same city as me after so many years. Her job was as a literature teacher in a preppy private school in Central London, and as she got used to her job, she started to leave the memory of Josh behind.

She had started having lunch with her every week, as well as my coffee dates with James and Beezus, to which I brought her, too, a few times. James described us, to her, as the ‘move for love’ club, claiming we had weekly meetings to talk about feminism.
I introduced her to Zoe Warren and Lizzy Pelly, and soon enough she was as much a part of my life as when we were sharing a dormitory room in NYU, except now we were both older, wiser and had more complicated problems, just like she dreamed of when we were being bullied in high school.

It was nice to have her, and Beezus, and James, because as much as I was really starting to enjoy my time with Zoe and Lizzy – and even Natasha who seemed to be making more of an effort to like me -, they were, after all, all in their thirties. They were all married and on a different part of their lives. I didn’t care, but it was nice to have Beezus, who was 23, and Alli, who was my age. It was nice having people who seemed to be just as lost as I was, instead of the put-together women who were married to Harry’s friends, who seemed to have it all figured out.

“I’ve been watching it, by the way.” Beezus added, on her hospital room during my visit that day in early October. “Master Chef, I mean. Did you know they’re transmitting it in the Food Network?”

“You get the Food Network here?”

“It’s a fancy hospital.” She shrugged. “The perks of dating an actor, I guess.”

In fact, I knew they were transmitting the Brazilian, all-star, charity edition of Master Chef I had shot when I was in Brazil during summer, because that was all I had been reading about in the media. People seemed to think I was ‘very cozy’ with Caio Castro, the Brazilian actor who was my love interest in my Brazilian movie, and who was on the show with me. As we had been friends for a while before the show, and as Brazilians are generally warm and touchy people, the rest of the world seemed to think that must mean we were in love, or something. BuzzFeed even made a post about the ‘26 Master Chef Moments That Made Us Ship Jenifer Silva With Brazilian Hottie Caio Castro’.

I groaned at the thought of Master Chef, making Beezus laugh. “I can’t even cook.” I said.

“Oh, I know!” She said, giggling, “You were almost eliminated in this week’s episode. About something called… farofa?”

“Oh, that’s right. I never got the hand of that. Mine burned.”

“It did,” She agreed, “But Caio cheered you up, which was really sweet.”

“Don’t say that near Harry.” I warned her. “He hasn’t been enjoying those rumors.”

“Got it.” She said. “I thought cooking was one of your biggest dreams, or whatever.”

“Well, I don’t actually have time, do I?” I asked. “We shot Master Chef for about a week in the summer, and the one time I managed to cook well, for the Queen, her fifteen stand-by cooks helped me through it. Living with Harry has helped realize just how much I actually suck at it.”

She gave me a sad look. “Does that mean you get eliminated?” She asked. “I was rooting for you.”

“Sorry, I do. You said the farofa episode was this week? Then I get out on the next one.”

“Damn it.” She let out, making me giggle. “You didn’t even make it five episodes.”

“I’m telling you, I suck.” I sighed. “Harry is uncomfortably good at it. He seems to be very pleased
to have found something at which he’s better than me.”

“What about gardening?” She asked. “Did you start your garden? I thought Kate was going to help.”

—

As my stomach started to - again – twist in pain, as it was doing a lot over the last few weeks, which I was shaking off as anxiety, I remembered the trip, just days before, to Prince Charles’ Gloucestershire home, Highgrove.

Kate drove me - and George -, as two security cars followed us nearby – one with Eddy and the other with Kate and George’s security detail. William had wanted to come, but he had meetings to attend and so he stayed behind, as well as Charlotte, who was with her nanny. Harry had wanted to come, trying to convince me to let him until the last minute I was in the house, but I had managed to make him stay by telling him he had to let me and his family sort out our differences by ourselves.

Highgrove House was a high ceiling, three stores rectangular, Georgian building, built in the eighteenth century and redesigned with neo-classical decoration in the eighties after Prince Charles bought the house and its estate, as well as a Duchy Home Farm nearby. The extensive garden, as Harry’s father proudly told me that afternoon, received more than thirty thousand visitors a year and was run according to his environmental principles, being the subject to several books and television programs over the years.

“We have solar panels in the farm,” he told me, expertly, as he walked me though the huge, colorful, beautiful Highgrove garden, “and the house is heated by a wood chip boiler. All the waste from the house is filtered through a natural sewage system.”

There were three gardens in Highgrove: a wild one, a formal one, and a kitchen one. He showed me to the Carpet Garden, the Southern Hemisphere Garden, the Walled Garden, the Autumn Walk, the Sundial Garden, and a Woodland Garden featuring two classical temples made from green oak and a stumpery. Every single part of it made me feel like I was in a surrealist movie of sorts.

When we stopped by the daisies near a round, cement fountain, which had a great view of the House ahead, I couldn’t keep the very honest praise in any longer, and made sure to tell him how unbelievable it was that he had done most of it from scratch.

He chuckled. “It has been a long journey since purchasing the house… a very small attempt to heal the appalling short-sighted damage done to the soil, the landscape and, in many ways, our own souls…”

I smiled, a little surprised. He had never been as nice to me as he was that afternoon.

“Some may not like it, others may scoff that it is not in the real world, or it is merely an expensive indulgence.” He went on. “Whatever the case, my enduring hope is that those who visit the garden may find something to inspire, excite, fascinate or soothe them.”

“I know I did.” I told him. “Though I also now find myself very intimidated.”

He smiled at me, the corners of his eyes falling slightly down as age pushed them.

“And why is that?”

“Well, I had this… idea in my head.” I told him, for some reason being honest, though even as I did
I could hear my anxiety telling me not to, “of the things I wanted to do once I was… living in a proper house, living a good, healthy relationship that I could see going somewhere that wasn’t just heartbreak.”

He nodded, but, sighing, I focused on the pretty colors of the roses in front.

“I wanted to live the kind of life where I could sleep at least eight hours a night, and cook every day, meals that didn’t have to come with a price tag in them, you know? I wanted to have a garden that I built myself, so I could see things rising up from zero. So I could see my own impact, in a way.” I shrugged. “It sounds stupid, I know.”

“My dear, I don’t think I have ever heard anything less stupid.” He told me.

I didn’t think I had ever heard him calling me ‘dear’.

“As humans that is, after all, what we all crave. To see that we are able to do change. It’s natural and understandable.”

“Well, turns out there’s a problem I didn’t count on.” I told him. “I’ve gotten so used to being good at things I tried, like acting, dancing, singing, that I didn’t account for the fact that I may be bad at these other things I wanted to do. Harry will be the first to tell you I’m really bad at cooking, and I’m afraid to find out gardening won’t be much different.”

“Oh, that doesn’t sound very fair.” He argued. “I still remember a very tasty dinner you prepared for us in Balmoral.”

I smiled, though I was afraid it was more of a grimace than anything else. “I think Her Majesty’s cooks deserve the credit for that more than me.” I admitted. “I mostly chopped stuff and told them what to do.”

He giggled, a sound that, this time, didn’t sound threatening or of mockery, but sweet and soft.

“Well, than I suppose it’s a good thing Harry is good at it.” He said, smiling. “This way he can cook for you, and you don’t have to.”

I smiled back. “That’s true, he is unsettling good at it.”

He laughed some more. “Very surprising, indeed. William is bad at it. I don’t think Harry has had much experience, either. He and William were always a little more sportsy, they didn’t seem very interested in gardening or anything that required patience. Though, I must say, Harry had a gift for painting and piano.”

“I’ve heard him play piano.” I told him, remembering the day Harry had played Hey There Delilah, accompanied by a very drunk Ed Sheeran during 2013’s 4th of July. “But I still can’t believe he actually painted. And he won’t tell me anything about it, either!”

“Oh, by all means, we have a painting of his here, I’ll show you later on, if you’d like!”

“I’d love to!”

“He was very accomplished.” He nodded, smiling. “He gave up once he grew up, didn’t like it enough, I think. His mother insisted he and William tried a few artsy things. She was a ballerina, you know.”

“I’ve heard.” I smiled, unsure how to respond to the mention of Harry’s late mother, whom I knew
was a cultural phenomenon in herself.

“But there was no convincing them once they hit a certain age.” He told me, shrugging. “Harry wanted more to do with motorcycles and, well…” He gave me a funny look. “…parties.”

I laughed, and he joined me.

“Used to invite his friends here, actually.” He pointed at the big House ahead, its vine covered brick walls shining beautifully under the Autumn sun. “They’d hide in the basement and drink, all kids’ stuff, but with the life we lead it was all very worrying.”

“I can imagine.” I told him. “I’m just an actress and it was already tough, for a future king the stakes must have been a lot higher.”

He nodded, appreciatively. “I couldn’t blame him, though. With the grim business with his mother, which kid wouldn’t… you know, lash out? Diana always said Harry was a lot freer than William. ‘You watch the things he’ll do’, she’d tell me.” He smiled, seemingly lost in thought. “I don’t think this is what she had in mind.” He joked, winking at me, and I laughed again.

“He turned out good, though.” I told him. “I haven’t met a better man in my life. You did a good job, sir.”

Charles nodded, slowly, crouching down to check for poison ivy amongst the daisies nearby. I wondered if this had anything to do with what Harry had told me once, about how in his world people were used to bottling down their feelings instead of talking about them, but I felt the need to defend Harry, who was incredible and always ended up with the ‘party prince’ reputation.

“Sometimes I think he and his brother turned out much better than I deserved.” Charles added, casually, though his voice sounded a lot rougher now.

“Well, then there’s one thing we have in common. I don’t usually feel like I deserve him, either.”

Though I had tried to make it sound like a laid-back joke, even I couldn’t avoid the truth in my own words.

The Prince of Wales stood up, still avoiding my eyes, and said:

“You know what I think he deserves?” He asked, and I had a feeling whatever that was, it wasn’t me. Charles’ eyes found me. “Whatever he wants.”

“Well, look at that,” I smiled, after a long pause, “we’re finding more and more things we have in common, sir. I think so, too.”

Charles gave me a sad smile. “I could never give him most of what he wanted… you know, freedom, privacy… but if I could, I would.”

I nodded, now staring at my own shoes, knowing that by being with me, Harry got the exact opposite: notoriety. More paparazzi attention. More fame.

“I would too.” I said, softly.

“Would you?” He asked, and something in his overly concerned tone made me look up. He had never sounded like more of a father. “Because, you see, I can think of something he wants that you can give him.” He stared. “He wants you.”
I couldn’t control the sad smile on my lips as I stared around at the pretty flowers my boyfriend’s father had planted himself, and I couldn’t control the painful knot on my stomach, either.

Or my witty response, apparently.

“I thought you didn’t approve.” I told him, trying to make it sound like a joke.

“I don’t.” He shrugged, smiling. “But I have long realized that matters very little to my sons. I didn’t approve of Catherine, either, at first, you know?”

I gave him a surprised glance, and he giggled, slightly.

“Oh, yes, she turned out to be perfect.” He nodded. “But I’m a father, Miss Silva, I very rarely will think anything is good enough for my boys.”

With a surprising wave of affection to the white-haired man in front of me, I started to realize his problem with me was very similar to Natasha’s.

“Do you love him?” He asked, suddenly, while I was still lost in thought after a long, silent pause. Startled, I barely had time to think about an answer before it came out of my lips.

“More than I probably should.” I told him. “More than he probably knows.”

He nodded again, looking at the gardening gloves on his hands, dirty with mud, but he was smiling now.

“My, my…” He sighed, “Whoever said love was easy was clearly privileged, huh?” I sniffled as I giggled, and he gave me his arm, which, feeling surprised, I took. “Let us walk back into the house, Camila and Catherine must be waiting for us to have tea. And I will show you that painting, too. Harry will be livid you saw it, it shall be wonderful!”

He laughed, and I joined, amused at how mischievous he looked.

“Thanks for showing me your garden.” I told him. “It is gorgeous.”

“You are very welcome. I’ll give you some pointers in how to get yours started, and soon enough that little patch of earth on your apartment will be just as colorful.” He smiled as he petted my hand on his arm, gently.

“Thank you, sir.” I told him, honestly feeling excited about the little piece of earth I could see my dreams about to grow on.

He smiled once more, as we made our way to the house, before adding, to my great surprise: “Call me Charles, dear.”

—

“You’re on first-name basis with the future king?!” Beezus asked, astonished, as I told her about my gardening lessons with Harry’s father.

“I’m just as surprised as you are.” I told her. “I thought he hated me. I keep forgetting no one judges as much as people who love.”

Beezus sighed. “…That was deep.” I giggled. “What about Harry’s painting? Is it good?”
I gave her a mischievous grin before answering. “I was so excited about it that his dad gave it to me.” She seemed impressed. “It’s quite good. It’s a big painting of the Highgrove garden. It’s not professional, or anything, but it’s very realistic. You wouldn’t be able to tell he did it as a teenager. And I certainly couldn’t do anything better…”

“He gave it to you?” She laughed, the sound warming my heart a little. “What did Harry think of that?!”

“He came home and I had hung it right in front of my Oscar picture.” I said, making her laugh even more. “He still seems confused. He doesn’t know if he should be happy his father seems to like me more now, or mad about how dangerous this connections is.”

She sighed. “What about Camila? Was she nice when you went back to the house for tea?”

I sighed. “…ish. I don’t drink tea, so I just asked for coffee instead, which she seems to have taken as a personal offense, though she has been better at hiding her displeasure about me.”

Beezus shifted in bed, pulling her oxygen mask off. “Jenifer, look at me.” She asked, and I raised my head again to do so. “Life is short and you’ve earned the right to be happy. Tell Camila to go fuck herself.”

I laughed, and let my head fall back on her shoulder as I did.

Suddenly, my loud laughter became an unwanted hiccup as I realized I was crying.

I hugged Beezus tighter, struggling to bottle it in.

“Hey,” she said, soft, caressing my arms with her warm hands as she hugged me, “it’ll be alright. It’ll be alright, I promise.”

I knew that wasn’t a promise she could keep, and I hated the fact she was the one contemplating her own mortality, not knowing how long she still had, and I was the one who needed comforting. I hated myself and my own weakness so much the knot on my stomach grew heavier and more painful than before.

I sat up on the bed, drying my cheeks with my hands, and looked back at her.

“You have to get better.” I told her. “This is an order from your fairy godmother, Beatrice, you have to get better.”

She gave me another sad smile. “…I’m trying.”

I nodded, and squeezed her hand tightly before jumping to my feet.

“I’m sorry, I have to go. I have a meeting in ten minutes and about ten emails to answer before my lunch time it’s over and I have to go back to set.” I told her, apologetically.

“Don’t worry about it.” She smiled. “Go save the world, Super Jen.”

I rolled my still watery eyes at my tabloid nickname, and she giggled, the sound muffled under the oxygen mask covering her mouth and nose.

“I’ll be back Saturday.” I promised. “With James and coffee from Kaffine, so we can have our weekly ‘move for love’ meeting here, instead.”

She smiled. “I can’t wait.” And I left, wishing I was really a superhero, and that I could save her
The knot on my stomach didn’t disappear for another few weeks.

I went to see Beezus every Saturday, as I had promised, and I would sit with her and James and laugh as we had gotten so used to, almost being able to forget why we were all there.

Harry and Richard took to care for Kit, forcing him to leave the hospital as much as they could, taking him out to unwind and drink, something he didn’t agree to until we said he was driving Beezus mad with all his smothering – which wasn’t, of course, true.

I had grown to hugging Harry tightly every night as we fell asleep, remembering how Beezus had told me I had earned a right to be happy, and to remember how short life was.

Harry had been happy that his father seemed to be less aggressive towards me now – Charles had even come back to see us once more, on a weekend, to help me get the garden started.

I hugged Harry every night, memorizing his smell, his heartbeat serving as my lullaby, trying to bottle in the stress of everything I still had to get done. Every decision I still had to make, all the scenes still left to shoot, all the movies still left to do, contracts to go through, scripts to memorize and relevance to keep up…

Finally, it was like the anxiety knot on my stomach wouldn’t even let me breathe anymore, and I woke up in the middle of the night feeling my entire body shiver in cold sweat.

Knowing, deep down in my gut, that something was wrong, I shook Harry awake, and had time to do little less than turning to the floor by the bed before I started to puke blood.

“Jenifer?!” Harry’s drowsy voice was loud and worried as he made his way around the mattress. He turned on the lamp by my side, and we saw the deep red of blood that I seemed to be unable to stop allowing to come out of my mouth. “Jenifer!”

I stood up, shakily, going to the bathroom. Somewhere in my brain, through all the confusion and worry, I told myself I should not be puking in my clear, fur rug.

I tinted the white, marble sink with red as I puked more, unsure if I should focus on the sickening feeling in my throat, the metallic taste in my mouth, or the horrible pain in my stomach. I heard Harry talking to the boys through the tablet near the door, asking for help, before I felt my legs weak and every sound disappearing.

Everything disappeared… and, then, there was just nothingness.

Chapter End Notes

WOAH. I know, I know. I’m a jerk. What a fucking cliffhanger. But don’t worry! Everything shall be explained in the next chapter… which brings the start of big changes for J and Harry! I’m so excited, we’re finally entering the most exciting bits of the story! I can’t wait to talk about it! Thanks for reading, let me know what you think!
Super Jen

Chapter Summary

Jen recovers from a scare and has to make tough choices.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When I woke up in the hospital, the metallic taste of blood was the only thing that I seemed to understand. I could feel my own face frowning as I raised up my head, my eyes getting used to the bright-lit, grayish white room that smelled of alcohol and cleaning products.

“Good afternoon.” I heard.

I supported myself on my elbows to look around, finding Beezus on a wheelchair beside my bed.

My eyes took everything in: the hospital gown I was wearing, the sharp pain in my gut, and the plastic tube around my face, which forced me down when I tried to sit up.

“Oh, yeah, careful. You have a cannula on.” Beezus said. “Takes a while to get used to it. Does yours tickle? Mine tickled a lot at first.”

I touched the little plastic straw that went into my nose and, sure enough, felt the warm oxygen being pumped up, tickling my skin as it did.

“No, I wouldn’t take it out if I were you.” Beezus warned, when I tried to pull the uncomfortable cannula out. “And that’s a needle, you shouldn’t take that out either!”

She wheeled herself closer to my bed when I started to tug on the white adhesive tape on my left forearm, quickly holding my hand in place so I’d stop.

“It’s like you’ve never been in a hospital before. Stop trying to pull stuff out of your body.”

I wanted to say something; hi. Hello. What are you doing here? What am I doing here? But all I could do was stare around at my surroundings in utter confusion.

After I had calmed down a little, she freed my hands. “You look terrible.” Beezus added. Thanks, I wanted to reply, sarcastic, but still nothing came out. “Sorry, did I sound excited? I didn’t mean to. It’s just that I very rarely get to feel like the prettiest of us.”

I tried to giggle, but the metallic taste startled me again and I just coughed. Beezus wheeled herself back to a mini fridge near a small chest and got me water and an empty cup.

I spit the water from my mouth to the cup, trying desperately to clean my mouth of the taste of blood, and then drank the rest of it without stopping for breath.

“Wha-“ I cleaned my throat, for a long moment, finding it weird how rough my voice had sounded. “What happened?”
Beezus shrugged. “All I know is this morning Kit told me you had been admitted.”

“I’m in London General?!” I asked, finally understanding how she could be there.

She nodded, and looked around. “Great room, too. Perks of dating a prince, I guess.”

I sighed heavily, feeling completely exhausted. The muscles on my gut were hurting just as much as my throat.

“I know you wanted to keep me company, Jenifer,” Beezus went on, on a light tone, “but this is a bit much, don’t you think?”

I tried to giggle again, and this time I felt it came out better.

The door opened, and a petit, bald doctor led the way in, being followed close behind by Harry and Monica.

“Hey.” Harry smiled, looking as shaky as I felt. “How are you?”

I held onto him, strongly, his presence calming the confusion inside of me, as he sat on my bed. He tugged a string of hair behind my ear, and his warm palm cupped my face as he gave me a reassuring smile.

“Jen, how are you feeling?”

I didn’t know how to answer to his question, so I just leaned in and rested my head on his shoulder. His arms wrapped around me, quickly, and I let out a deep breath inside the hug.

“Better now.” I said, honest, closing my eyes and breathing his smell.

“Excuse me, sir.” The doctor asked, as he made his way closer, Harry stepped away, but remained holding my hand as the doctor examined me. “Alright,” he said, putting away his stethoscope after a few minutes, “Now, Jenifer, can I call you Jenifer?” I nodded, and he took out a clipboard and a pen, “your friend Monica tells me you were diagnosed with an ulcer a few years ago, do you remember that?”

I nodded, vaguely remembering the doctor’s appointment right after the award season in 2014.

I heard Harry sigh, frustrated. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

I eyed him with confusion. “Oh, I’m sorry, I didn’t know giving you my medical history was a prerequisite of living with you.”

Beezus laughed, and the doctor looked at her. “Miss Quin, what are you doing here?”

She looked regretful. “I… I’m her friend.” The doctor raised his eyebrows at her. “What? I can be Kit Harington’s girlfriend, but friends with Jenifer Silva and Prince Harry is where you draw the line?!”

This time I laughed, which turned into a cough again. The doctor forgot Beezus and looked back at me.

“And do you remember your doctor in California advising you to stop ingesting things that may contribute to a buildup of stomach acids?” He gave me a sharp look over his glasses. “Like coffee. And alcohol.”
I sighed. “I don’t know, that was such a long time ago.”

Monica scorned. “Yes, she remembers it.” She said. “The doctor said overindulgence in alcohol and caffeine, as well as psychological stress, was more than likely the causes of her ulcer.”

“Why didn’t you do what the doctor said?” Harry asked, looking angry.

I gave him a sort of obvious look. “He told me to cut off coffee and alcohol!” I said, as if no more explanation was necessary. “That’s like, half of my diet!”

“Yep, that was the argument then.” Monica agreed, still looking sour.

“Jenifer, you have an ulcer!” Harry said, “You can’t drink coffee or alcohol if you have an ulcer! You could have kept it under control, but it burst last night. You were vomiting blood!”

“Well…” I sighed, starting to remember the sharp pains in my stomach I had been trying to ignore over the previous weeks. “Did you fix it?” I asked the doctor.

He raised his eyebrows at me. “If you mean I put you through an extensive, exhaustive, expensive, unnecessary gastrointestinal open surgery, then yes, young lady, I fixed it.”

“Well, good.” I said. “Problem solved. Can I go home?”

Monica, the doctor and Harry exchanged exasperated glances. Beezus looked amused.

“You had surgery!” The doctor squealed. “We suctioned out all of the content in your stomach! You have stitches!”

“No, you can’t go home.” Harry told me. “You have to stay to recuperate.”

“How long?” I asked.

“At least ten days!” The doctor squealed again, in his harsh, high pitched voiced.

“Ten days!” I shouted, looking at Monica. “I can’t stay here for ten days! I have a job!”

“You should have thought of that before you decided to disobey your doctor’s orders!” Harry said, and I was feeling less affectionate towards him by the second.

“In any case, I’ll give you those orders again!” The doctor went on. “You will follow a liquid diet for the first three days here, then we’ll introduce soft foods, and you may start solid foods again in a week.” He paused, to give me sharp look, making sure I was paying attention. “And no coffee or alcohol!”

My mouth dropped. “For how long?!”

“Forever!” Monica told me, in a tone that made me think of my mother.

“What?!”

—

For Monica, Harry, the doctor, as well as Richard, Janine and my parents – who arrived in London the next day -, it didn’t matter that I was twenty-six years-old. They didn’t care that I was the first Latin American actress to win an Oscar in the leading actress category or that I was the youngest person ever to win all four biggest awards of the Entertainment Industry. All they seemed to care
about was my lifestyle choices, which were, apparently, all completely wrong.

I was told I would have to cut out alcohol and coffee – completely – for at least the first several months after the surgery. I tried to tell them I didn’t even drink that much, but they just laughed at me.

“Jenifer drinks three venti cups of coffee a day!” Monica told the doctor.

“Snitch.” I mumbled, and then looked at the doctor, defensively. “I work long hours! I have a tough job, I have to stay awake!”

“Normal people don’t have to add a shot of vodka to their coffee every morning in order to get through the day, Jenifer.” She replied, sharply. “Oh, yeah. I noticed!”

“How long have you been doing that?” The doctor asked.

I sighed, rolling my eyes. “It’s not a big deal…”

“Since the first award season.” Monica told him. “Early 2014. I thought it was just because it was a tough time, and she and Harry had broken up, but she never stopped it.”

I avoided Harry’s glance, who was leaning against the wall nearby, allowing my parents and the Artchets to stay close to me.

“I work ten hours a day, when I have luck!” I shouted. “Normally, it’s twelve or fourteen hours! And even during breaks, I’m designing and answering emails and calls, and overlooking final cuts of scenes or memorizing lines! I can’t do everything I need with the little sleep I get!”

“Then you must start to do less things.” The doctor said, in a definite tone, looking at the adults around.

Richard, in his black suit and tie ensemble, holding his smartphone in his hand and sporting a Bluetooth earpiece, and Janine, in a purple power suit, typing away in a table, looked like they had just stepped out of their own offices in Los Angeles, though I knew the fifteen hour flight couldn’t have been comfortable.

My parents, in jeans and wool jumpers, my mother wearing boots, looked a lot more like people who had been traveling and had just arrived at a country they didn’t quite understand – I knew they were probably freezing in the British October weather.

“Oh top of this girl’s terrible dietary habits,” the doctor told them, and I resented his tone when he had said ‘this girl’, “I can tell she has been working herself up too hard. Someone this young should not be getting ulcers, and I can only shake it up to stress.”

My mother sighed, giving my dad a worried glance. “I keep telling you she’s working too much.”

“Yes, she needs to slow down!” He agreed, now glancing angrily over at Richard and Janine.

“Her acting appointments are very natural and healthy.” He told them, defensively. “The problem is that she’s not only an actress, is she?!”

He now looked at me, raising his eyebrows.

“What is that supposed to mean?!”

“Jenifer, you have an acting career, which in itself is already too much,” Janine started, “and on top
of that you’re working for the U.N., and managing your company in Brazil, also your charity in Brazil, and you have the partnership with Dolce and Gabbana and all the promoting on social media.”

“And she just wrote a book!” Monica added, before looking at me. “You have to slow down!”

“I can’t slow down!” I argued. “All of these things need me.”

“You have a business manager.” My father reminded me. “And we live in Brazil, and we are doing just fine without you having to be so involved in all of the decisions. It’s always going to be your company, parakeet, but it’s a lot of work and you can’t do all of it on top of working in movies too!”

“You have to choose.” My mother agreed. “If you wanna work on the company you can move back home and focus on it. But if you wanna be an actress you have to accept that the company is now too big for you to keep making the decisions during your breaks!”

“But I wanna be involved!” I told them. “I need to know things are going well and if they aren’t, I need to know what I can do to fix it!”

“You are not Super Jen.” Monica told me. “You can’t do everything.”

“Watch me!” I replied, childishly, avoiding the feeling of being wrong in the pit of my stomach.

“Jenny,” my father started, “you don’t even like being a business woman. You like that you succeeded and that you built something we can all rely on, but your heart isn’t in it. Or is it?”

I sighed.

“You can’t force me to choose!” I told them, stubbornly.

“You’re right.” Harry spoke for the first time, making all of us look at him. “They can’t… So I guess you have a third option.” He raised his eyes to look at me, and I hated the frustration in them. “You can keep doing things the way you have been, and kill yourself.”

I avoided his eyes, looking at my hands on my lap.

“Jenny,” my mother started, walking towards me. “I know you’ve always felt like you needed to make sure we would have enough to go on… you know, enough money. After all those years struggling, it was when you started working, after all, that things got better for all of us. But you don’t have to do that anymore. No, listen, you don’t. Your brother has a job, and he’s taking care of the marketing for the company. And your father is dealing with personnel, and I’m dealing with the charity. And we have enough money saved up to last us a lifetime.” She squeezed my hand. “You don’t have to keep on taking care of us so desperately. It’s time to take care of yourself.”

“Money is not all there is, parakeet.” My dad added. “All your work is useless if you don’t have your health to enjoy it.”

There was a long pause, during which I let their words sink in.

“What else could we cut back?” Janine asked, looking back at Monica.

“Well, the Dolce and Gabbana line is ready.” She replied, “We’re prepping for promotion now, for the line and for Heathers.”
“Heathers isn’t until December.” Clara added. She had been standing in the back, looking very guilty about grilling her boss when she was so new to this whole dynamic. “And I think we could probably push the Dolce and Gabbana promo for then, too, if we argue it’ll give them more publicity to do it during award season.”

Janine looked at her, approvingly. “I’ll email them.” She said, and turned on her heels to walk towards the wall as she typed away on her tablet. “And you,” she looked at Monica, “make sure we delay the Vogue cover story until November, to give her time to recuperate.”

Monica nodded, and started typing on her phone too, joining Clara and giving her new instructions.

Richard looked at me. “I have some new scripts for you to go through,” he started, “but I’ll let the directors know you won’t be making any decisions until early next year.”

“They’ll give me up!” I argued.

Richard shot me an ironic glance. “Don’t be stupid. You’re Jenifer Silva, they’ll wait for you if they know what’s good for them.”

“Not to mention these new proposals aren’t for until late next year,” Janine added, without bothering to look up from her tablet. “So you have time.”

I hesitated, curiosity taking over me. “…what are they?”

Richard grinned. “No, no, no… No more work until you’re all better.”

I pretended I didn’t care to know, but then Richard mumbled: “But you’re going to freak out when you hear it…”

I groaned, loudly, throwing my head back in my pillows.

“Fine!” I said, waving my hands in the air frantically. “I’ll step away from the Company.”

My mother smiled, seeming utterly relieved, and Janine and Richard gave me appreciative nods.

“But I’ll still want quarterly reports!” I told them, as my mother gave me bone crushing hug.

__

A few hours later, Harry was sitting in the armchair near me revising the notes Edward had made for him in a speech he’d have to give soon enough.

I turned off my phone, tired of reading the fan replies of ‘get well soon!’s I had been sent, and looked at him, as I had probably fifty times in the past minute alone.

I couldn’t shake off the look he had given me when the doctor told me about the ulcer, and again when my parents had told me I had to choose.

“You’re mad at me.” I said, finally, staring at the shape of my legs under the blankets.

I heard his silence, then his long, exhausted sigh. “No.”

“Deal.” I said and, knowing he’d need more to understand me, went on. “We made a deal that you’d always tell me what you were feeling or thinking.” I looked at him. “I’m calling deal, Harry. Tell me the truth.”
He nodded, closing his laptop, and stood up. “Alright.” He said, resolute. “Fine, Jen. I am mad. Of course I’m mad. How can you have done this to yourself?!”

“It’s not like I planned it!”

“No, but you might as well.”

“You can’t be serious!”

“Jenifer, you were given very simple instructions to recuperate and you knowingly disobeyed them simply because you wanted!”

“It was a hard time!” I said, exasperated. “I was barely sleeping, I had ten interviews a day, then a fitting and a ceremony at night, and my whole future hanging in the balance!”

“That’s not an excuse!” he replied and it was his calm tone, more than his words, that shut me up. He approached, sitting in the bed next to me. “Jenifer, you could have died. Do you have any idea how scary that was?”

I looked down, avoiding his blue eyes. “It was scary to me too, but-“

“You want me to tell you what I’m feeling?” He interrupted. “Here it is. I love you. I’m going against my better judgment, my family’s expectations, and everything the world thinks of me trying to wreck my brain to find a way to be with you, and you can’t even give up coffee and vodka to be alive long enough for me to manage it?!“

I was speechless. Shocked, as I realized why he was so angry, I felt ashamed.

“It was a long time ago.” I told him, my voice coming out small. “We weren’t even together.”

“We are now.” He said, staring at me intently, and I had never felt more like a child. He had never looked more adult as he guilt me into facing the ridiculous, immature decisions that had lent me in a hospital bed.

I let a moment pass, and then moved in the mattress to sit nearer him. I rested my head on his shoulder again, and his arms closed around me.

“Please,” he begged, “don’t make me ever have to try and imagine my life without you again.”

With love rushing through me, I hugged him tightly.

“I won’t.” I vowed. “It was a long time ago. My life was such a mess. I’m better now.”

He leaned back to look at me. “You heard Richard earlier. You’re just as huge now. How do I know you won’t get back into your old habits at the first sign of stress?!”

I sighed, allowing his turquoise eyes to pierce into mine unashamed.

“Because there’s a big difference between who I was then and who I am now.” I told him. “I have you now.”

—

It was decided that we would promote my business manager, Luca Montero, who had been working with me for years, to CEO of Silva Co., and so I would only receive quarterly reports and be involved in the big picture decisions when they involved too many changes. I promised my
parents I would only focus on the post production of You Will Come Back To Me – my Brazilian movie – on weekends, to focus my energy on Broken during the week and have more time for myself. I was also forced to promise I would cut back on caffeine and alcohol, which was partly because Harry had already told me he threw up all of it that we had at home, and, with that, I was officially on road to recovery.

Richard and Janine left the country after three days; they stayed in Richard’s apartment and used their time to meet with the directors, producers and studio executives for Broken, to explain the situation and work out a way to give me time off to recuperate that wouldn’t delay the schedule too much.

Tom, the director, Laura, and a handful of cast-members came to see me and explained that they were pulling forward the Tom scenes, which I wasn’t a part of, so that they didn’t lose money with my absence. After I apologized a good three times, Laura finally gave me a sarcastic look and said:

“Yes, well, this is clearly your fault so we’re all livid with you.”

My parents stayed in our apartment with Harry, which I was highly nervous about.

“The first time they see our place and I’m not even there!” I exasperated, to Harry, as he explained he had placed them in the bigger guest bedroom.

“Your mother loved that picture of you on the hallway.” He told me, grinning, and I groaned, loudly, making him giggle.

—

After my parents were gone, Harry kept coming to stay with me early most days, and staying until late, working from his phone and computer to keep me company – except on the few afternoons he had to work.

There was a small number of paparazzi stalking the hospital doors during visitation hours after Beezus had been admitted, to get pictures of Kit and their friends – such as Richard, Jenna, Natalie Dormer and even Harry and me. Since they hadn’t been there in the middle of the night when I was brought in, they didn’t know I had been admitted until Monica released a statement informing the press that I had been through surgery.

After that, as they realized Harry would be coming around much often, it was like every paparazzi in the country was camping outside the hospital twenty-four-seven.

Alli came to see me most days after six, when she was out of work. Harry would go off home to shower and eat something and to give us some time alone. She’d tell me about adapting to the country – she had the same issues as I did with driving, the accents and television – and I’d tell her about how much I wanted a drink.

Lizzy and Guy came to see me one night, bringing a box of artisanal tea bags.

“So you can start drinking tea now that you have to stop drinking coffee.” Lizzy justified, and I tried to give her a polite smile.

Zoe and Jake came the night after that, and they had brought Natasha with them, who seemed to think my misfortunes were all the punishment I deserved, and suddenly started being a lot nicer.

Then, one afternoon as I was talking to Alli about her brat students who didn’t seem to care about her classes, George Percy strode in, on his handsomely fitted gray suit and blonde hair, smiling at
me through his lashes, his brown eyes kind and apologetic at the same time.

“Melissa is coming.” He told me, handing a bouquet of hibiscuses, “She’s just outside. We wanted to wish you a speedy recovery.”

I smiled, a bit surprised. Though they had been nicer to me than I had expected on the past few weeks, I hadn’t expected them to come see me in the hospital.

“You didn’t have to.” I told him, honest.

“Well,” he grinned, “I think Mel feels bad about Thomas. She thinks is her fault he’s been a bit of a jerk to you. And me, well, I work around the corner from here, it’s no trouble.”

“Hi.” We looked over, and I realized I had completely forgotten Alessa was there. She stood up from her armchair to smile at him with her perfectly white teeth, “Alessa McKenna.”

George smiled back, crossing the room to give her a warm handshake. It was the first time I saw Alli’s eyes shining ever since she had moved to England – ever since the Josh heartbreak -, and I started wondering what her kids with George Percy would look like when they inevitably got married.

—

“Alright, so you wanna start by English Breakfast.” Beezus was telling me, leaving her wheelchair with two cups with fuming hot water to sit on the sofa next to me, where I was looking through Lizzy’s artisanal tea box.

“Why?” I asked, staring at the little tea bag suspiciously.

“It’s the one with most caffeine on it without actually being coffee.” She explained, handing me a cup.

As I looked at it motionless, pouting, Beezus gave a little sight before taking the cup from me.

“You put the baggy end on the water,” she did so, didactically, “and pull it in and out so the flavor will take, see?” She handed me the cup again. The smell wasn’t so bad, and the warmth of the cup on my hand made me think of coffee. “Now you can take it black, or with milk. I prefer milk, but I guess you should try both.”

Beezus struggled not to laugh when I frowned in frustration after drinking the dark tea. She poured some milk on it, and I tried again.

“It’s not coffee.” I told the cup, childishly, though it tasted less bad with milk.

“You just have to get used to it.” She told me.

We let a few minutes pass, as I tried, as she said, get used to tea.

“How have you been feeling?” I asked.

She gave me a sad smile, and shrugged. I nodded, somehow understanding exactly what she meant.

“You?” She asked back.

I sighed, looking at my teacup. “I hate tea.”
She giggled. “I mean about cutting back work.”

“Oh,” I looked at her. “I don’t know. It’s strange… in a way, I kind of like it.”

“Really?” She raised her eyebrows at me. “I barely know who Jenifer Silva is without impossible amounts of work and alcohol.”

“That makes two of us.” I smiled. “But, it’s funny, you know? It’s like, just making the decision of stepping away from the company already makes me feel much… calmer. I hadn’t even noticed the toll it was taking on me to try and juggle everything.” She nodded. “I worry I’m enjoying this… break a little much. I mean, I have a big cut and stitches on my stomach, and I’ve been eating barely anything other than mashed potatoes for days, but I feel like I’m on vacation.”

She giggled, shaking her head. “You’re weird…” I looked confused, and she went on. “Well… sure, it’s not the same… but, I don’t know… I can’t stop thinking about work.” Her eyes drifted into the rug, with a sad shine flickering through them. “I can’t stop thinking about dancing. It’s like my body aches just of thinking about it. I can still feel how my muscles stretched when I danced, and I miss it so much I almost cry.”

For a moment of so, I wondered why that meant I was weird. But then, I realized it: Beezus loved her job so much that even though she didn’t know how long she still have to live, and even though I’m sure her family, friends and Kit filled her mind with worry and pain, her job was still filling her mind with… well, saudade.

And here I stood, just days away from going back to mine and wishing I had more time to lay on a bed all day and just talk to her about tea.

Should I be missing my job more?

“I mean, I know I have to go back as soon as possible.” I told her, defensively. “The amount of money the studio will lose if they have to delay the schedule it’s unimaginable. Not to mention is just unprofessional.”

“That’s not missing work, is it?” She asked, carefully. “That’s just…” She shrugged. “Hating the idea that people might think you’re irresponsible.”

I let her words sink in, realizing, with a knot on my throat, she probably had a point.

—

Life in the hospital with Beezus was almost fun. She wheeled herself to my room almost every morning, and got one of the nurses to find me my own wheelchair so we could explore together. I noticed, with preoccupation, that though she seemed to know what she was doing, wheeling herself around seemed like a big effort to her. She barely got through most ramps, and we had to stop for her to catch her breath all the time.

She showed me to the nurses offices, where she introduced me to the ones she liked most, whom all asked to take selfies with us, and were so kind I didn’t even mind. She took me to the cafeteria, where a nice lady got us free muffins, and then to the private gardens, where only patients could go, where we’d sit during the afternoon to talk and enjoy the sunlight.

I started to see Beezus as a bit of a chameleon: when we had gone to Abu Dhabi, her Australian olive skin had quickly gotten a light tan, making her look like she belonged to the beach. During our coffee dates in Kaffine during the weeks before she was hospitalized, I had noticed her skin was whiter, paler, and though I didn’t know if that was due to the London weather or her sickness,
I realized she blended in perfectly well with the Europeans around.

Here, in a hospital, she did the same. The wheelchair, the cannula, the IV line, the ramps and nurses and the hospital gown… somehow, it was like it all was an extension of her. Like it suited her in a weird way. She looked… pretty. As if she was in her element. As if she belonged there, in control and bravely facing her new environment.

She looked… fine. I knew she was weaker every day. But still, I couldn’t help but look at her and think she didn’t look like she needed anyone’s help anymore. As her ‘fairy godmother’, it made me feel both a little proud of how far she had come, of how confident she looked even despite the circumstances, and also excruciatingly sad. Both because I thought she didn’t need me anymore, and because I couldn’t help but wonder if it was a sense of acceptance that made her look that way. As if she had accepted that that was the place where she would live her last days.

As fast as those thoughts reached my mind every time, I always pushed them out. I couldn’t take them. I couldn’t take the idea that this girl that had made her way into my life so smoothly could one day – soon – disappear. I simply didn’t want to have to imagine my life without her in it.

Finally, after I had been in the hospital for a whole week, the doctor accepted to let me go finish my remaining recovery time at home.

“At least another three days on bed rest!” He squealed, warningly, as he signed my release forms.

I hugged Beezus goodbye, vowing to come back to see her next Saturday, put on the clothes Clara had brought me, including a big pair of sunglasses, and braced myself to face the sea of paparazzi outside.

After we had left them behind, I let out a long, deep breath, and laid my head back in the car seat, instantly filling with exhaustion.

I had never felt more at home in our penthouse in the Wellington Court Road building as I did walking in after my stay in the hospital. The mirror surfaces in the walls and ceilings, my Brazilian paintings, white couches, glass pianoforte and marble doors felt familiar and looked as nice and cozy as I had left them, in a hurry, a week before.

Vodka came running towards me, her high-pitched barks making me feel truly at home, and I picked her up and cuddled her as Eddy took my bag to the master bedroom. Even my own picture in the hall felt less defiant and looked funnier as I walked pass it, Harry following close behind.

The minibar in the sitting room had vanished, as I knew the wine in the cellar in the kitchen had too, as well as every trace of coffee in the house. I pushed that thought to the back of my mind as I hugged my dog closely on my arms.

“Clara has been feeding Vodka.” Harry told me, as I walked into our bedroom to the sight of a much darker room. I eyed him questioningly. “Oh, right. Looks different without the rug, doesn’t it? Clara took it to be cleaned. She says they’re bringing it back tomorrow.”

I nodded. Of course. The rug was probably ruined with blood from the night my ulcer had burst.

Harry was telling me about work as I unpacked. He wanted to do it, and I had to insist I could. I started putting my dirty clothes in the laundry bin and placing the others, cleaned, in their place.
“The doctor said you can eat solid foods now.” Harry went on. “But I think we should start slowly. Though I won’t make mashed potatoes, don’t worry, I know you can’t even see it anymore.”

As I placed my deodorant and moisturizer on a shelf, I eyed the back of the bag to get the last item there: a pack of pads. I placed them in their place noticing, with confusion, it was closed.

“So I’m torn between pasta or risotto.” Harry was saying, from outside the closet. “Though I think risotto will be better on your stomach for now.”

I left the pads on their shelf and grabbed my phone, opening the app I used to write down my periods.

I knew if Clara had put the pads on the bag she took for me in the hospital after I had been admitted, it was because she knew I would need it. But, then, why didn’t I see the need to use them?

“So, you can choose.” Harry’s voice became clearer as he walked into the closet with a casual smile on his lips. “Pasta or risotto. What do you think?” I raised my eyes to look at him. His smile faded when he saw the look on my face. “…what?!”

The app on my phone had a notification on it: your period is thirteen days late.

Harry was still staring at me, knowing something was wrong. I wondered if I was a good enough actress to keep this from him.

I wondered how I could possibly tell him that there was a chance I could be pregnant.

Chapter End Notes

WOAH. AGAIN. I KNOW. Another one! I’m sorry! But this friday you’ll know how this ends! What are your guesses?! Does Jen freak out?! DOES HARRY PROPOSE?! WILL THEY MAKE IT THROUGH THIS?! I’M SO EXCITED! Let me know if you liked it?!

I can’t tell you, but I just wrote the most exciting part of the story so far last night!!! I cant wait for you to see it!!!! Thanks for reading!
Harry's Plan

Chapter Summary

Jen and Harry deal with some very real possibilities.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Okay. So. Don’t freak out.”

Though it looked like I was talking to Harry, I knew the words were actually directed towards myself.

“Why would I freak out?” He asked, his eyes going between my face to the phone in my hands.

I felt my mouth open and close a number of times as I struggled to say it aloud.

I didn’t want to say it aloud, I barely wanted to think it. But I knew, just as I knew there was no pretending that everything was fine, that Harry needed to know. One, because I could never deal with this alone. Two, because it was just his problem as much as mine. Three, because even I wasn’t as good an actress.

“I’m late.” I told him.

“Late for what?” the look of utter confusion on his face made me sigh in pity.

If the thought of me going out of the house after arriving from the hospital was enough to make him nervous, I didn’t want to think of what he would be like when he understood.

“My period is late.” I explained.

“Your-?” Harry still looked confused, but now suddenly his face went blank. “Wait. Does that mean-” he paused, and his eyes went from mine to the phone on my hands, to my stomach, and I knew what he was trying to see there. “Does that mean-?! What does that mean?!?”

I gulped. “It doesn’t necessarily mean anything.” I said, trying to sound casual. “I mean, I heard it’s normal… sometimes.”

“Is this one of those times?”

I sighed. “Well… there is a very slim chance that I could be…” I forced the word out, “pregnant.”

The dynamic of our relationship had evolved into Harry being the adult, responsible, rational thinking one and me being the anxious, broken, freaked out one, which is why what happened next was completely new territory for me: Harry was freaking out.

He paced back into the room, his hands grasping big chunks of his own hair as he walked around, his eyes drifting from place to place as his face became suddenly void of color.

It took me some time to notice this, as I was too busy trying to calm myself down. I could feel my
heart beating fast in my chest and my mind going completely blank as I made my way to the mirror on top of the big chest by the windows.

“I mean, come on,” I went on, sounding disbelieving, “I’m not! I can’t be. That’s ridiculous…”

I turned to the side and looked at my stomach. It was as slim as ever, even a little more as I had just spent the week in the hospital barely eating right. My hip bones were pointing out more than usual.

I touched my breasts. They felt sensitive. ‘But that doesn’t mean anything!’ I told myself. ‘It does that when I’m about to get my period, it doesn’t mean anything!’

I looked back at him, Harry’s hands were covering his mouth as he stared at my stomach, aghast, trying to see any signs that there could be a child growing in there.

“It’s okay.” I murmured, trying to convince him and myself in the process. “It’s gonna be fine. I mean, it can’t be it. I mean, we use condoms! We always use condoms.”

As Harry sighed, closing his eyes, I wondered if he, too, was remembering the Friends episode when Rachel tells Ross she’s pregnant and he finds out that condoms aren’t a hundred percent effective.

“Oh, my God.” Harry mumbled, still pacing about the floor from one side to the other. “Oh, my God.”

“It’s okay!” I said, louder, the sight of him so out of control awakening something inside of me, some instinct of leadership. “It’s okay. Everything is under control. I’m probably not-“

“Probably!” He interrupted. “Probably being the key word, because we both know there’s a chance!”

There was a long pause as we stared off around the room, both lost in thought. Do I feel pregnant?, I asked myself.

“Wouldn’t they know it in the hospital??” He asked suddenly. “You just left, they were making tests on you every day, wouldn’t they know it??”

I frowned. “I don’t think they would know it unless they tested me specifically for it, which they didn’t. They couldn’t have known…”

As Harry started to pace the floor again, something shifted inside of me and I was suddenly very aware of what needed to be done. All the times I had freaked out in the past, maybe, gave me a very clear head to know how to handle this and I found myself on game mode.

“Right.” I said. “First problem, find out the truth.”

I went back to the closet, found my walled on my purse and walked past Harry out of the room, not before I stopped by the security electronic tablet by the door and pressed the intercom button to Eddy’s room.

“Eddy, I need you in the foyer.”

I made my way out and met my bodyguard by the elevator.

I took a deep breath before handing him my credit card, bracing myself to his reaction.

“I need you to go get me a pregnancy test.”
Eddy’s mouth dropped open. He quickly cleared his throat and nodded, taking my card and trying to look professional.

“Buy three. Different brands. As quick as possible. Don’t be seen and don’t tell anyone.”

With another nod, he pressed the elevator button and I marched back inside the house.

Harry was sitting in one of the armchairs in front of the bed, his elbows in his knees and his face hidden away in his hands.

“Alright, we’ll know soon enough.” I told him.

“This, this is…” He mumbled, on a low tone. He rose his head to look at me. “I mean, you… you!”

Feeling like I had been punched in the stomach, I started to realize the problems that must be swirling around his mind: his family barely even likes me and now I’m bearing his illegitimate child?! They would surely be more than disappointed, they’d be livid! And the press would be quick to point this out as another of the ‘party prince’ misdeeds. All his hard work to recover their trust and respect gone down the drain.

“Oh…” I said, trying to clear my head again. “Okay, you know what? As the person who usually freaks out in this relationship, I think I should be the authority in how to handle this.” Harry didn’t seem to be able to hear me. His head was still buried in his hands. “The way I usually survive freaking out is by making plans. If you know what’s going to happen, then you don’t have to incessantly wonder, you know? And it feels better. So… so…” I sighed. “Let’s make plans.”

Harry’s face rose from his hands as he took deep breaths. “Okay?”

“Okay!” I agreed, taking great comfort in this incentive. “Okay! So… first possibility, I might not be pregnant. In which case, no problem! We move on with our day as if nothing happened and you make me that great risotto you were just talking about for dinner!”

He tried to smile, but he was still so nervous his lips barely stretched. I tried to think some more.

“The next possibility, I might be pregnant.” I gulped, feeling my throat dry. “In which case we also have options. The first question is, do we want to have a baby?”

He looked at me. “If you’re pregnant I don’t think wanting it or not will do much to help!”

“Well…” I started. “We’re pro-choice.” I reminded him, and understanding flashed through his face painfully. “We could… terminate.”

He stared for a long time. “Do you… would you want to?”

I thought about it. “No.” I told him, and saw him take in a sharp breath as relieve took over understanding. “No, I mean… I’m financially stable. I’m twenty-six, it’s not like I’m a teenager. And I’ve always wanted to have kids…” I nodded, understanding my own truth. “I couldn’t. I’d want to keep it.”

He was nodding emphatically, and I knew he agreed. Right. That’s out of the way. Think, Jenifer, think! If you are pregnant, what needs to be done? What needs to be fixed? What can you do?!

“So if I am…” I went on. “I can’t be much more than three weeks, maybe two. So I can finish Broken.” I struggled to remember my schedule of work, trying to make sense of what I could still do and what I’d have to get out of. “I can promote Heathers, it’s early December. I’d have to get
out of Tangled and Hamilton.”

“But you’re so excited about it!” He interrupted, looking distressed. “You love Hamilton, and Tangled is in your bucket list!”

I shook my head. “It’d be too difficult to hide the bump.” I told him.

“But, Jen, you’re really excited about it!”

As he struggled to help me keep my normalcy through our hypothetical problem, a thought flashed through my mind before I could stop it: I am?! I couldn’t remember being excited about it – or about anything – as the only thing I could wonder was what the hell was I going to do.

“I’ll probably be due in May or July-“ I went on.

“Hey,” he interrupted again, looking excited, “you can still do Doctor Who!”

I gave him a small smile. “I’d have to go straight at it after the baby is born.”

“So?”

“So?!” I laughed. “Harry, I’m not just gonna have a baby and go straight into work! It’s going to need me!”

“I can take care of it.” He assured, standing up, and I smiled. “I’m good with kids! And we can hire a nanny to teach me what I don’t know… it’ll be fine, you don’t have to give up anything!”

“I know you can handle it, but the thing is,” I sighed, “I don’t want you to do it alone. I wanna do it too. So…” I thought some more. “I’ll… I’ll probably just take the whole year next year to be with the baby.”

His face fell. “So… if you… if you won’t work, you… you-“

“Yes?”

“You wouldn’t have work. You’d be free to move back to America.”

“What?”

He gulped. “You’re only in Britain for work.” He said. “You would want to go back to California.”

Shocked, and a little offended, I stared at him.

“No, I wouldn’t, you idiot!” He seemed taken aback by my outburst. “Why would you say that?”

“You said so yourself!”

“If I was working!” I replied.

“Well, you’ll go back at some point!” he shot back. “Then what?!”

He paced the room, and now I was the one who was confused.

“I mean, what? What?! Are- are we just gonna raise a child together while seeing each other once every month?!” he looked at me.

“No.” I said, but my voice was barely a whisper.
“Then, what?!” He exasperated, loudly, looking more distressed than I had ever seen him before. “What is the solution, because I can’t see it! The way I see it what’s going to happen is you’re going to find a way to twist this around and use it as an excuse to break up with me and then move back to America with my kid, that I’ll only see every other holiday!”

There was a silence so loud and deafening that I didn’t dare break. Harry was breathing heavily, pacing slowly across the bedroom floor, avoiding my eyes while he still nervously scratched his hair.

There were a lot of things that he said that I wanted to talk about, but the first one I picked was the reason for his outburst, that I started to realize had little to do with his family or what the press would think of him.

“Is this why you’re freaking out?” he looked at me when I talked. “Because you think I’ll break up with you?”

He shrugged, and I thought I saw his eyes water as he looked back at the window.

“…It’s bound to happen, isn’t it?” he asked, his voice rough. “All this time I’ve just been waiting for the moment you’ll think of some problem I won’t be able to talk you out of. The moment you’ll realize you don’t want this. And I get that-“ He looked at me, still panting. “I get it, I get it if this isn’t what you want. I always knew you wanted to take it slow exactly because of that, but Jenifer, if we’re having a child-” he sighed. “Then, then… then it’s not just about the two of us, is it? I can’t… I can’t stand the thought of being a father and not being able to be there, like it was with me and my parents, always seeing just one of the two at a time, never fully knowing them. I can’t-I can’t!”

As I felt a knot on my throat, I realized this situation was much more familiar to him than I had realized. The thought of doing to his own kid what had been done to him, condemning them to grow up divided between two parents. But the thought that we would do that to our kid?! It felt so absurd I could feel myself frowning and, as much as I wanted to, I couldn’t even think of what to say.

He wasn’t crazy, as much as I felt like he was. After everything we’d been through it made sense that I would end up using this to walk away, but would I?

I looked at him and the sight of his orange hair, large shoulders and blue eyes filled my heart with such love the only thing I could think of saying was an angry outburst.

“Why…” I started, trying to control my own voice, “why would I move away from you when we’re supposed to be having a kid together?!” I shouted. “Harry, come on! It makes no sense!”

“But, you-“

“Harry!” I stopped him. “I know I’m… problematic. But even I’m not this… insane! If we’re having a kid together, even if we do break up eventually, we’ll always be in each other’s lives, you’d see it as much as you’d want to!”

“Jen-“

“Not to mention, as much as it makes sense based on all the signs I’ve given this far, I don’t want to break up with you!” I told him. “Now more than ever, Harry, I want you. I don’t need you, I won’t say that, because I’ll be the first to tell you I can definitely do this on my own. But the thing is, I don’t want to! I want you.”
He looked at me for a long time, confusion and emotion flickering in his eyes, before he finally spoke again.


“…what?”

“Deal. I’m calling the deal. We made a deal that you would always tell me when you’re freaking out.”

“…okay?”

“Well?”

“Well what?!”

“Why are you so bloody calm?!” He shouted. “How aren’t you freaking out over this?! Tell me the truth, are you freaking out?! Because I wanna know if you are!”

I looked away, not angry anymore, but trying to answer his request with as much honesty as I could. I looked inside, trying to tell what I was feeling. Wasn’t I freaking out? Why wasn’t I freaking out? If this is happening, I’m going to be a fucking mother. I’m having a baby?! How am I not losing my mind?!

Somehow, I simply wasn’t. I knew very clearly what was going to happen: I would take next year to have a baby. I could still work with the U.N. – as they don’t mind baby bumps as much as movie directors do – and I could go on living here, in London, to stay close to Harry. We’d turn one of the guest bedrooms into a nursery and choose names and face the worst press harassment of our lives as the world started throwing knives at us for daring having a kid without being married. Harry would be the party prince and I’d be the Brazilian, social-climbing slut. His family would be livid, mine would be completely disappointed.

But at the end of the day, we’d have a baby, and maybe, just maybe, it’d be easy to ignore all of this. Maybe we could get through it. Maybe we could survive this.

“I’m just not.” I shrugged. “I guess I’m still a little numb. Honestly, I don’t think I’m pregnant.”

He looked even more exasperated than before. “Okay, so…” he said. “Plans. Let’s keep making plans. Say you walk away from Doctor Who and Hamilton, then what? What’s your next thing?!”

I remembered the movie Richard talked about in the hospital. “Richard says there’s a cool project for the end of next year. He wouldn’t tell me what it is, but I think it’ll be shot in Canada.”

“Oh!” He nodded, enthusiastically. “Okay, sounds good. That’s good.”

“But the baby would be too young.” I told him. “Not to mention, Canada in the winter? With a baby?” I tried to picture myself with a crib on my trailer, leaving my child with a babysitter as I went off to shoot whatever it was Richard thought I was gonna like so much. “I work twelve hours a day,” I reminded him, “How would I even take care of the baby? I don’t wanna be those mothers who barely see their kids because of work.”

“I’ll go with you.” He told me, determination all over his eyes. “Yes! That’s it. I’ll come with and I’ll be with the baby while you work.”

“Harry…” I started, thinking of his job in England, of his family, his friends.
“No, it’s fine!” He said, and he was smiling now. “Jen, I can do it! We can do it! You’ll go to work and I’ll be with the baby. I’ll be the housewife, I don’t care!” He chuckled now, and I could see it in his turquoise eyes that he meant every single one of his words. “We both know I’m a better cook, anyway.”

“Your family?” I asked. “Your job?!”

He shook his head. “I honestly do not give a shit.”

I stood up from the bed, facing him sharply. “Deal.” I asked.

“What?”

“I’m calling the deal. The deal we made that you would always tell me what you’re thinking and feeling. So? What is this?!” I pointed at all of him. “What are you really thinking right now?!”

Harry bit his lip, and looked deep in thought as he nodded, slowly, considering my request. He walked towards me and delicately made me sit on the bed again.

“Okay…” He started, avoiding my glance. “Okay, this is where you freak out and leave me.” He mumbled, running a hand through his hair, distressed. “But I promised, so okay. You wanna know what I’m thinking? Here it is.” He looked at me, determinedly, his eyes full of intensiveness. He spoke slowly, carefully, seeming to think about every word twice, trying to be honest and not to scare me at the same time. “I have always wanted this.” He said, and his eyes flickered to my stomach again. “Always. I have always wanted to have kids. And a family of my own… And… and since I met you, and since I fell in love with you, I have wanted to do this with you.”

I gulped, breathing heavily, feeling my heart pounding hard against my chest.

“And now, now that you might be…” His lips stretched quickly into a nervous smile. “…pregnant… I have this, this…” he gestured to his stomach, “this huge ball of utter, hot, burning…”

Anxiety? Regret? Fear?!

“…joy filling me from the inside just at the mere thought of having a…” he walked towards the bed, kneeling in front of me, at eye level with my stomach, “of having a little baby that is both me and you…” He looked up at me, smiling, “I’m thinking that this baby might be the ginger, brown eyed baby we dreamed about in Abu Dhabi, that we’re gonna name Vincent or James or Victoria or Alexandra, this baby that we’re gonna raise together. I have so much joy inside that I can barely breathe.”

He paused, smiling at me again. “I-I-I,” he stuttered, “I wanna marry you.”

Inside of me, there was only surprise. Shock. Disbelief. And a burning desire to throw everything up and say yes. In the back of my mind, I heard the question again: why am I not freaking out?!

“I wanna do it right.” He went on, his voice a mere whisper, his smile had faded. He now looked serious and determined, as clear headed as I had ever seen him. “I want this baby to be raised by both of us. I want the baby to grow up with both of us. Be it wherever it is! Canada, California, here… hell, let’s move to Brazil! I don’t care!” he sat up, holding my hands tightly in his. “I want you. I want us, the three of us. I don’t care if that means I have to leave everything here behind, Jenifer, I will.” He sighed. “Because the other option is being away from you, and I don’t want that. I want you. I want us. That’s what I’m thinking.”

I cleared my throat, trying to clear my head as I did it, trying to stop myself from making harsh
decisions, trying to be rational, trying to think of every loophole in his plan that I could find to sabotage us.

“They’d think we’re only getting married because of the baby.” I said, my voice coming out lower than a whisper. “Even I’d wonder if that was the only reason—”

“Jen.” He interrupted, softly, and as I looked up, I realized he was smiling. “We both know I’d marry you right now if you’d let me. Baby or not.” I sighed.

Of course I knew. He had said it months ago, in my birthday.

“Your job.” I said again, “Your family.”

“I’ll walk away.” He repeated, stronger now.

“How would that work?!”

He stood up. His eyes weren’t in me anymore, but had drifted to something I couldn’t see. His mind was working fast as he paced about the room again.

“That’s it.” He said, in a matter-of-fact kind of voice of someone who’s just had an epiphany. “Of course, that’s is. Jen…” he looked at me. “That could work. I mean, they would hate me. Everyone would hate me. But who cares? I don’t! This way I could come with you to America and help you with the baby so you could keep your job!”

“That’s it what? What is it?!”

“I’ll…” He sighed. “I’ll give up my claim to the throne, in my name and my descendants’.”

I was confused. “Can you even do that?!”

“Technically, yes. It would be a…” He sighed, waving his arms around to try and show me the magnitude of it. “Huge mess! Everyone would have a hissy fit over it, I mean, the last time someone did it was when granny’s uncle walked away to marry Wallis Simpson. You remember The King’s Speech, right? Like that! But I won’t be king, so it wouldn’t matter as much… Of course, people would still make a big deal out of it. But who cares?”

He approached again, and sat with me on the bed.

“I’d still be a prince, but it would be a ceremonial tittle, I wouldn’t have to represent granny or my dad, I wouldn’t have to do royal engagements.”

“But you like the royal engagements!” I argued.

He frowned. “Well… I like some of it.” He nodded. “I see their importance and I’ve grown to accept them. But it wouldn’t matter. I could still work with charities. I could get another job like the one I had at Halo.”

“But your family—“

“Jenny,” He smiled, turning to look at me. The love in his eyes filled me with a calm I had been trying to give him this whole time. “You’re my family.” He said, holding my hands in his again. “You, me and the baby, the three of us. That’s what I want.”

I gulped, feeling my heart beating fast in my chest. That sounded perfect. That sounded like the solution for all our problems. Harry wasn’t asking me to give up my life for his, it was the other
way around. He was volunteering to do it himself.

“This way you get to keep your job and we can be together.” He smiled. “Wherever you want us to be. I’ll follow you anywhere.”

That sounded like a magical solution to all of our problems, a way for us to be together. A messy, complicated way that would bring us a lot of issues, but if he didn’t mind, I knew I wouldn’t.

Then why, I was asking myself, did my heart feel constricted? Why was there a knot on my throat? Why did the peace his eyes gave me not fill me all the way through? Why was the anxiety still making me breathe heavy? Why was I still frowning trying to find the flaw? Was there even one? It felt like it did.

As he looked at me, having just made one of the biggest decisions of his life, having just decided to spend the rest of his days with me, giving up his world to follow me into mine, I couldn’t celebrate. I couldn’t feel happy. There was something in the plan that simply didn’t... feel right. But what was it?

We heard the doorbell. Harry and I exchanged a nervous glance.

“Eddy’s back.” I said, standing up and, before he could answer, I was already running to the door.

Eddy gave me the little brown bag and my credit card. Inside, there was three small boxes of different brand pregnancy tests and a card. I stopped on my way back to the door and read it. It said: ‘Congratulations on your little bundle of joy!’

I looked back to throw a sharp look at my funny bodyguard who was grinning apologetically as if he just couldn’t help himself.

“Let me know!” he said, before I slammed the door in his face, leaving him to take the other one to the security apartment.

I walked back from the kitchen, straight into the bathroom, and Harry was already there, jumpy and nervous, his phone in his hands.

“I have the stopwatch ready.” He said, as I avoided his eyes and went to the toilet, closing the door after me.

“Uh, Jen?”

“What?” I asked, leaving the boxes in the small sink and watching my reflection in the mirror.

I looked just as jumpy and nervous as he did, but I also looked paler. More tired. Afraid.

“Can I come in? Are you taking it?”

“No!” I said. “I just…” I sighed. “I just need a moment, okay?!”

He hesitated. “Okay. Let me know when to start the stopwatch.”

I took in a deep breath. I needed to know. I needed to know why I was freaking out now.

“This way you get to keep your job and we can be together.” Harry had said, just minutes before. “Wherever you want us to be. I’ll follow you anywhere.”
Why did it sound wrong? Why were his words giving me anxiety? He had found the perfect solution, why didn’t it feel like it?!

“Jen?!” Harry’s nervous voice reached me again, from just outside the door. “Jen, are you taking it?”

“Not yet.” I called back.

“Why not? Oh, right, you need to pee. It’s okay. Take your time.”

I sighed, bracing myself for the hard questions I knew I needed to ask next: was it Harry? Was Harry what was wrong with the plan? Did I not want to be with him? Did I not want him to follow me anywhere? Did I not love him anymore?

“Turn on the water.” Harry suggested, from outside the door. “It always makes me wanna pee.”

I let out a silent giggle before I could stop myself, and the effect made me a little stronger. It made my head clearer. I took in a deep breath, feeling my heart full with love for him.

No. Harry wasn’t the problem. I wanted him. To be with him. To love him. To have him forever. I wanted him more than I had ever been willing to admit before that very day. But, then, what was the problem?

“Jen, are you taking it?! I wanna see it with you!” His voice was nervous again.

“Just give me a minute, okay?!” I replied, sharply, my mind racing so fast I could barely keep track.

I need to calm down. I need to understand. What is the problem?

Is it the baby? Is the baby the problem? It’s understandable if it is, it’s not the right time, I hadn’t planned on having children now. It’s understandable if the baby is making me feel like the life Harry offered it’s not the one I want. But… is it? Is the baby the problem?

I looked down at my stomach and placed my hands around my bellybutton, embracing the thought I had, so far, only seen in an indirect way. I imagined a baby there; small, unrecognizable still. One that would grow to have my jet-black hair and Harry’s blue eyes. My big, pump lips and Harry’s strong nose. A baby that would speak with daddy’s beautiful British accent and mommy’s Portuguese. A baby that would be a little of both of us.

Smiling, I closed my eyes, filling my heart fill with utter, burning joy. No – I knew. The baby is not the problem. It’s unplanned and ill-timed, but I always wanted a baby and I love Harry. If this is happening, I know I want it. I know it’ll come to fill our lives with happiness and excitement.

But then, what is the problem?

“Just promise you won’t see the result without me!” Harry called out again.

I sighed. “I won’t. I’m taking it now.”

I wet the three plastic sticks with my pee, the process not leaving much space on my mind to think of much else.

When I was done, I laid the three tests on the sink, flushed and washed my hands.

“Start the clock.” I told Harry, as I stepped out of the toilet into the big bathroom.
He looked up. He had been sitting in the small bench near the bathtub and quickly typed away in his phone, proceeding to gaze at it intently.

I watched him. His tick ginger eyebrows were frowning at the clock. His big, bulky hand covering his mouth, scratching his beard. His blue eyes were squinting at his phone.

He looked up. “What?”

I was smiling as I shook my head, sighing. “I don’t know…”

He blocked his phone and placed it in his pocket, turning in the bench to face me.

“Look, Jen…” He sighed, bracing himself. “I know this is… a lot. I know this is a big… mess. But… But…” He stood up. “We’re gonna be fine. We can do it. I promise I wanna do it!”

Walking closer his hands held on to my arms, gently, and he smiled.

“We’ll be fine.” He promised. “I know you’re probably… freaking out over your…” he frowned, “job and how hard it’ll be for you, but I will help. I’ll help with the baby and you have Richard and Janine, not to mention it’s, you know… it’s you! You’re Jenifer Silva! You’ll come back even bigger than before! They’ll be idiots if they don’t take you back.”

I had been so busy watching the way his blue eyes shone at me it took me a while to notice I didn’t know what he was talking about anymore.

“What?”

He sighed. “You know… Your job. That’s why you’re worried, isn’t it? You’re afraid you’ll lose work and you’ll waste time and it’ll be difficult to go back.”

“…right.”

Even as I said it, I knew he was, indeed, right. I would have a child at twenty-seven. I would come back at the end of my twenties. Richard always said if an actress isn’t well-awarded and talented her career is as well as dead after her twenties. A year or two out of Hollywood to take care of a baby, how would I make my way back? Would they want me? Would my awards matter?

Years ago, when I was still planning my life with a man in less complicated situations, I had planned on taking a break from the industry to have a family. Take care of kids the way my mother had taken care of me. Be present, be there, and then go back after they were at least a little grown. I had known it would be difficult to make the way back, but back then it had felt natural. Normal. What everyone did. The only way. Why did I now seem to have a problem with it?

“But, Jen…” Harry went on, reassuringly, “You’re you! You’re amazing and I know you’ll find work! And I told, I’ll help! You’ll keep your job and you’ll be even more amazing than before!”

I looked at him, frowning. “Is this why you’re so worried?” I asked.

“…What?”

“Is this why you’re so worried that I’m gonna leave you? Because you think I’m scared I’ll lose my opportunities?”

He looked confused. “I know how much it matters to you. I don’t want you to think you’re gonna lose something over it. I don’t want you to… to be sad over something that could be so… good.”
I sighed. My God, I loved him! I loved him so much my heart felt like it could burst from my chest. Even now, on the verge of disappointing for good his entire family and the world and all of their expectations for him, he worried about me. About what I wanted. What I needed to be happy. To enjoy our little bundle of joy as much as he did. His life was about to be a mess and he was offering to walk away from everything he knew just so I could keep my normalcy, my dreams, my goals.

Harry suddenly jumped as the phone in his pocket went off, telling us the time was up for the results.

He calmed himself as he turned it off and looked at me expectantly.

“You’re the boss.” He said, and, sighing, I turned back to the bathroom.

Maybe it was his words – you’re the boss – or, more likely, it was how he had said he knew how important my job was to me, but suddenly my head was very clear. Suddenly, I knew exactly what was wrong with his perfect plan for us.

Understanding weighed down on me so heavily and, at the same time, making me feel so light that I almost forgot what I was supposed to be doing in that bathroom.

Harry waited outside. I read the boxes to make sure I would understand the results. If I was pregnant, the first test would be pink, the second would have a blue cross and the third, a digital one, would be blinking the very obvious word: pregnant.

I took in a deep breath, knowing in my heart the hard truth I was starting to think I had known for much longer that only that afternoon, the truth I had been trying to ignore for months, and looked down at my destiny.

Blue. A horizontal pink line. Not pregnant.

I let in a sharp breath, eyes closed, eager to recognize the feeling flooding through me before I could stop it, before I could rationalize my way out of it.

I turned to Harry outside.

“Well, that was a lot of drama for nothing.” I said, attempting to break the tension. “I’m not pregnant.” I told him, my voice blank of emotion.

I watched, very carefully, what flickered through Harry’s eyes. I watched as he blinked, slowly, in understanding. I watched as he bent down, his hands in his knees, keeping him up. I watched as his chest went up and down as he breathed in deep and then… I watched as he nodded, slowly, avoiding my eyes.

“Okay.” He said. And I knew what was that emotion on his face, because I recognized it from my heart.

Confusingly enough, it was a sort of… disappointment.

“I mean, it’s a bad timing, anyway.” I said.

“Right.” He replied. “Of course… our families, they would…”

“Right.” I nodded. “Of course.”

Smiling a little, I raised my hand and slapped it against his.

“Oh, okay.” He repeated, looking at the door. “Well... I’ll... go... make dinner, then.”

He cleared his throat, smiled at me one last time, and walked out.

I was left in the same spot I was standing on when I told him the test results. I was rooted on the spot without knowing how to move on from it. I looked back at the sink, at the three negatives that now looked like they were judging me.

“This is ridiculous...” I murmured, walking towards the sink and throwing all signs of the tests in the trashcan.

I walked out of the bathroom and sat on the bed, ready to get some of that rest my doctor had recommended, but my mind was going a thousand miles an hour.

Harry’s voice ringed in my mind: “This way you get to keep your job and we can be together.”

I couldn’t run from it. I couldn’t avoid it. I had looked inside my heart and the harsh truth had stared back at me. I knew what was the problem with Harry’s plan, the one where we got to be together, have a baby, and I could keep my job: I wanted Harry. I wanted the baby.

I didn’t want my job.

Chapter End Notes

WOOOOOOOOOOOOOOAH MAN! I KNOW! WHAT A CRAZY LAST FEW CHAPTERS HUH? ONE BOMB AFTER THE OTHER! I am sooooo excited! This chapter is what truly changes everything, so from now one there’s a new wave of feelings Jen has to deal with. As you know her, her first step is denial. But dont worry, there’s only so much she can run.

Let me know if you like it?! I’ve been so excited about this part of the story since I wrote it I’ve been dying to talk to you about it! Come talk to me?! Let me know what you think?! Should the result have been positive? What would they name the baby?!

Hope you’re having a great week! See you next time!
Jenifer's Choice

Chapter Summary

Jen deals with the aftermath of the pregnancy scare, but can’t shake off the epiphany she had when thinking about it.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

‘Dearest Alexandra,

Your previous letter found me in a time of turmoil, but the thought of hearing from you and getting to write to you once more as we have done since we met on that blessed week aboard the Queen Victoria filled me with joy.

I was so happy to read about your granddaughter’s first day of college. My best friend Alessa got her doctorate from Sorbonne not long ago and she swears it is one of the best institutions in the world, so I know your girl will be in good hands. I still remember my first day in college, not long ago. Hopefully she’ll have a better experience than me and will stick to it.

Speaking of which, thank you for your kind words about my autobiography. It has been quite… strange having the world know about all of my mistakes, but I wouldn’t have it any other way. At least now I feel light. Free. Like I’m starting on a clean slate, and even though I know there’s a lot of criticism being said about me, I now feel no one can hold anything against me.

For the first time in a long time I feel like I have nothing holding me back. I have nothing hurting me. I have no walls around my heart and no traumas changing the way I look into my future. Though it sounds good and healthy, the reality of it is terrifying. The truth is, I don’t even know who I am without my pain. I’ve been carrying it around since I was a teenager. It has guided all of my other choices. Am I the same person without it? And if I’m not, as I suspect, will the people I love still love this new Jenifer?

Please don’t feel obliged to give me answers. The truth is, I don’t know why I write these things to you. I used to see a therapist, and if I still did, I’d pester him with my problems, but right before I moved to London he decided I had had enough therapy and could do well on my own. I thought he was right, but I have now started to wonder if that wasn’t a mistake.

Anyway, I don’t think anyone can help me with this particular problem. This is the kind of existential doubts that only my own mind can solve, so that if I make a wrong decision I have only myself to blame.

To answer your question, I unfortunately have had no time to explore Britain yet. Mostly because of work, but also because a dear friend is hospitalized and I like to visit her every week, which takes one of my only two days off, not leaving time to much else, as I’ve also taken to spending time with Mr. Smith’s friends and family – that has been a journey of particular amusements.

As I told you a couple of letters ago, his brother and sister are some of my best allies. Despite a rocky start when I first met his brother, I think he has grown fond of me, and his sister likes me as I
think she sees her own struggle to fit into this family when she looks at me. I love their kindness and their sweet children and despite the age difference, we always have a good time together.

His father has transformed into a surprising friend, and has been helping me set up a garden in our terrace, which is going well, though he tells me the challenge will be to get it to survive the winter. His stepmother still seems reluctant, but she has been less aggressive lately. I think her husband must be pleading my case, but Mr. Smith’s sister-in-law tells me her actual problem is that she possibly sees too much of herself in me. Too much love for Mr. Smith is the big problem keeping most of his friends and family from accepting me, which makes it a little more okay on my book.

By the time you read this, I’ll be in New York. I have a few days there with work with the United Nations and then I’m to attend the Emmy Awards ceremony before coming back to shoot the end of the movie I’ve been working on. This job with the U.N. is some of the most interesting things I’ve ever done, and I really feel like I’m doing something relevant now. As much as I hate to admit it, the truth is everything else has started to feel somewhat pointless. I worry that this feeling should have passed, but still hasn’t.

Sorry about the cryptic emotional blabbering. I look forward to reading about the progress of your trip to Greece! Send my love to Ethel. I do miss her so!

Much love,

Mrs. Smith.’

Finishing the letter, I placed in an envelope and sealed it, writing Alexandra’s address on it and putting it in my purse. I would send it before going to meet Alessa on Hide Park, one of two things I had to do that day before getting on a plane to the United Nations’ General Assembly and the Emmy Awards.

If I was being honest, I didn’t know why I had told Alexandra those things. Maybe it was the comfortable feeling it gave me knowing she could keep a secret, something I found out when I met her on the Queen Victoria ship during the cruise Harry and I took when the world still didn’t know we were back together.

But the truth was, I had no one I could confide in about the one thing that had me losing my mind. Janine, Richard and Monica were too involved. My parents were too biased, and so was Harry. Alessa, Beezus, Zoe and Lizzy were too normal. They wouldn’t understand. And Taylor, Selena, Tyler and Ophelia were too much of celebrities. They wouldn’t understand it either, but for different reasons.

I was living with Harry for barely three months and my life already felt like it had been turned upside down. I was living with a secret. I, Jenifer Silva, a multiple award-winning actress for almost fifteen years, didn’t like my job.

In the weeks that followed the pregnancy scare, things went back to their apparent normalcy. On the day we thought we’d be parents, however, Harry and I had barely exchanged another word. Not because we were upset at each other, but we were too distracted, both of us were too lost on our own thoughts to remember to keep up conversation.

I couldn’t read Harry’s mind, and if I could, I would be too scared of what I would find there, but I wondered if he was thinking about the same thing I was: I wondered if he, too, was thinking of the little brown-eyed, ginger baby that we had thought we were going to have. I wondered if he noticed that I was still laying my hand near my bellybutton, wondering what it would feel like to be pregnant. I wondered what the crying would sound like. What the laughter would sound like.
found myself echoing names in my mind, seeing if I liked them.


I couldn’t help it. I couldn’t stop it. I wondered if we’d have to call them ‘prince’ or ‘princess’, I wondered if Harry would want to use his mother’s name as a middle name, I wondered at what age I could start to teach them Portuguese. I couldn’t stop!

I knew at a rational level that was ridiculous. I didn’t want to have a baby immediately! I wanted to be a mother, yes, as I knew I did, but in time. When things felt right. When I was ready. Not suddenly, irrationally, unpreparedly. Not right away. Not while I had three movies and a TV show to shoot on the next year alone!

When I wasn’t thinking of our hypothetical child, I was thinking of my little bathroom epiphany, the moment I had stopped to try and figure out why Harry’s perfect plan for our lives felt wrong.

He had proposed to give up his life – his tittle, his job as a royal, his family, his country – to follow me – and the baby - ‘anywhere’. To come with us and help me raise our child so that I could keep my job.

Thought it sounded foolproof, there was no denying the tightness in my heart as I felt like something about it wasn’t right. I scanned my thoughts, my feelings, I looked inside my heart and realized, with some shock, what the problem was. It wasn’t Harry, it wasn’t the baby, but the ‘keep my job’ part.

Harry had repeated a number of times how mind-blowing it was to him that I could simply see no question I could give a simple answer to. I overthought everything. I considered exceptions. I considered different interpretations. It was just not in my nature to give a direct answer to life’s most complicated questions.

So when it came to something that important, it’s no surprise that that was precisely my method: overthinking. I was overthinking the hell out of that. As an actress, I had developed a good imagination. I spent a considerable amount of time closing my eyes and picturing myself as a character. What am I thinking? What am I feeling? What is happening? How does it affect me? So I did the same. I pictured myself with a baby. In Canada, filming some movie, Harry waiting for me to come back. The baby there with him.

As I kept my job, I knew what came with it: the twelve hours of work. The horrible sleep schedule. The full week of appointments. Every January and February on Los Angeles for award season. Watching everything I eat, calculating how much I have to work out to burn it so that the next casting director I meet won’t tell me I need to ‘drop a couple of pounds’. The promotion tours, as I was about to leave for again, for Heathers. Day after day full of interviews, answering the same questions over and over until all of my excitement about a character’s story is dried. Doing everything I can to remain relevant. Wondering when the wrinkles will appear. When I won’t be able to play teenagers anymore. When I’ll be first offered a part as someone’s grandmother.

How old will the baby be then? Will it be a teenager? Will I still be waking up at six and coming home at eleven? Will I still be living my life at a different country every three months for a different movie?

Richard was intent on making me the next Meryl Streep. The next Maggie Smith. Old and wrinkled and with a long list of award nominations. A big name. Not even bothering to show up anymore. The ‘not having to show up’ part was more appealing to me than the ‘long list of nominations’ one.
Because the thing was, for me to still be nominated to awards at forty, fifty, sixty years-old it means that I’ll still be making movies at forty, fifty, sixty years-old. It means that as my bones feel weaker and age reaches me I’ll still be waking up at six and going into a movie set to only come home at eleven at night. I’ll still be barely sleeping. I’ll still be struggling to remain relevant. I’ll still be wondering when is the time to quit.

It wasn’t without some trepidation that I realized the truth, a truth that I suspected had been in my heart for much longer than I cared to admit: I didn’t want to be an actress forever.

But if that was the truth, my truth, what did it mean? Did I hate my job? Since when? When did that happen? Has it always been like this? How come I never noticed it before?

And, most importantly, how long could I still pretend everything was fine?

“I thought I was pregnant a few weeks ago.” I told Alessa, as I sat next to her in a bench in Hyde Park on the afternoon of my last day in London before leaving for the U.N.’s General Assembly. She gave me a sudden, shocked glance. “I’m not!”

“Oh, my God.” She let out, not bothering to pretend the news weren’t a big deal. She looked around, distressed, making sure the group of badly disguised paparazzi photographing us were still far enough. “Woah! So… so what? What happened? Did you freak out?”

I shrugged. “ Weirdly, no. Harry did, though.” She looked confused. “I know, right?! I don’t understand it either. I just… I knew what to do. I knew how to handle it. I was okay.”

She glared at me with amazement. “Look at you…” she marveled. “Growing up.”

I rolled my eyes with a giggle. I let a silent moment pass, as I took a sip of my English breakfast tea with a pout, and then spoke again.

“I don’t know who I am anymore.”

Alessa sighed. “Jesus, you’re so dramatic… Do you need help? Let me tell you who you are. You’re smart, talented, passionate, fiercely loyal… a bit sarcastic at times… too witty for your own good…” I smiled. “Does that work?”

I looked at her, feeling my heart beating a little freer on my chest. “Sometimes all I can think of to describe myself is, Jenifer Silva, actress.”

She frowned. “You’re way more than that… I mean, sure, at first, maybe. But now, you’re… you’re a humanitarian. A designer. A dancer and singer. And business woman. You’re Super Jen, after all. I mean, you are an actress. But at the of the day, that’s… that’s what you do. Not who you are… What’s with the identity crisis all of sudden?!”

I sighed. “I don’t know. Don’t mind me, it’s just… with the almost-baby I started thinking a lot about what I’d do with my life. But it’s just because of the baby that never was.” I assured her, trying to assure myself. “I don’t really feel like this, it’s just because I thought I was pregnant.”

Surely, that was the truth. It was just because of the baby. I had thought I should quit because of the baby, because I was trying to do the right thing. I didn’t mean it. Millions of people would kill for the career I had! Surely, I couldn’t mean it.

“I have to go.” I told Alessa, regretfully. “I’m going to see Beezus before flying out.”
“How is she, by the way?” Alli asked, with a smile. “I read online she and Kit Harington are engaged?! Some A Walk to Remember tabloid story?”

I smiled largely, “No, that’s true, actually.”

She looked at me, surprised. “Seriously?!” I nodded. “But I thought she was… you know…”

“She is.” I sighed, the smiling fading unnoticeably from my lips. “She is still very much… dying. Or, you know, waiting for a pair of lungs. But… they’re engaged. I think it’s…” I smiled. “Cute.”

“It is.” Alessa nodded. “It’s brave, I think. Choosing to live love against all odds. Good for them…” She sighed, staring into her own cup of tea, which she was far more into than I was. “I wish I’d find a love like that…”

I watched her drink, her cheeks reddening slightly, and remembered a certain blonde man who had, not too long before, asked me for her number.

“On a completely unrelated topic, how are things with George Percy?”

Alessa coughed, spitting her tea a good meter in front of her. I looked at the paparazzi across the lake, their cameras still pointing at us.

“Well, that’ll be a good picture.”

“I don’t know what you mean.” She said, defensive, still drying tea from her chin.

“Right.” I smiled. “He asked me for your number, Alessa, I know you’re going out with him this Saturday.”

She sighed. “I hate that he’s friends with Harry.” She mumbled. “Look, it’s not a big deal. We’re just going for dinner and a movie. Chances are he’s gonna be a pompous dick and I’ll never see him again.”

“I don’t know,” I started, “he’s pretty cool. Of Harry’s friends he’s my… third favorite one.”

“Woah, I’m sold.” She ironized, making me laugh. “Who are the first two, anyway?”

“Skippy and Jake. But George is one of the good ones.” I promised. “Thomas and Guy are the ones I’m unenthused by.”

“And Thomas is his brother-in-law!” She said, as if that decided things.

“He’s polite, charming and handsome.” I told her. “Not to mention he’s gonna literally inherit Hogwarts. You could do worst.”

She smiled, reluctantly. I knew when Alessa was seriously invested someone she had a tendency of being pessimistic about them, so that told me she was interested. When she had been into Josh, her ex, for instance, she had spoken so much about him even before we met I already knew his zodiac sign. This, I knew, was a good thing.

“Not literally.” She murmured, a while later. “Hogwarts is fictional, so he won’t literally inherit it. He’ll inherit the castle where they filmed most of it.”

“Right, because that’s not just as exciting.” I added, sarcastic. “You know if you marry him you’ll be a countess, right?!”
“Weren’t you leaving?!?”

I laughed, gave her a big kiss on the cheek, and stood up. “I’ll call you when I get back.”

“Kick some presidents’ asses.”

“Call me after the date!” she rolled her eyes, and with Eddy on my feet, I made my way to London General.

---

“So, how’s work?” Beezus asked, her voice small and rough, as she laid on her hospital bed that afternoon.

“Good.” I told her, adjusting her bed covers. “All the reports have been sent and added to our final presentation, and both Emma and Harry said my speech sounds great, so I’m calmer now.”

She raised her eyebrows at me. “I meant the movie, but okay.”

“Oh.” I said, startled. Of course she did. That was my job, after all. “Right. I thought you meant the U.N. work, since I’m going to New York for it… no, it’s fine. The movie is fine. Almost done now.” I desperately tried to think of more things to say so that she wouldn’t read too much into my mistake. “We shot the kissing scene last week.”

“Oh, I saw the pictures.” She smiled, pointing at a tabloid in the chair nearby. As the scene was in a public street, the paparazzi had managed to see it. “Harry must have loved it.”

I smiled, contradicted, remembering the passive-aggressiveness with which I had been greeted after the pictures were taken.

“He relaxed after I…” I blushed, trying to think of an euphemism, “…helped him understand just how much I prefer his kisses to Tom’s.”

Beezus’ cheeks got slightly pinker, so I knew she had understood exactly how I had made him understand.

“But let’s talk of good things,” I started, carefully sitting by her in the bed, careful not to distress her too much now she was starting to look more fragile and weak, “for instance, your wedding dress!”

I pulled a bridal magazine out of my purse and gave it to her, whose eyes shone despite her frustrated sigh.

“I told you, I don’t wanna make too many plans.” She reminded me.

Despite getting engaged, Beezus was insisting that she didn’t want to get married just to come back to a hospital later. But I just couldn’t help myself.

“I’m sorry, okay, it’s stronger than me!” I told her. “You told me about your dream dress-“

“A decision I am now regretting…” She mumbled.

“…and I couldn’t rest until I found it! And, Beatrice,” I took a deep breath, solemn. “I found it!”

Her curiosity was stronger, so she just sighed as she gave me her hand, asking for the magazine, which I quickly opened to the marked page.
I watched as she took a deep breath staring at the dress I had found.

“Lace bodice, tulle ball gown skirt, short sleeves… it has everything you wanted!”

She nodded, slowly, a smile slowly crippling into her lips. “It’s perfect.” She gasped.

I smiled. “It’s yours.”

She looked at me, suddenly. “I told you, we don’t actually know when we’re getting married.”

“I know. But when you do, if you still want it, that dress will be yours. Don’t argue, Bee. I’m your fairy godmother, giving you a dress is my job.”

She smiled, before looking back at the magazine with dreamy eyes. I saw her shaky, frail hand, which held an IV line, caress the page delicately, as if trying to know what the fabric would feel like. In her bony finger, stood the beautiful ring Kit had given her when he proposed. It had a central pearl surrounded by small diamonds, making it look like a flower.

It was so shiny and pretty I felt a jealous twist in my stomach at the sight of it, as I had the first time I had seen it. I shook my head slightly, trying to shake that feeling off. It made me feel violently awful to envy Beezus for something like this when she was literally living in a hospital without knowing when or if she would get out. But, more than that, it made me wonder what it meant. Why am I jealous? Do I just want a pretty ring? Am I that shallow?

Or do I envy the fact that if it weren’t for her diagnostic Beezus could be living her love story the way love stories are supposed to be lived: fully. Without worrying about paparazzi or lines of succession.

Beezus sniffed, and my eyes went from her ring to her face. There were tears leaving her eyes now, falling straight down her cheeks to the magazine page. She let out a small cry when I passed an arm around her shoulders, bringing her closer in a hug. I felt her rest her head on my chest, and tried not to appear too surprised at how skinny she was – I could feel most of the bones in her spine as I hugged her. She should not be this skinny.

“I’m sorry.” She hiccuped. “You’re doing something so nice and I’m just here, being silly!”

“Beezus,” I started, trying to steady my own voice, “there’s absolutely nothing silly about this. Please never apologize for crying.”

“I just…” She sighed. “I just wanna wear it so much…” she sniffed again, “That’s so stupid.”

“No, it isn’t.” I told her. “It really isn’t! Listen, you’ll wear that dress, okay? I swear it on everything I hold dear, on… on coffee! I swear it on coffee that you will wear that dress if it’s the last thing I do!”

She burst out in a weak giggle and rose up to look at me, shaking her head and drying her cheeks.

“How is the abstinence going?” She asked, ready to change the subject, still staring into her dress on the magazine.

“Awful.” I told her. “I had a cup of tea with Ally in the park just now. It still tastes horrible.”

“Better than having another ulcer.” She reminded me, and I rolled my eyes.

We let silence fill the room as she slowly flickered through the pages of the magazine. I watched
her movements, switching between thinking about how unfair life was that this amazing girl had to
die and how weird it was to envy the ring on her finger.

“…I don’t wanna die.” She whispered, a few minutes later.

I wanted to say something, to say that that was absolutely understandable and that I didn’t want her
to die either, but I was so busy trying not to cry I didn’t have the strength to say anything.

Beezus sighed. “I should have married him a long time ago… when I was still healthy.” She went
on. “At least we would have had more time. At least I would have died knowing how it felt to be
his wife… to be that… happy.”

I still couldn’t say much, but Beezus didn’t seem to need me to.

“You told me to put my happiness first,” she added, “I tried. I think I forgot it a few times, but I
really tried.” She looked at me. “I was happy, you know? I was. It was a good life.”

“It’s not over yet.” I said, my voice not much louder than a whisper.

She nodded, giving me a sad smile. “Right. So much to look forward to… like the tasteless mashed
potatoes at dinner, and watching TV the whole day tomorrow, and, oh, that’s right, laying on this
bed until my lungs finally give up trying.”

Her voice was filled with sarcasm, but I couldn’t blame her. There was a tense moment during
which I tried to think of what to say before I finally couldn’t help but laugh at the causal tone of
voice she had used to literally describe what she would do until her inevitable premature death.

It was all I could do not to cry, and Beezus joined me.

“Wanna hear something totally weird?!” I asked, still laughing, as the sound of her laughter got
louder. “I am actually jealous of you.”

She gave me a weird look, “what?!”

I held her left hand in mine, and touched her ring. “Of this… It’s weird, I know. And I swear I
don’t diminish your pain… but… I just can’t help it. I’m a sucker for good jewelry, I guess.”

I watched the sparkle in her ring for a long time, feeling her eyes on me, hoping she didn’t hate me
for admitting it, when she finally spoke again.

“Oh, my God…” She mumbled, sounding surprised, “you wanna marry him.”

I looked at her, giggling dismissively. “No, I don’t. Every admiration I had for Kit’s good looks
vanished after the first time I heard him fart. I promise.”

She smiled, but didn’t take her eyes from me. Feeling weird, I looked back at her ring. “Not Kit.
Harry.”

I looked back at her. “What?”

“You wanna marry Harry.”

“No, I don’t.”

“Yes, you do.” She insisted. “You’re not jealous of the ring, you’re rich. You could buy any ring
you want. You’re jealous of what it means.”
I felt all the air in the room suddenly disappear as I thought about it.

I shook my head, nervously, feeling my face warm, knowing I was blushing.

“That’s ridiculous.” I told her. “There’s so many reasons why that’s ridiculous!”

“Jen,” she started, kindly, “you’ve been together for a long time. You love each other. It’s perfectly natural to start to want the relationship to be more serious.”

“We’ve been living together for three months!”

“And you’ve dated for almost two years!” She laughed. “People have gotten engaged after a lot less time.”

“You’re insane.”

“You wanna marry him.” She repeated, her voice getting more and more amused. “You wanna marry him! You wanna marry him! You wanna get a pretty ring, and wear a pretty dress and slide down Westminster Abbey with the whole world watching and with a tiara on your head!”

I laughed. “Shut up!”

“You wanna marry him!”

Laughing, I hit her very lightly with the magazine so she’d stop. She finally did, giggling, but her words did not abandon me for the longest time.

—

It was a weird feeling, sitting in the audience for the Emmy, nominated for an award I already had, for a show I had finished working on almost a year before. It felt almost… boring. I told myself it only felt that way because, as an actress, I had moved on from television. I was a movie actress now - at least that’s what Janine had told me in the red carpet when I complained about it as she escorted me from one interviewer to another. She must’ve been right, or so I thought. Surely it didn’t mean anything.

As I sat there in my Ashi Couture cream dress, with a big, puffy, pleated midi skirt that left my feet out and had a deep V cleavage contrasted by the long sleeves, I smiled at Scott Eastwood and Robert De Niro. I had shot the first and second seasons of If Tomorrow Comes with them; Robert played the experienced burglar who gave my character and Scott’s the burglaries they had to do. Scott played the competition my character fell in love with. The last season ended with them making one last steal and taking separate flights to meet up in Rio with after gathering a small fortune and just managing to escape the FBI. In the plane, Tracy – my character – met a millionaire and indicated she was ready to start another con. The end.

I was nominated for that season, after having won my first and – so far – only Emmy for Best Actress in a Drama for the first one. I looked around during the first break for commercials, walking over to the roll next to mine to say hello to Ophelia and Oscar. As I made my way back to my seat, I stared at the familiar faces of so many professionals and friends I had worked with so many times before. I heard the jokes the host made about our industry and wondered when did all of this stop feeling like it meant something?

I wondered if it was just because I already had one Emmy.

“And the winner is…” Jesse Tyler Ferguson read up on the stage, opening the golden envelope
that night. “…Jennifer Silva, for If Tomorrow Comes!”

As all the faces around focused on me, as the lights shone brighter, blinding, and the cameras panned on my direction, I felt my heart leap in my chest in familiar excitement at the sound of my name. I stood up, hugging Robert, then Scott, and marched on to the stage, smiling. Feeling happy. Proud. Joyful.

With the deafening sound of applause filling the room, I held my dress’ hemline higher to climb up the steps towards the microphone where Jesse waited for me with my second Emmy award.

Then, my mind did a strange thing: it started drifting.

I started to think about the U.N. and the good results of the General Assembly I had just taken part in. I recounted in my head the titles of the reports I wanted to read before my next meeting with Emma Watson back in London about our Women’s Spring project. I made the decision, as I walked towards Jesse, that I should start on the plane back to Europe or I would not finish in time.

As I smiled and hugged him, and held my award, I remembered that just one year before I was receiving my first one, just as the Hate Wave was beginning. I remember getting drunk on the after party and scheduling a double date with Kit and Bee. And then I remembered that Beezus was probably watching from a hospital bed at that precise moment, not knowing if she would ever get out.

What a difference a year makes. A year later and Beezus and Kit were living in a hospital, I wasn’t drinking and was living with Harry in England and wondering why was I suddenly bored while receiving an Emmy?!

This was not the moment to be bored. This was incredible. This was an honor.

“This is such an honor, thank you!” I said, my voice echoing loudly across the room from the microphone.

My voice was breaking and I was emotional as I thanked the director, the cast, my family and management, but inside, in some dark corner of my mind, I was wondering why did it feel like acting. Did I not mean what I was saying?! Of course I did. It was an honor. One that I wouldn’t have without the people I was thanking. I meant those words. Then why did I feel out of place?

I thanked the fans lastly, before saying good night and making my way to the back of the stage feeling… lost. Empty. Confused.

—

I was sitting in the after party a good few hours later staring at my award at the table in front of me. I had grown so used to the routine it barely even registered anymore: walk backstage after winning, take pictures with the award and the presenter, give three interviews then go to press room, make sure to mention the project I won for and the one I have coming up next (“Heathers! Oh, my God! I’m so excited for everyone to see it!”). Watch the rest of the ceremony, celebrate with the cast at the after-party…

And yet. It had stopped feeling… what? What did it used to feel like? Hadn’t it always felt like a job? Hadn’t I always drank my way through award ceremony nights to convince myself this job was better than the other options I had? Either because it paid so well or because I was so good at it?

No. I liked it. I used to like it, I knew I did. Then when did I stop liking it?
I stared at my award, its golden gleam intimidating the anxiety out of me; some actresses much older, talented and experienced than me went years without ever getting one and now I had two.

My phone buzzed in my hand again – it was a text from Alli. ‘Congraaaaats!’, it read. I wished I felt as excited as her text did.

I decided I should leave. A good night’s sleep was all I needed. I was probably just tired. I was probably just on PMS. A cold shower and a chocolate bar would slap me back to my old self – if only I could find it.

___

“Goodnight.” Eddy called, when we got home, making his way behind me to the guest bedroom.

“Night.” I replied, making my way to my own room.

My good, old Los Angeles house had stopped feeling like home and it wasn’t hard knowing why. It was because I knew no matter which room I walked into, Harry wouldn’t be there to greet me with his cute smile.

I left my shoes, handbag and award in the closet and took off my Ashi dress, leaving it ready to be collected to go back to my stylist’s atelier in the morning. I removed the nude adhesive tape that had been making sure the dress wouldn’t move away from my breasts and fished a bikini top from my bag, marching back out into the pool after putting it on.

I sat by the pool with my feet on the water and looked at the time on my phone; it was almost one in the morning, which meant it was almost nine in London.

“Good morning, beautiful.” Harry’s voice greeted me, a tad nasalized, when he picked up.

“Good morning, Mr. Prince.” I replied, smiling automatically at the view of the Los Angeles horizon ahead.

“Congrats on the Emmy.”

“Thank you. Why do you sound sick?”

“I don’t sound sick.”

“You do. Are you getting sick?”

“I don’t get sick.”

“Right. Well, drink a lot of fluids today just to make sure, okay?”

“Whatever you say.” He replied. “Hey. You don’t sound drunk.”

“…thank you?”

He giggled. “You know what I mean… you’re usually drunk after award shows.”

“Yeah, well… my boyfriend made me promise I wouldn’t drink.”

“Wise man.” I laughed. “He must be looking out for you.”

“Whatever you say.”
“…I miss you.”

I closed my eyes, sighing as I still smiled. “I miss you more.”

“We’re such losers.” He added. “We used to be able to go one, two, even three months without seeing each other.”

“I know. We’ve spoiled ourselves.”

“You’re coming home tomorrow, right?”

“I am.” I smiled. “I should be home tomorrow night.”

“Good!” He sounded so excited I felt my heart racing in my chest.

Suddenly, I remembered something I hadn’t thought of for the longest time and, before I could change my mind, I decided to ask him about it.

“Hey, Harry… do you remember that time in 2014 when we first saw each other in Brazil after not talking for almost a year?”

“When you kissed me in the garage of the British ambassador’s house? Yeah, I remember.”

I smiled. “No, I mean the night after that, when you came to see me in my hotel.”

“Yeah, I remember.” I could almost hear the smile in his face. “It was hard pretending I didn’t want to kiss you, but we had argued on the shopping mall and I just couldn’t accept that we would end up like that…”

“And you told me about how you didn’t like your job anymore.”

“Yeah.”

As if in a dream, I remembered the night he marched into my hotel room and told me everything he had been avoiding talking about for almost a whole year:

‘They gave me an office job and the deal is if I do it for a while I get promoted, and then there’s more office job and I’m glad they trust me, and it means I’m doing well, but… I didn’t join the Army so I could spend my days behind a desk in an office. People think I should, because I’m good at it. And I am, I am good at it. I’m planning a four-day long international sports event for armed services veterans in September, and I like it, don’t get me wrong, I do. I like that part. I like the competing, and actively helping soldiers who… who lost something while fighting for us. But people assume I like all of the desk-job thing since as far as they know I spent all my time in New York doing just that, but it’s different. It’s not New York. It’s not the same. I don’t like it. I don’t like my job.’

“Was it hard?” I asked him, on the phone. “Realizing you didn’t like it anymore?”

Harry was silent for a while.

“Yes.” He admitted. “I mean…” He sighed. “I mean, the military, they… they saved my life in a way, you know? They didn’t just make me who I am, they saved me. I was a complete mess when I enlisted. They made something good out of me. My father, my grandfather. You can trace generations back of men and women in my family who have served and served well. The military is almost as much of a family business as being a royal is. And I love it… It’s always been one of
the few parts of being a royal that I actually liked. That I… understood. I respect the institution. I love it, still. So it was hard understanding that…”

“That it wasn’t a betrayal?” I asked, realizing how small my voice sounded.

“Sort of, yes.” He agreed. “It was hard understanding that not liking the job I was doing then didn’t invalidate the job I had done before, you know?”

I knew – of course I knew. Did not liking my job now invalidate the work I had done before? The work that had changed my life and made me into who I was? The job I had truly loved?

“And I was good at it, too. So I felt it was my duty to go on. But it’s just not how life is, you know? At the end of the day I had to accept that even though it was something that had made me happy in the past, it just wasn’t anymore, and so I had to move on to something that did.”

His words fit into my heart like a glove.

“…did you manage?” I asked, a little desperate now, thinking if I had a right to give up something I was so good at. “Are you happy now?”

“I am.” He said. “I like the conservation work. And I’ve even been enjoying the royal duties more. Though I prefer the conservation work, you know?” He chuckled, and I managed to smile.

“I know.” I told him.

“Why are you asking, Jen?”

“I don’t know.” I lied. “I was just thinking about it… I was just… I won the Emmy tonight and I was thinking that I won one too last year and I was in such a different place in my life. I started to think of everything that changed and I just… I don’t know, I just feel like such a different person.”

“Do you not like this new person?”

I thought about it.

Though she was currently confused out of her mind, the new Jen was healthier, less stressed out and definitely a lot happier.

“No, I like it. I… I even love her. She’s…” I sighed. “She’s who I wanted to be when I was little.”

“Good. I love her too…”

I smiled. “I miss you.”

“Well, good thing you’re gonna see me tomorrow, because I miss you too.”

“I’ll be home soon.” I promised, both to him and to myself.

“I’ve been watching The Office, by the way.” He told me.

“You have?!”

“Yes, I’m on season six!”

“Woah!” I giggled. “You’ve had a productive weekend! You were on season four when I left.”
“Don’t act like this isn’t your fault.” He replied, chuckling. “I was perfectly okay having only seen the British version, but you just had to make me see the American one.”

“And how much better is it?”

He sighed. “…A lot now that Jim and Pam are really together.” He admitted.

“Told you.”

“Yeah…”

“What episode are you on?” I asked, waving my feet on the water, closing my eyes with a smile trying to pretend he was there, and we were talking in bed like always.

“Uh… Erin discovered Andy was engaged to Angela.” He told me. “Pam was telling her that she was engaged before Jim, and she said something I liked, how was it? Oh, uh… it’s not about who you’ve been with. It’s about who you end up with.”

I nodded, remembering the episode. “I like that one.”

“Yeah, she said… sometimes the heart doesn’t know what it wants until it finds what it wants.”

I opened my eyes, staring at the night sky of California. I didn’t know if he knew the turmoil I had been carrying in my heart, but somehow his words went straight into it, and they sounded like they had been made for me.

“That’s a good line.” I whispered.

“It is.” He agreed. “I like it.”

It occurred to me Harry might like the line for a more direct reason than I did – because he had an engagement in his resume before he had found me. But still, the line was echoing in my heart, telling me things that I didn’t know if I was ready to hear yet.

“I’ll see you tomorrow.” I told him.

“Goodnight, love.”

“Goodnight, Mr. Prince.”

——

It was a few hours later, almost four in the morning, when I found myself wide awake in bed. I had just woken up, and it felt like I had been asleep for years. I felt rested, energized, and my mind was clear as day. As I sat up in my bed, I automatically reached to the left side, missing Harry’s shape under the covers.

I couldn’t explain how it happened, but when I woke up that night I knew what was happening. I knew what I was feeling, why I was feeling it, and what I wanted – or, better yet, I was finally able to accept what I didn’t want. If I was being honest, the truth had been there for a long time, I just hadn’t been brave enough to see it.

I didn’t want to be an actress anymore.

Chapter End Notes
OKAY. SO. I know what you’re thinking: BUT WHAT ABOUT HARRY?! DOES SHE WANT TO MARRY HIM?! Calm down, children, all in due time! Jen needs to look into this with a clear head to make sure she makes a good decision, so she’s separating both issues. Now that she has decided on one issue, she’ll have no other option but to think about the other one. I hope you stick along for the ride, because this is when FIUYMI enters a new phase. I’d say we’re almost on the final third of the story – still a while to go, though.

Let me know if you liked it? What do you think Jen’s life will be like when she’s not an actress anymore? Keep in mind she still got a few movies to finish and promote, so she won’t stop being an actress that soon!

Hope you have a good week, thanks for reading!
The 27 Club

Chapter Summary

Jen tells her management about an important decision and Harry can already see the difference in her.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When I got home after my short trip to the US for the UN’s General Assembly and the Emmy Awards, it was the middle of the night. I wheeled my bag into the sitting room and left it there to avoid making too much noise and walked to the bathroom barefoot, having left my boots behind for the same reason.

Vodka was fast asleep in her little pink mattress when I slowly passed by her, making my way through the big, double doors into the bedroom. Harry’s shape under the covers was a comfortable sight and the lavender smell from out laundry detergent made me feel at home at last.

With the heater shielding me from the late November cold outside, I took off my pants and jacket and slid under the covers as close to Harry as I could, enjoying the warmth of his skin and smell of his perfume.

“Hey.” He let out, whispery, his voice rough as he opened his eyes drowsily. “You’re home.”

I smiled as his arms moved under the covers to wrap around me, bringing me to lay inside his embrace.

“I missed you.” I told him, letting myself be hugged, caressing his naked torso with my palm.

“Me too. How did we ever go months without seeing each other?”

“We didn’t have any other choice.” I replied, knowing I never wanted to go through that again.

“How was your flight?” He asked, and his hand followed the trace of my backbone down.


He opened his eyes, more awake now. “Hi.” He smiled back.

Framing my face with his hands, he slid his fingers between my hair, brushing it away from my eyes. I adjusted myself on top of him, sitting my crotch on top of his, feeling his erection get slowly harder at my touch.

“What happened?” He asked, eyeing me with confusion.

“Why?”

“You look… different.”
I wanted to tell him that I felt different, but I wasn’t sure if that was the moment for it. The decision of moving away from acting would still take a long time to get into place and I didn’t want to tell him before I knew how the details would play out.

The conversation I had had just that morning, hours before, with my management team was still echoing in my mind.

“Different how?”

He shrugged. “Just… different.”

I leaned down and touched his nose with mine. I heard a barely audible grunt from him when I thrust my crotch harder against his.

I leaned just slightly away before he could kiss me. “I have a question.”

“Yeah?” His hand left my hair and moved slowly down my body until my underwear. He cupped my butt cheek, forcing me harder on him. I felt his volume on me and started tingling all over.

“You know when you say I’m the most interesting person you know?” I asked, in a whisper, sliding my hand down his torso towards his boxers. He nodded, soundless. “Let’s say, hypothetically, that I wasn’t an actress.” I held on to his hard erection, feeling myself move up and down as his breath got harder. “That I wasn’t a celebrity. That no one knew my name. That no one cared.” I slid his member out and rubbed his knob against my labia, under my underwear, slowly. “Don’t just tell me what I wanna hear. Be honest… would you still love me if I was boring?”

In a quick move, I slid him inside me, feeling instantly filled, stretched, by him.

Harry let out a long sigh, struggling to keep his thoughts in order. He sat up, slowly, and his hands brought forward my knees, making me wrap my legs around his waist to sit in his lap.

He looked at me and smiled. “You’re Jenifer Silva.” He slowly slid up my shirt until my chest was as bare as his, throwing it across the room. “You could never be boring.”

I started to slowly rock us together. Before I knew what was happening, he threw us back to the bed, lying on top of me.

As he slid in and out, his cock rubbed against my clit making me forget what was it that we had been talking about. Making me forget where we were, what time of the year it was, my name… Making me forget anything that wasn’t him and me, and his moving inside and out of me.

“Stronger.” I begged, whispery.

Harry held the crook of my knees and slid my lower in the mattress. I felt my beck rise in the bed against my will as I felt him harder against me. I bit my lip to stop myself from screaming as my nails scratched anything they could find. Harry didn’t complain.

“I wanna hear you moan.” He asked, his warm breath against my neck sending chills all over my body.

I opened my lips and let the sounds out, as my legs wrapped firmly against his. He slammed me faster and I lost all control over my own body for the delicious minutes while all that mattered in our lives was the extension of that California king bed.

Then, when I didn’t think I could handle it anymore, I felt his body harden against mine and heard
his guttural grunting when he came.

He slammed against me one more time, making another moan leave my lips involuntarily. Then another, and I sighed when he pulled himself out.

We didn’t move. We just laid there, enlaced, his weight on top of me making me feel whole and right; our breaths erratic and fast paced calming together, rhythmically.

For a long time, no one said anything. We just breathed together and marveled in the wonders we had just felt. I caressed his naked back gently, calmingly, trying to soothe the soft skin my nails had just harmed. Everything felt right in the world.

He raised his head and moved it down just enough to kiss my left breast, gently, calmly, softly.

He rested his chin between my breasts to look at me and smiled.

“Hi.” He said.

I smiled, sighing. “Hi.”

“Ants.” I felt my brows furrowing in confusion. Harry giggled. “That’s pretty much the most boring thing I can think of. You could decide to spend the rest of your life researching the history of ants, and you would still be the most interesting person I know.” I smiled larger. “Do you know why?”

I nodded, serious. “Because I’m that good in bed.”

He laughed. “That too.” He kissed my chest, tracing his way up until his eyes were in front of mine. “Because I love you.”

I sighed. It had been a year and the words still made the room spin when I heard them.

“And so, Jenifer,” Harry went on, “you could never be boring to me.”

When that man smiled and leaned down to lay his head on my shoulder, his arms wrapped around me and we remained in our embrace as my mind was filled with a thousand things at once.

But the most important of them was the utter peace which filled me every time he touched me. The most important was the feeling that I wouldn’t mind one bit to spend the rest of my life in that bed, with him, and Richard’s words from a few hours before echoed in my mind.

——

“Star Wars.”

The list of things that made Richard Artchet happy was very extensive and almost complex at times: good wine; Swiss chocolate; tanning beds; a warm day in St. Bart’s; fast Wi-Fi; well-maintained classic cars; his children’s happiness and his clients’ success. But as he said the words ‘Star Wars’ his eyes were shining with such excitement it confused me.

“Since when are you a nerd?” I asked him, standing barefoot in the living room in my house in Los Angeles that morning after the Emmy Awards Ceremony.

“I’m not.” He told me, his smile turning into a smug grin as he sat back, relaxed, in the couch. “But you are.”
“I still don’t see what you mean.”

“The movie I told you about?” He asked, raising his eyebrows at me suggestively. “The one for you to do in late 2017 after Doctor Who?” I nodded remembering the project he mentioned while I was in the hospital, which should be filmed in Canada. “Star Wars.” It took me a while to understand, but when I did, I knew my reaction had not been what Richard was expecting. “Well, this is really anticlimactic. I was expecting you to freak out a little more.”

“Star Wars wants me?!” I asked. “For one of the new movies?!”

“Star Wars wants you!” Richard smiled, nodding enthusiastically. “When Episode VIII starts to shoot in late 2017 in Canada, you’ll be in it!”

Suddenly, my heart constricted at the joy in his face, as I understood why he was so happy. Star Wars didn’t make him excited, and it wasn’t my possible success either, as Star Wars wasn’t exactly award season material. He was happy because he knew the idea of being in Star Wars would make me happy.

Richard didn’t consider me one of his clients – he valued my happiness as he did with his own children.

How am I supposed to look this man in the eyes and tell him I don’t want to be an actress anymore?!

“Disney is getting Spielberg to direct and you’ll play a new character.” He added. “Spielberg is adamant to have you on it. Disney sent the contract and everything. They’ll send the script soon as it’s done.” He pointed at the thick block of paper on my coffee table. “Josh’s been over it already, it’s all in order. So if you can sign it, we’ll get Janine and Monica started on the marketing plans with Disney.”

Janine smiled brightly at me as Clara, her blonde hair waving behind her, jumped from her seat beside Monica to find a pen in her purse and give it to me along with the contract.

“I’m confident we can get them to release an action figure of your character.” Janine told me. “You’ll be a small character, but you’re a big name. It’ll be in their best interest to do it, and it’ll mean more revenue for us.”

Clara was giving me a suggestive glance as she held the bulky contract and the pen up to me. I was looking at the coffee table, still thinking about everything that had suddenly become so clear in my head and knowing that I had to tell them.

It wasn’t a matter of being able to hide it from them, it was about me not wanting to. This, this big, huge thing I had just understood about myself was who I was. It was a big part of understanding who I had become and I wanted them to know me. If they didn’t know about it, they didn’t know the real me, and they were more than my management; they were my family. I needed them to know me. I loved them.

“The next thing we need to discuss is the Heathers promo schedule.” Monica said, and the others looked at her. “We have you paired with Tyler for twenty press junket interviews and you’ll do another fifteen on your own.”

“That’s not a lot, are you sure that number is correct?” Richard asked her.

“Yes, we requested her schedule to be lighter.” Janine told her husband. “Because of the ulcer and all.”
Richard nodded, and Monica looked back at her notes on her tablet.

“We have a shoot with the whole main cast for Rolling Stone,” she went on, “and another one just with the girls for Glamour Magazine, that’ll be done in London and Paris before the promo tour starts. And then we’ll have you on Graham Norton Show for the British premiere, and Jimmy Fallon, Jimmy Kimmel and Ellen for the American one.”

As she spoke, the others looked at her – business as usual. I, however, held the Star Wars contract and flickered through the pages absently, my mind thinking of a million things at once.

One, I was thinking of the day I had met them.

I met Richard at a meeting in his office during the first season of The Mediator. He was wearing his usual Armani suit, sitting in a leather armchair across from me giving me his pitch speech (“We have many success stories and are confident you’ll be the next one if you’re represented by us.”). I had my legs crossed and was wearing a leather jacket and aviator sunglasses to mask my baggy eyes, credit of my latest hangover. As my party-girl phase was gleaming ahead in my future, I had no patience for the meeting. So I just told Richard I knew how management representation worked, signed the contract he had ready for me and lazily made my way out of his office asking him to get me a movie for when I had time off from the show.

I remember that as the day I met the person who would soon save my life. Richard remembered that as the day he met a girl who should really read her contracts before signing.

It was a few weeks later that he had to bail me out of jail for the first time for DUI. His sweet-talking of the police captain took a while and when I was finally out, the California sky had turned into a pinkish sunny morning one.

Richard took me to his house instead of mine and left me and my very short black dress lounging on his couch as he set off to prepare breakfast for his kids. At the time, Hunter was a junior in high school and Asher was twelve. At seven years-old, Payton was the first of them to wake up that morning.

It took me a while to notice she was there, wrapped up in her Cinderella blanket watching the thin, pale figure in a black dress taking over her couch. Later on in life, Payton would describe her first impression of me as ‘legs for days and a hangover for a face’.

“Hi.” I said, then, eight, almost nine years ago.

Payton didn’t say anything, but her eyes drifted in the direction of the kitchen from where she could hear her father.

I looked at the TV, which didn’t quite have much of my attention. Richard had left it on cartoons and it occurred to me then that it might have been the little girl’s tradition to watch cartoons every Sunday morning as she waited for her brothers to wake up.

I sat up on the couch to make some room and tried to give her an inviting smile.

“Do you wanna watch the cartoons with me?” I asked.

Payton nodded slightly before approaching the couch to sit by my side, adjusting her blanket over herself. She eyed me worryingly before adding:

“You can lay again if you want.”
She puffed her blanket on her lap to make a little pillow for me, and returned my smile. My head hurt too much to wonder if I was scarring that child for life, so I just laid on her lap and fell asleep to her gentle caressing of my tangled, messy, weed-smelling hair.

I remembered that as the day I first felt like part of a family since saying goodbye to my parents after my high school graduation. Richard remembered that as the day his second daughter made her way into his life and heart.

As I stared at the Star Wars contract, I knew what it meant. It didn’t just mean being part of an amazing franchise that I was a huge fan of. It meant three or four more months of acting work. It meant I would still need to be an actress for the entire next year and then probably still do promo for it a year later.

“And then we have 2018 projects to start to think about.” Richard said, and I was taken out of my trance. “I know you’ve met with Tim Burton in London, Jen, and he loves you. I spoke to him last week and he said he wants you for a project for mid-2018, so we have that reserved for him. And I think we should consider another drama for early on in that year.”

That was it. I knew it in my heart, in my soul, that I could not handle another two years of this. I knew what I had to do.

“I won’t sign this.” I told Clara, who still had her arm raised handing me the pen to sign the Star Wars contract.

That seemed to get their attention.

Richard gave me a worried glance. “I know, no script yet. But, come on, honey, you know it’ll be good!”

“Richard,” I started and paused, taking in a deep breath trying to think of how to say this. “I’m not gonna sign this contract or any other contract.”

“What do you mean?” He asked.

They stared, expectantly and, unexpectedly, I let out an excited giggle.

I couldn’t help it. Telling them felt like making it official and making it official simply made me so unbelievably happy! It made me excited, as if my life was finally starting! Even though it was just entering another chapter.

“I realize this is gonna sound sudden and out of the blue, but I need you to understand I have had this feeling inside of me for a long time.” I explained, nervously. “I understand you’ll have questions, but I need you to understand that this is what I want and I need you to respect it.”

“Oh, my God, Jenifer.” Monica mumbled, looking utterly confused. “What is it?!”

I took in a deep breath and sighed.

“I don’t wanna be an actress anymore.”

When the words came out, they were as simple as could be. There was no nervous laughter, not a single note of regret in my tone – or in my heart. As the words came out, aloud for the first time, they confirmed the feeling in my heart and I knew they were true.

The others didn’t seem so sure.
“I’m sorry, what?!” Richard asked, scoffing.

“It’s not a joke.” I told him. “I have been feeling… this for a long time. I didn’t wanna tell you because I thought it would go away, but it hasn’t. And now I am finally able to admit it to myself and to you, too. I need you to know because I need you to understand why I can’t sign the Star Wars contract, or any other. I don’t wanna be in Star Wars. I don’t wanna be in anything else.”

“Jenifer…” Monica started, her eyes widened.

“No, don’t worry.” I interrupted, knowing what she was going to ask. “I’m not dropping out of Tangled, or Hamilton, or Doctor Who, or out of the You Will Come Back To Me promotion. I am proud and excited for these projects, but I am even more excited at the thought that they will be my last projects.”

There was a long silence. Clara very slowly walked back to her seat in the couch, leaving the contract and pen in the coffee table, seeming uncomfortable. As my newest team member, the personal assistant clearly didn’t think she had a right to an opinion over the shocking news.

“Okay, slow down.” Richard started, leaning forward in his seat to rest his elbows in his knees. I thought I was going at a pretty slow pace, but didn’t say anything out loud. Janine stood by Richard’s side with a blank expression on her face, though her dark skin was paler than usual.

“What- what-?” Richard sighed. “What are you saying?! What would you even do if you weren’t an actress?!”

I smiled, before shrugging. “I honestly don’t know.” I told them. “And I don’t mind not knowing. For the first time ever I don’t mind not having a plan. This isn’t as much about what I wanna do next as much as it is about what I wanna be able to stop doing now.”

“And you wanna stop…” Monica asked, still sounding confused. “…acting?”

“Yes.” I said.

“Why?!” Richard asked, exasperated.

I sighed, trying to form an answer that was both truthful and gentle.

“There’s not a big reason.” I explained. “Just a bunch of little reasons. They have always been here, but they weren’t so important before. But they are now. The most important of them being that… this job simply doesn’t make me happy anymore – not as much as I wanna be.”

“Well, I’m sorry!” Richard almost shouted, sarcastically. “I had no idea you were suffering so much!”

“Richard…” Janine warned, sadly, as I rolled my eyes. He ignored both of us.

“No, I am! I am so sorry, Jenifer.” He went on. “I mean, Jesus! We’ve been busting our ass trying to build your career up, making you a millionaire, then billionaire, putting you on top of the world, on top of every list of highest paid celebrities, of most famous young women in Hollywood, and this whole time this wasn’t making you happy?!?”

“I’ve been happy!” I interrupted. “Like I said, the reasons were there, but they didn’t matter before. I didn’t care about them. This is what I wanted so far, but it’s just not anymore. But I’ve been happy, I have!” I looked at Janine, desperate that they would think I had been hating my job this
whole time. “I’ve loved every single thing I’ve been a part of! But lately I’ve started to realize that the parts I like about my job now are not exactly the acting parts.”

“I don’t understand.” Monica said, as Richard still fumed angrily.

“I like hanging out with friends.” I told her. “I like being in a movie, being a character. I like seeing the final product and knowing I will be in it forever. But the making of the movie, the creative part of it, actual acting? It became... exhaustive. It’s not that I hate it, I just don’t love it anymore.”

“Do you have any idea how many people would kill for this job?!” Richard asked, standing up now. “Thousands! Hell, millions of people are out there right now dreaming of having a chance, just a little chance of making it in this business, Jenifer!”

“I know!”

“Do you?!” He shouted. “Because I think if you did you wouldn’t be this ungrateful right now!”

“I am very grateful!” I shouted back. “Richard, you know I would not have survived in Hollywood without you. Literally. I was a mess when you met me! A mess! If you hadn’t taken me into your life, into your family, I don’t think I would have made it! Not just in the business, Richard, in life. I would never have gotten myself out of that depression. I would never have grown out of that god-awful party phase. I would have probably overdosed on coke before I was even twenty-one!”

There was a deafening silence as I steadied my breath. The unspeakable truth of the reality in which I found myself when Richard met me finally voiced, there was no hiding from it anymore. Not for me, not for them.

Richard looked away, his hands on his hips. I was panting nervously, trying to keep away the tears as I desperately tried to think of a way to make them understand.

“Surely you remember, Rich, what you told me when you hired me to work with Jenifer.” Janine started. “We were not on good terms then, you and I, and I wondered why was it that you were overcoming your pride to admit I was the best in the business just to get me to work with this beginner no one knew and you told me-“

“With the right help, she could be something great.” Richard interrupted. “Without it, she might just become the first actress in the 27 club.”

I gulped. The 27 club was a popular term to describe the ever growing number of party scene musicians who died at 27, usually due to drugs.

“I am so grateful for everything you, all of you, and this entire business, have done for me,” I told them, “I am. You made me who I am. You made me strong, strong enough to know I deserve to be as happy as I can even if it isn’t doing this. You made me strong enough to admit that I want something different now. And I can’t ignore that.”

“How long have you felt this way?” Janine asked, almost whispery.

“Too long.” I told her. “I’ve started noticing it almost a year ago now. I just... I just wasn’t able to admit it, even to myself.”

“You have an EGOT.” Richard told me, turning to face me. “You’re the first Latin American to win the leading actress Academy Award, Jenifer! You have a Grammy and a Tony! You can’t just walk away from this!”
“We can’t force her to do something she doesn’t want to do, Richard.” Janine told him.

“But this is what I’m saying,” he told his wife, “surely you can’t hate it as much as you think you do! No one would be this good at something they hate, you wouldn’t even have gotten this far! And you have won every single award you possible could!”

“Richard-“

He interrupted me, looking calmer and sounding gentler, “Listen.” He held my shoulders, fatherly. “What I’m saying is, you’ve been through a lot. There was the Hate Wave. And you’ve been away from the movie scene for a while, and the lack of award season nominations makes you feel like you’re not getting anywhere, I get that, Jen.”

“I don’t care about that-“ I tried to tell him, who shook his head.

“And then there was the ulcer, I mean, of course you’re tired, you’ve been so stressed out!” He added. “But, dear, that’s not a reason to make such a permanent decision. These things will pass, Jay! Soon enough you’ll remember why we’re doing this you just have to take a deep breath and be strong.”

“I am strong.” I told him. “I told you, Richard, this isn’t a decision I just made. This is something I’ve been feeling for a long time. I’ve only now been able to talk about it. I don’t wanna do this anymore.”

“We’re slowing down your schedule.” He went on, as if I hadn’t spoken. “We’re just doing it gradually. You’re not doing as much social media promotion anymore, and you’ll soon be doing none of it. I mean, we can get Clara your passwords and she can do it for you! And we’re gonna focus in one project at a time.”

“Richard…”

“No, listen!” He interrupted. “I think you should take a break.”

I sighed.

“Her schedule is full until September of next year,” Monica told him. “I don’t think waiting ten months for a break will do her much good.”

“We’ll find the time.” Richard argued. “We’ll find a way. But you deserve a break. Not just one or two weeks off, either. A real vacation! For you to spend some time with your parents in Brazil, and a good few weeks traveling or doing nothing. You’ve earned it!”

Sadly, I knew that if I had had that break much earlier maybe I would have gone a lot longer without being bothered by my workload. But even then I knew I would still inevitably wanna quit eventually.

“It’s not enough, Richard.” I said. “It’s not what I want.”

“Jenifer!” He argued.

“No, listen, Richard! I need you to understand what I am saying!”

“You could be the next Meryl Streep!” He shouted.

“I don’t wanna be!” I told him. “Because that means I’ll still be acting when I’m thirty, and forty
and fifty! I can’t even stand the thought of another full year acting, Richard, I would never be able to handle this!”

Janine sighed. “She did always said she wouldn’t want to do this forever.”

I looked at her, confused. I did?

“She did?” Monica asked.

“Yes,” Janine told her, “I distinctively remember right at the beginning when we had a conversation about actress mothers, and Jen told us she wouldn’t want to be one, because a set is simply no place to raise a child. She said she knew it from experience, as she felt like she had been raised in one. And as we always knew she wanted a family, we’ve always sort of known she would quit at some point.”

I didn’t remember that, but she was right.

“Is this about Harry?” Richard asked, abruptly, sounding a lot less gentle.

“What?” I asked. “What is?”

“This, Jenifer, this!” He replied. “Suddenly deciding you don’t like your job anymore! I can’t help but notice this epiphany occurred to you right after you started living with the guy! Is that what this is about?!”

Utterly confused, I stared at the others for help, but they looked just as confused.

“I don’t understand what Harry has to do with this.” I told him. “He’s my boyfriend. This is about my career.”

“Yes, a career that you can’t have if you wanna marry him!” he said, pointedly.

I felt the air escaping me as it usually did when the ‘M word’ was mentioned, but I also realized it wasn’t as dramatic as it used to be.

I was completely lost for words. “I… I still don’t understand.” I told him, sincere.

“Oh, spare me, Jenifer!” Richard shot back. “You’re infatuated with the party prince and decided you wanna be the next Cinderella and now you’re throwing away your life!” He shouted, angrily. “I never pictured you as the girl who gives up her job for a man.”

“Richard!” Janine warned, irritated, looking offended now.

“I resent the accusation, Richard,” I said, angrily. “but I still don’t see why you would think Harry has even anything to do with this! He doesn’t even know about this yet.”

“Jenifer,” Monica said, “Harry can’t marry an actress, but if you’re not an actress anymore, it’d make it easier for his family to accept you.”

I stared, silently, finally understanding, my mouth opened and dried.

“So…” Richard started again, glaring at me, “can you look me in the eyes and tell me he isn’t what this is about?!”

I took a deep breath as not to let my anger guide my next words.
“If Harry and I broke up tomorrow,” I told him, “I would still want 2017 to be my last year as an actress.”

He scoffed. “Bullshit! You’re giving up your life for him and you know it!”

“I’m not giving up anything!” I shouted, to shut him up. “I am making a conscious, professional decision to make a career change. I don’t wanna act anymore, Richard. That is it. And that will be it whatever happens on my personal life. If I marry Harry, and I’d be happy to, it’ll be a completely different subject!”

‘If I marry Harry, and I’d be happy to’, the words echoed in my mind as soon as I had said them. I’d be happy to. They didn’t feel false, or weird, just… natural. Just… truth.

When did that happen?!

“I don’t wanna be an actress, Richard, and I’m sorry if that’s disappointing to you, but it’s just where I am right now. I’m not doing this for him. Or anyone. And I won’t stick to a job I don’t like just for you or anyone else, either. I’m doing this for me.”

There was another long silence, then Janine stood up and walked towards me.

She smiled before wrapping her arms around me tenderly.

“I just want you to be happy.” She said. “You’ve earned it, babe.”

Monica and Clara smiled at me from the couch.

“I’m with you.” Monica told me. “‘Till the end. Whatever you need.” She shrugged. “As long as you need me.”

Janine raised her long fingers to dry a single tear from my cheek, and smiled as she raised my head high.

“Now,” she started, “let’s make sure Jenifer Silva goes out with a bang.”

I smiled at her, feeling more grateful than ever, and then we all looked at Richard, who was still facing the window.

“What if you change your mind?” He asked. “Then what?!”

I shrugged, smiling. “Then I’ll shamelessly adjust my life accordingly, just as I am doing now.” I assured him. “But I don’t think I will. I think…” I sighed. “I think this is a part of my life that is over. Now I want new things. And, Richard…” I walked towards him, to stand in front of him where I could look him in the eyes. “I want to have your support.”

“Do you realize what you’re doing?” He asked. “You are basically firing me, Jenifer.” He reacted to the shock in my expression. “Yeah, you are. Whatever you decide to do, until you stop acting and maybe even later, you might always need PR and an assistant,” he pointed at the others, “but effectively now, you don’t need me in your life anymore, do you?!”

“Richard,” I started, startled, “you’re family. I will always need you in my life.”

He blinked, and I saw his own eyes filling with tears as he stared off into the Los Angeles horizon ahead of my windows.

With my heart filling with love, I knew what his problem was. Richard wasn’t upset about losing a
client, or about the success I was ‘throwing away’. He was upset that he wouldn’t have an excuse to be in my life anymore.

He took a step closer before holding my hands in his. “I just want you to be well.” He said.

“I know.” I smiled. “Which is why you should see that this is the right decision.” He slowly nodded, looking down at our hands together. “I just cannot handle the thought of spending one more day than I have to doing this.”

He nodded again, and looked up at me.

“If you could live without acting, you should.” He recited the old saying from the show business world, which I had heard a long time ago.

I smiled. “I couldn’t before, Rich,” I told him, “but I can now.”

Then, cleaning his throat, he suddenly smiled at me, resolute.

“Well, than I make mine my wife’s words.” He said. “Let’s make Jenifer Silva go out with a bang.”

Chapter End Notes

Soooooooooooooooooooooo pay attention world, cause Jenifer Silva is leaving… soonish. She still has a lot of work to get done. So to clarify: this chapter plays out in late 2016, and Jenifer still has to film 2 movies + one TV show appearance until September of 2017, then do promotion until the end of 2017, and THEN she can quit. So…… the question is: when will she tell Harry? What will he think? What will the world think? WHAT DO YOU THINK???????? also the million dollar question: what does she do afterwards?! I think we all know ;)}
You Must Protect It

Chapter Summary

Harry finds Jen in an interesting situation, and finds out about her big decision.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first time I wore a wedding dress I was nineteen years-old and shooting a romantic comedy called ‘He’s Not That Into You’. My character had a quick ‘where are they now’-type scene at the end with her wedding to the love of her life, and so I put on an off-white, lace, trumpet shaped gown and went to work. I didn’t think much of it then.

The second time I put on a wedding dress, I was twenty-one years-old and it was also for a movie: ‘The Big Catch’. My character entered a dating reality show competition just for the participation money and ended up as one of the finalists and actually in love with the bachelor. At the end, he chose her and she chose a million dollars and walked away, waiting the appropriate time to be as far away from the press as she could before she went after him and they got married and lived happily ever after with their one million dollars. For that one, I wore a sheath shaped, pearl white, satin dress with no veil for the characters’ beach wedding in Hawaii.

The third time I was in a wedding dress it was a simple mini dress for a ceremony in city hall – that was all my character in Wild & Free could afford.

The fourth time, on If Tomorrow Comes, Tracey Whitney wore a lavishing, beaded ball gown to con her way into a fraudulent billionaire’s life to steal his fortune and run away – one of the prettiest dresses of all.

Then there was the time I actually modeled the bridal line of Oscar de la Renta at eighteen years-old – pictures that were still available online.

I had planned to have the fifth time I wore a wedding dress to be for my own, but as it usually does, shit happens.

I was standing in my master bedroom in front of the big, golden framed mirror near the chest by the windows watching the fitting team work on the adjustments necessary for it.

“Well, the dress won’t close, so I think we won’t need to do much about the chest difference.” The designer told me.

“Good.” I told her, watching the way the lace bodice seemed to fit me, knowing it would still have to be altered. “But you will need to take off at least half a meter of the hemline. The bride is very petit.”

“And from the measurements you gave us, I think we’ll have to tighten up the waist too.” Her assistant added, checking on her notes the numbers I had given them, with Beezus’ measurements. “I don’t understand why we can’t fit the dress on the bride herself.”

“The bride is hospitalized.” I told them. “She gets tired easily, I don’t wanna overwhelm her. After
you’re done adjusting the dress to her size, we can do a final fitting to make sure it’s right, but I
don’t wanna put her through a lot of this.” Sighing, I noticed how my own voice got sadder. “She
can barely stand up for this long without panting anymore.”

They eyed me sadly before continuing their work.

Rosa Clará was a Spanish label. The designer they had sent to make the adjustments to the dress I
bought Beezus was called Maria Villanueva, a business-looking blonde woman with eyes of steel
and the ego of a white male.

“You need a veil.” She told me, going for her garment bag.

“I do?”

“We can’t see the final result properly without one. Do you know which veil Ms. Quin is going to
want?”

“Yes. Elbow length.”

She came back with the sheer white fabric and started to fiddle with my hair.

“Here, I’ll take this for you.” Her assistant gestured to my reading glasses – I never wore contacts
at home – and took them from me to place them in the nightstand.

“What do you think, Mike?” Maria asked him.

They stood side by side in front of me and I used the time to check in the full-body mirror what it
was that they were seeing.

Beezus’ dress was a pure white, ballgown with a sweetheart neckline and sheer short sleeves
covered throughout the bodice with lace, which morphed into layers of tulle in the big, puffy skirt.
From the front of the mirror, it looked perfect on me, but the back was opened as I had more chest
than her. Besides that and my height, we pretty much had the same body type, so it worked that I
tried the dress for her.

Maria and her assistant discussed centimeters and hemlines as my mind drifted to the image in the
mirror.

Strangely, it felt weird to see myself in a wedding dress now. It hadn’t before, all the times before,
because I was working. But as I wore Beezus’ dress it didn’t feel like work – probably because I
knew I didn’t want to be an actress anymore. Probably because, as Richard had been kind enough
to remind me, not being an actress brought me as close as I had ever being to marrying someone.

Not just someone, of course. My boyfriend. The man I loved. Now that my future was becoming
clearer in my head, everything suddenly felt possible and, with this ‘everything’, the possibility of
spending the rest of my life with Harry. The only question now was: did I want to?

My face was pale under the veil – the British weather didn’t do my Brazilian tan any favors and I
had lost it in mere months. The veil was puffy and fell to the sides of my eyes as Maria pinned the
dress with needles as I became lost in thought.

I could see myself in a dress like this, walking down an aisle, but who was I walking to? I felt
almost scared of imagining Harry there, but I felt even more scared at the thought of everything
else I knew would come with him – even though I barely knew what it was.
It occurred to me, as I stared at my reflection dressed as a bride, that though I had spent the last four years reminding myself I couldn’t be with Harry, I barely remembered the reasons anymore and, the truth was, I didn’t want to.

After telling my management team – Richard, Janine, Monica, Clara and even Eddy – that 2017 would be my last year working as an actress, it started to actually feel real and I started to feel so ridiculously excited about it.

I felt excited about the possibilities it afforded me; about all the free time I’d have to spend however it was that I wanted to; the chance to sleep eight hours a night. Traveling and enjoying the money I worked so hard for for years; seeing my family more than just once a year; not having to say ‘I’m working’ every time a friend asks me to go for drinks…

The idea of having time to live my life instead of having to spend every minute of it either working or preparing for work – going over scripts, planning which emotion to focus on at every word out of my character’s mouth – was so absurdly foreign and wonderful I barely dare believe it. This was one of the biggest reasons I didn’t want to think too much about Harry.

I didn’t want to wonder what the decision meant for us because it would mean thinking too much about things I didn’t know if I was ready to. Without the excuse of my work, what if I couldn’t find another reason why we shouldn’t be more serious? What if I suddenly realized I didn’t want to? Then what?

He had been the most constant, stable, safe, healthy, absolutely incredible part of my life for the past two years (ever since we became exclusive). I couldn’t stand the thought of my life without him and if I suddenly decided I didn’t want to move forward with him, I’d have to face my life without him and I simply didn’t want to.

Then there was the fear that Harry wouldn’t find me as interesting if I wasn’t an actress anymore – something he had already disputed, but that I still couldn’t stop thinking about.

And, of course, there was the fact I still had a good year to finish my acting career before even thinking about what to do next, so I had time – reason why Richard himself had asked me, still in L.A., to wait before I started telling people about my decision.

“I’m not going to keep something this big from Harry.” I told him, then.

“Fine. Tell him. But wait before telling anyone else.” He replied. “Maybe you’ll change your mind. In anyway, it’ll be more profitable for us to reveal this at the right time.”

I didn’t care about what was more profitable. The truth was I felt like shouting to the whole world that I finally understood what I was feeling and where I wanted to go. But despite getting the ‘go ahead’ from Rich, I seemed to be unable to tell Harry.

I had had plenty of opportunity, and yet I just couldn’t utter the words. What if he thought I was boring? What if he suddenly proposed? What if he thought it was a terrible idea? And, worst of all, what if I did change my mind? How do I go back and tell him, ‘never mind, I’ll just keep on being an actress!’?, after what could be months of planning a future excitedly?

Suddenly, in the middle of my hardcore thinking, there were voices. Maria and Mike didn’t stop what they were doing. I knew it was impossible to hear the front door opening from the master bedroom, so I knew, when I heard the voices coming from the hallway, that Harry had probably come back.
“Shit.” I let out, desperate.

My mind went to two places at once. One, I was wearing a wedding dress! Two, there was no way I could get it out in time.

“Honey, I’m home!” I heard, followed by laughter.

The really desperate thing about it was that it wasn’t Harry who said it – it actually sounded like Skippy.

‘Great’, I thought, ‘if it wasn’t bad enough, Harry has guests!’

The doors opened and three new figures were suddenly in the room with us, looking giggly from the door.

I looked up, pale. They looked up, eyebrows raised and suddenly silent.

“Hi, guys…” I started, using all my acting powers to appear casual even though I knew there was a freaking Friends episode where a guy broke up with Rachel after inexplicably seeing her in a wedding dress.

Skippy and Jake, from both of Harry’s sides, were coming out of their shocked trance and now had teasing grins on their lips. Harry still looked appalled.

“So…” I started. “This is a funny story.” I said, trying to sound like I did when I was telling embarrassing things in late night talk show interviews.

But Skippy was too much ‘the funny one’ to let this opportunity go.

“I didn’t know you guys were getting married.” He said, elbowing Harry in the ribs. “Mazel Tov!”

“I feel a little hurt that I wasn’t asked to be your best man.” Jake added, grinning. “You’re my daughters’ godfather, man.”

“Oh!” Skippy protested, now sounding a little more serious. “If Will is not going to be his best man, I think it should be me.”

“I’ve known him longer.” Jake replied.

“So, fun story!” I interrupted them. “My friend, Beezus, is getting married, and is too sick to go through these exhaustive preliminary fittings, so I’m doing it for her.”

“No need to find excuses, Jen.” Skippy told me, playful.

“Yeah,” Jake nodded, “it is perfectly normal for a guy to come home to find his girlfriend trying on a wedding dress. It must have happened to me and Zoe at least three times before we were engaged.”

“That’s right.” Skippy mocked, and now I was sighing, frustrated.

Harry hadn’t said a word the entire time, though his mouth was half opened and he was staring at me with an intense look of disbelief. He cleaned his throat.

“Would you guys mind waiting outside?” He asked his friends.

“Sure, but seriously though, who would be your best man?!” Jake asked and Harry rolled his eyes,
before practically pushing them out.

“Would you give me a moment, too?” I asked Maria and Mike, who nodded, understandingly, and left after putting their needles in the table between the two white, low back armchairs near the windows.

There was a long silence while Harry walked towards me, still eyeing the dress.

The situation felt so comical I actually had to stop myself from laughing.

“Harry,” I started, “this is Beezus’ dress. You know how tired she’s been lately. I’m just getting it fitted for her, we have almost the same measurements.” He didn’t say anything. “Please don’t freak out.”

“What? I’m-I’m, I’m not freaking out.” He stuttered, making me smile. “I’m…”

He eyed me up and down again, seeming overwhelmed, before sighing.

“I promise I’m not some crazy girl trying on a dress for herself!” I assured him, still almost laughing, hysterically. “I mean, this dress is gorgeous, but it’s not really my style. I think. I mean, it kind of is, but it’s not like that!”

Harry smiled now and walked the final distance towards me excruciatingly slowly. He was not speaking, though his smile was making me nervous. His eyes moved up from the hemlines of the dress, through the lace bodice until my – white veil covered – face. When I saw the turquoise blue staring back at me, it was like trying to stare into the sun – beautiful, but almost too much to handle.

In his eyes, I saw a cocktail of unbarring admiration, exciting hope, and overwhelming love. Somehow, I just knew he was seeing the future we talked about, jokingly, in Abu Dhabi. I could see it too, in his eyes, the horses I wanted to have, the garden, the chandeliers, the kids. I saw a glimpse of a future I had only ever dreamed of and he was seeing it too, right then and there, as he looked at me with a wedding dress on.

“Say something.” I begged. “Harry, are you okay?”

“You…” He started, his voice deep before he cleaned his throat to continue, “you-you look… you look…”

“It’s not mine.” I repeated.

“I know…” He nodded, looking breathless now. “I just, I’m sorry, Jenny, I just…” He came closer, resting his hands on my waist, “I can’t help it. You look absolutely… gorgeous.”

I felt butterflies dancing away in my stomach at how sincere he sounded.

“And I just, I can’t help it.”

“Can’t help what?”

He smiled, slightly. “Picturing it.”

He didn’t need to explain. I knew what he was picturing. Without my fears to stop him, he was picturing me, in this dress, walking down an aisle towards him. He was probably hearing the music, imagining my dad by my side and all our friends around. I wondered if it would look like
Will and Kate’s wedding and that’s when I knew I needed to stop. That exactly what I didn’t want to think about.

Harry slid his hands around my waist to where the dress was opened on the back. He touched my skin, delicately, tracing it with the tips of his fingers so lightly it made my breath rare. His face was closer to mine now and I couldn’t help but hearing the words ‘you may now kiss the bride’ in my head, my heart beating fast at the thought, begging him to do it.

“You should,” I cleaned my throat, closing my eyes, trying to focus, “go. You-you probably have… stuff to do with Skippy and Jake. And I have to finish this before, you know…” I couldn’t remember what was it that I had to do, but I knew I could come up with something as soon as he wasn’t standing so close to me. Suddenly, it came to me. “To go shoot for Dolce and Gabbana!”

I had to shoot the campaign for my sunglasses line that Saturday afternoon.

Harry nodded very slightly before leaning in to rest his forehead in mine. “Okay.” He said. “But promise me something?”

“What?”

“That I’ll get to undress you from one of these one day.”

We smiled together as I blushed, biting my lip to try and stop myself, to try and say something that would shift the conversation, that would stop that nonsense. That would make my heart stop beating so fast in my chest.

Harry kissed my forehead for a long time before giving me one last smile and walking out of the room without waiting for me to promise what he asked – probably knowing he was asking a bit much of me.

A long time after he left, a long time after I was strutting around London’s postcard historic places wearing couture and sunglasses I had designed myself as a famous photographer snapped shots of me, I was still feeling my heart excitedly leap inside, wondering if it would ever stop.

Wondering if I wanted it to.

—

Beezus and Kit got married on a cold winter day in early December. There wasn’t much preparation involved – in fact, the guests had gotten the call the day of the wedding, as bride and groom explained, they simply didn’t want to wait anymore.

So everyone was given tasks and hurried into their cutest looking outfits into London General Hospital – giving the paparazzi a field day – and marched into the hospital chapel trying to make the ceremony look as official as possible. That feature was particularly difficult as the ceremony was very much not official, which didn’t seem to bother bride and groom.

“It’s real for us.” Beezus told me, as I hurried inside her hospital room with her wedding dress. “It’s all that matters.”

They were, however, trying to make the wedding seem official, which involved a particularly weird turn of events: they asked Harry to officiate.

“Are you sure you don’t want Jen to do it?!” He asked them, looking pale, “I’m really bad at public speaking.”
That was, of course, a tremendous lie. Harry was a great public speaker – he simply always felt nervous when he had to do it, which didn’t change the fact that he was good at it.

“You’re a prince!” Kit argued, and Harry looked appalled.

“Why should that mean I’m good at this?!”

“You know… in ancient times the king had the power to annul weddings and all.” Kit added, seeming unsure.

“Dude.” Harry shook his head. Kit was looking at him, apprehensively, so he finally sighed. “Okay. I’ll try. But don’t expect too much.”

Kit beamed before going off to find his tie and I smiled at my boyfriend.

“You’re a hopeless romantic.” I told him, who rolled his eyes as he fished for his phone in his pocket.

“I’ll see you later.” He said. “I have to write a wedding speech.”

—

“Beezus, you look fantastic!” I told her as Natalie adjusted the elbow length veil on her half-up, curled hair.

“Thanks.” She smiled, caressing the fabric in awe. “I’m so nervous, though.”

“That’s normal, I’m sure.” Natalie smiled, just as her phone started ringing. “I’m sorry, I’ll be right back.”

Beezus’ eyes followed her and turned to me after she left.

“Please distract me.”

She knew I was the kind of person she could say that to without having to endure a pep talk about what motivated the sentiment. If anyone, after all, understood a freak out moment before a big commitment decision that would be me.

So as I knew when I met her that she could keep my secrets, I decided to give her another one.

“I’m not gonna be an actress anymore.”

Beezus looked up at me, surprised for a moment.

“Oh.” She nodded. “Why?”

I sighed, knowing I’d have to keep on explaining it for a long time still.

“It just doesn’t make me as happy as it used to.” I told her, remembering how her eyes would gleam at the memories of her work. “It doesn’t make me as happy as I know dancing makes you. As I know working with veteran does Harry. As I know songwriting does Taylor… And so… I just can’t do it. I guess I just… learned that I deserve to be as happy as I can.”

She smiled. “Good for you.”

“Good for me?”
Though I believed my explanation, I had prepared to have to justify myself a little more – like I had had to do with Richard, Janine and Monica.

“You gave me that advice yourself.” She added, still smiling. “You know… Make happiness your priority. That’s what you told me when we first met. That’s what I’m trying to do today and that’s what you should do too. Always.”

I stared at that beautiful girl, skinny, frail and pale, facing so much for such a young age. She had grown so much since I had met her, she had gotten so much more confident in herself even through the difficult circumstances. Despite terribly sad, I felt proud and happy at who she had become.

And then even sadder at the thought she wouldn’t have much time to enjoy the happiness she deserved.

Biting my lip to stop myself from crying at the thought, I picked the sheer lace gloves that paired with the dress and handed them for her to put on.

“Thanks, Bee.” I told her, smiling.

––

Gary, Heathers’ choreographer and Beezus’ boss, walked her down the aisle that day since Beezus’ parents had not had the time to fly in from Australia. Kit eyed her from the moment she stepped into the hospital’s chapel and didn’t take his eyes from her anymore.

I felt about to break down into tears at any point so I had to steady myself to be strong. And then, Harry started speaking.

Anyone who knew Harry just a little bit would know he never felt comfortable speaking in public, something he had to get over due to who he was. But I could recognize the signals of his nervousness: the hand beneath his suit jacket, over his heart, where his fingers were probably fidgeting restless.

He took a deep breath and smiled at the couple in front of him, before cleaning his throat as the song dimmed and preparing to speak.

“Dearly beloved,” he started, “I don’t really know all of you as much as to refer to you as such, but in my experience this is how you’re supposed to start these things.” The guests laughed, and Harry smiled, seeming a bit more comfortable. “If you’re wondering why Prince Harry is performing a wedding ceremony, that gives us one thing in common. I also have no idea.” There was more laughter. “Nonetheless, we are all here for one reason and one reason alone, we got an overly-excited phone call a few hours ago.” Harry paused again as the guests giggled. “Letting us know we would have the honor of witnessing Christopher and Beatrice vow their love to each other.”

Natalie Dormer leaned in to me, the fancy smell of her hair making her seem even prettier than normal. “Christopher and Beatrice?” She asked, in a whisper, with raised eyebrows.

I smiled. “He said no one uses nicknames in weddings.”

“It’s not a real wedding.”

“It’s Harry.” I justified. “His definition of weddings involve big ass abbeys, weird hats and the archbishop of London.”

She nodded. “Fair enough.”
“When I was preparing to do this I reached this part of my speech and I almost wrote down the line, you must be wondering why, in the present circumstances, Christopher and Beatrice would make this decision, when I had to stop. The truth is, and this is confirmed to me as I look around the room tonight, I don’t think any of us thought that when we got that call. In fact, if you’re anything like me, when you got the call, you probably just smiled largely knowing that this,” he looked at bride and groom, “simply makes sense.”

Kit and Beezus smiled at each other, knowingly, adorably, emotionally.

“I don’t stand here claiming to be any kind of expert in weddings or love.” Harry went on. “My whole life I heard a lot about it, though. I felt it, or thought I did, a few times, and at the end of the day…” He sighed, and his eyes drifted to me for a couple of seconds. He smiled, looking down at his notes, seeming confused. “Sorry. I- where was I?” He stuttered, looking adorably lost.

I smiled to myself at the thought just the sight of me could make him nervous, and as much as I tried not to, I had to wonder if he was thinking of me when he had written that speech.

“Right.” He cleaned his throat, ready to start again. “Most of us in this room have had to love someone in a very… public manner. Most of us have had to deal with loud opinions and judgment being thrown our way either we wanted it or not. Christopher and Beatrice did too. On that note, I think there’s too much being said about love. I think everyone has their own idea of how it is, how it should and shouldn’t be and what everyone else is doing wrong. There are all kinds of movies and love songs about it and sometimes it seems as if each of them contradict the other, but the truth is… I don’t think there’s one real definition of love. I don’t think there’s one way love should go or be. I think we are all kind of… trying. Doing our best to find someone that would make us feel like…” He looked at me again, smiling, and then looked away, “like our hearts have wings and we could fly.”

I smiled again, remembering the distant day in Morgan Bay when we started our publicity stunt, when I had told him I wanted more than anything to find a love like that. I had. I guess he had too.

“And trying not to hurt as we do…” He went on. “And as much as pop songs, romantic comedies and John Green books try to tell us otherwise, there’s not just one way to love. Love can look different in everyone and as long as both parties are as excruciatingly happy as they deserve, love is love. And at the end of the day, in the middle of a world that tries to tell us not to, choosing to love someone despite adversities remains one of the bravest things anyone can do. So, tonight, we are all honored to be here, witnessing the bravery and love of Christopher and Beatrice.” He smiled at them, who beamed at each other once more.

“Nice.” I heard Richard Madden comment, on a low tone, from the row behind me, and grinned.

“And before I step away so they can share their vows, I will leave you with one last bit of wisdom if I may.” He cleaned his throat, looking at his notes a lot more emotionally than he had all the time so far. “One of the most loving people I’ve ever known was my mother.” He said, looking up now, clarifying why he seemed so much more intense as he spoke. “She was a real ambassador of love and falling in love and loving as hard as you possibly can no matter how hard it seems… and though I wasn’t fortunate enough to have much time with her, I do remember what I think is one of the greatest things she’s ever said to me. She said…” he stared at his notes again, much more likely, I thought, to avoid everyone’s eyes than because he didn’t remember what he had to say. “She said if you find someone you love in life, you must hang onto it, and look after it, and if you are lucky enough to find someone who loves you back,” he looked up, and his eyes found me again, “then you must protect it.”

We exchanged a secretive smile, and I let those words sink into my heart.
I watched as Harry stepped away and Kit and Beezus exchanged sweet words to each other, making everyone in the room cry despite themselves. I could keep thinking was of the handsome breaded ginger that kept throwing caring looks my way – and winking from time to time, making me smile. He made my heart swell with adoration and I knew, as I stood there, I would do whatever I needed to protect him.

—

After the wedding was over, there was a short reception where we watched the unofficial Mr. and Mrs. Harington share an emotional first dance.

Afterwards, we rode home together and, without a single word, we ended up parking by the Thames river, across from the London Eye, the same place we had been twice before at different moments of our relationship.

We walked along the sidewalk taking in the cold night’s breeze, thinking of Kit and Bee, of love and loss... of everything and nothing.

As I reached the precise point where I could stand right before London Eye, I took a deep breath, remembering how young it felt like we were the first time we were by the Thames river together, still just trying to figure out how we felt for each other.

“I could do it.”

When I looked back at him, I realized Harry had stopped walking a few steps behind. He was staring at me intensively from his big, dark blue overcoat.

“Do what?”

He walked towards me, barely blinking in the cold December air.

“What we discussed when we thought,” he hesitated, “when we thought you were pregnant.”

Confused, I turned to face him completely.

“Do you mean...?”

“I mean I could renounce my place in the succession line.” He told me. “Mine and my descendant’s. This way we could walk away. I could mar...” He took in a deep breath. “I could choose to be with whomever I want and they couldn’t say anything and I could move away and...” he sighed. “And be with you.”

“Harry...” I started, not knowing how to finish.

We had discussed exactly what that meant a few days after the pregnancy scare – him leaving his rank behind to try to live like a civilian. It wouldn’t necessarily mean he would stop being referred to as ‘Prince Harry’ – he would always be a prince of the United Kingdom as his father was set to be king. But he wouldn’t get any new titles as life went by and he wouldn’t be expected to work on charity patronages or represent his grandmother on overseas diplomatic trips – or anything, really.

The problem was that this was something highly frowned upon. However many people considered the monarchy outdated and useless, a much bigger number would feel betrayed by something like this. As Harry explained to me, it all came down to what I watched in The King’s Speech. King Edward, who was Queen Elizabeth’s uncle, renounced his claim to the throne and so the next in line, his brother Albert, the Queen’s father, became king instead. Though they became highly
loved in time, and still are to this day, many historians and public still felt betrayed that a member of the royal family – who should have sworn to dedicate his life to the service of the country – would simply walk away from it.

Even if Harry’s situation was different – he wasn’t supposed to become king and things were a lot more different now – it was understood that refusing to be a part of the monarchy and to play a role in it would still feel like a betrayal as King Edward’s was still so fresh in history.

I could understand this because of something Janine had told me once about telling the truth on interviews: when you’re famous, no one wants to know that you have problems. No one wants to know that you are anything but absolutely enjoying the life you lead, which everyone assumes is perfect as it is so rare and privileged. The minute you complain, they see you as a betrayal. As ungrateful. Entitled. This happens because people think that if you have more money than they do, the least you could do is be happy and stop complaining.

This was the reason I knew it was important to announce my retirement in the right time, and with the right words, so people wouldn’t assume I was complaining through my privilege – and even then, they probably still would. And this was the reason I knew Harry would be hated if he did it.

That was just one of the reasons I couldn’t let him do it. The other reasons included the fact that I knew he would be doing it for me; that as someone who had just made a very similar decision, I knew he didn’t have the right motives; and finally, I knew despite having a complicated relationship with it, he had grown to love his job.

“You can’t do it.”

“Yes, I can.” He insisted. “I absolutely can. I just have to sign away my birth claim, announce it publicly and then we can do whatever we want.”

I sighed. “Harry.”

“What?!” He asked. “Jen, it would solve everything.” He took two steps towards me, and held my hands in his. “We could be together. After you’re done with your work here and have to move away again, I could move with you. We could have more time together.”

“Harry…” I shook my head. “I can’t let you do this because of me.”

“Why not?” He asked. “I know what I want and I know what I have to do to have it. What makes it so bad that I want to be with you?”

“Because you shouldn’t give up such a big part of yourself for it.”

“Yeah, well, life is like that sometimes.” He replied. “Jenifer, I want this. I promise.”

“You want me.” I told him. “You just want this because you think it’s the only way.”

“And why is that such a bad thing?!”

“Because you like your job!” I said. “As someone who has just faced this very question, I know how important it is to do it for the right reasons and I can’t let you do it like this.”

“I – I don’t understand. What do you mean?”

I knew what I had to tell him to explain why he simply couldn’t do it – but knowing it was the only way didn’t make it any easier. So I just took in a deep breath and braced myself for the moment of
“I’m not gonna be an actress anymore.” I told him. Seeing the confusion in his face, I decided to just add everything else I knew he was gonna ask. “I have officially stopped signing new contracts. Doctor Who will be my last official project. After I promote it and the other movies I still have coming out, the Brazilian one, Tangled and Hamilton, I will officially be retiring as an actress.” I sighed. “I have been thinking about this for a long time, but only now found myself brave enough to admit it and so I had to do something. The truth is acting doesn’t make me happy anymore and I want something that does. I don’t know what yet. Maybe the U.N. work. I don’t know. But I’m excited about not having to figure out… this is the first time the lack of a plan has actually felt good.”

Harry was silent. His eyes widened; intense.

I gulped. “You know how I am, I never have a definitive answer to things. Everything is a matter of interpretation… but this, this is something I’m sure of. I don’t wanna be an actress anymore. and I don’t know what I wanna be after I’m not an actress anymore, but I know I wanna be… healthier. Better. The… the most authentic version of me that I can be. I wanna rest. And do some good and… and travel.” I shrugged, smiling nervously. “I don’t really know and that is actually very exciting to me.”

He turned to look at the Thames, still silent.

“Say something, Harry.”

“This is why you asked about when I wanted to leave the military.”

“…yes.”

“You’ve known for a while, then.”

“…yes.”

“Why didn’t you tell me sooner?”

I sighed. “I had to tell Richard and Janine, and Monica… They… they have been as much a part of my career as I have. They deserved to be the first to know.”

He nodded, carefully. He didn’t seem surprised anymore. I could not, for the life of me, know what was going on in his mind.

“Also, I was scared.” I admitted, and he turned to look at me. “This job, this… career. I have had it since I was twelve years-old. I don’t know who I am without it, and I… I am afraid I won’t be as interesting.” I looked down. “It’ll take a while. I still have to work most of next year, and then attend award season in 2018, and I don’t know what’s going to happen until then, but at some point I won’t be Jenifer Silva anymore. There’ll be no more parties, no more awards, no more speeches… I’ll be… normal. It might take a while but if all goes well at some point I will fall into oblivion. And as exciting as I am for that, and as much as we complain about it, I know that it’ll change things. And I guess, I guess… I guess I’m scared you won’t find me as exciting as the girl you first met.”

I wasn’t looking at him when he finally spoke.

“Jen, you- you-” he sighed, and as I looked up, he was scratching his eyes, seeming frustrated. “You know, that actually feels offensive.” He sounded mad. “You think I care about that?! You
think that honestly matters to me?!”

“I don’t know…” I mumbled.

“Jenifer, what? Do you- do you think I’m even surprised by this?!”

“You’re not?”

He sighed. “I haven’t said anything, because…” He looked at his feet, “because it would sound like I was being biased… but, Jen, you haven’t seem to like your job for a while now.”

“What?”

He shrugged. “All you do is complain about it.”

“I…” I started, remembering that Beezus and Janine also didn’t exactly seem surprised. “Am I the only one who never thought about this?”

He smiled, slightly. He walked towards me, and I saw his lips part and close repetitively as he seemed to struggle to find the words he wanted.

“I don’t care what you do.” He told me. “I just want you. So don’t ever think I would find you boring.” I smiled, closing the distance between us to hug him. “If this is what you want, I’ll support you, Jenifer, I just want you to be happy.”

I hugged him tighter, and then leaned back to look at him.

“You see, Mr. Prince, that is exactly why I can’t let you walk away from your job.”

He frowned. “I don’t understand.”

“Making this decision was one of the hardest things I have ever had to do.” I told him. “And now that I have, I know it’s the right one because I know it’s what I truly want. For me.”

As I spoke, I realized, with renewed confidence, that I had a definitive answer to give Richard: I was not making this decision for Harry. I was making it for me.


He looked down, blushing slightly. Remembering that Chelsy had walked away on him because of exactly that part of his life – the part he was offering to give up for me – I knew I needed him to understand I would never do that.

“I love you.” I told him. He looked up, astonished. “I love every single part of you, including this part that you think it’s so hard to love.”

I only had a second to notice the intense look in his eyes before he closed the distance between us to kiss me, strongly.

I rested my forehead on his after a while.

“If this is what you want, what you really want for you,” I told him, “I’ll support you. I just want you to be happy.”
“You make me happy.” He whispered.

I smiled. “Think of it this way… if we broke up today, right now, where would you be a year from
now?”

He leaned back, looking confused. “What?!"

“Imagine what your life would look like a year from now if we break up today.” He seemed
thoughtful for a moment. “Would you still have walked away from your place in the succession
line?”

He looked down, and sighed. “…Probably not.”

I smiled again. “There you go, then. If you still wanna do it for you, I’ll support you, because I just
want you to be happy, Harry. But don’t do it for me.”

He wrapped his arms around my waist, tightly.

“But it would make everything easier.”

I sighed. His perfume was filling the air I breathed and his blue eyes were shining from the
reflection of the Thames water. His strong jaw, his beard, his hair; he was as handsome as I had
ever seen him and I felt so full of love I could barely think straight.

“Just look at Kit and Bee.” I told him. “Sometimes the hard way is the right one.” He rested his
forehead in mine and brushed our noses together.

I remembered, with more love than I could describe, that the advice I gave Beezus the day we met
hadn’t come easily to me. I remembered that I had uttered those words to her after a long time of
running away from my own happiness. I remembered that I probably wouldn’t have gone through
all that change if it wasn’t for a single person.

“You know…” I started. “This wouldn’t be possible without you.” He leaned back a few
centimeters to look at me. “This decision… how far I’ve come… you did this.”

“No.” He shook his head. “You did.”

I smiled. “Harry… I was a mess when I met you. And an even bigger one when I fell in love with
you. And you… you never tried to change me into something that would fit you better. You never
tried to fix me, or complete me… you just…” I smiled. “You made me realize I was strong enough
to do that myself.”

He smiled. “You’re the strongest person I know.”

“And you made me stronger.” I smiled back. “You helped me complete myself… you might be a
prince, but you never tried to save me. And I love you for that.”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: how cute is thaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaat?! Kit and Bee are married (sorta), Harry
knowooooooowss…………... things are happening! Let me explain something:
harry is very non vocal about J’s decision for now because he wants her to have a
chance to change her mind. But we will soon know what he thinks about this okay?
Patience! Next chapter: Jen is giving an interview and she's so nervous she might talk
about a lot of stuff she doesn't usually talk about =X

How are you going? I’m mostly tired. In debt. My teeth hurts again. But I bought
chocolate today, so life is a little better now. Hope you’re doing well!

Thank you so much for reading, it means everything! If you liked it, please let me
know? Thanks! See ya next week!
The Wait

Chapter Summary

Jen has to do an interview as she waits for news of Beezus’ transplant.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Jenifer, relax. She’s going to be okay.”

“Don’t. Don’t say that. You don’t know that.”

As much as I wanted to believe him, and as much as I had given Beezus that same answer all the times she had said she was going to die, I knew now was not the time for optimisms. Now was the time for the harsh reality.

This murmured exchange between me and Tyler, however, went by unheard by the stage assistant standing in front of us with Jack Whitehall and Orlando Bloom.

“Ladies and gentleman, please welcome our guests for the night, comedian Jack Whitehall!”

At the upbeat song and raw sound of applause, the white, brunette, handsome young guy stepped up into the stage to meet Graham Norton for the taping of the talk show interview we were all about to give.

“Orlando Bloom!” The excited voice called again, and Orlando made his way out.

“When are you gonna hear?” Tyler asked me.

I checked the time on his wristwatch. “A few hours to go, still.”

“Tony Award Winner, Tyler Alvin!” we heard, and Tyler squeezed my hand, comforting, before splattering a fake smile on his face and stepping out too.

I knew I was next, so I shook my head, trying to rid my mind of all negative thoughts about Beezus, and took a deep breath, ready to smile, which I did when I heard my name, before stepping out after the others.

It had only been days since their wedding and Beezus was in surgery. After years of waiting, she was finally getting new lungs after a dangerous transplant surgery that could potentially kill her. Along with her family, friends and husband, as of the moment I stepped into the Graham Norton Show’s stage I had been waiting for news for nine hours and thirty-one minutes.

I had spent the previous two days in France and Italy premiering Heathers and now we had flown into London for the same thing. It was comforting knowing I could sleep in my own bed – even if just for one or two nights –, but it was more comforting knowing I could be in the hospital in just a few minutes if things went badly – I had promised Beezus I would.

As Heathers premiered, I was battling the joy of watching something I loved so much, and had
worked so hard on, with the agony of not knowing if a friend would die – but that was just for the previous nine hours.

Before that, we were actually just pretty happy. The movie looked great, the soundtrack was skyrocketing to the top of the charts and the critics, though they didn’t seem to think we were good enough to get an Oscar or any of the major awards, all seemed to think, however, that the adaptation was well done and the music, a delight.

Unsurprisingly for a movie counting with Meryl Streep, Emma Watson, Anna Kendrick, Tyler Alvin and moi, the opening weekend box office shattered records and quickly became the highest grossing opening of the year. Our soundtrack, which had been released before the Grammy eligibility date expired, made the cut just in time to receive nominations for Best Song Written for Visual Media and Best Score Soundtrack Written for Visual Media. It currently stood as number eight on the top of Billboard, seven on iTunes and was racing to the top against the Broadway album, which years later was still there as well.

Graham welcomed us into his overly colorful stage and quickly, and smirkingly, asked us if we knew each other before today.

Tyler and I gave Orlando a smile.

“We met.” He told Graham. “Oscars 2014, right?”

I nodded, smiling. “Yes. Though I must admit most of that night is still a blur in my mind…” I looked at the British, young man by his side.

“We just met Jack, though.” Tyler told Graham. “Backstage.”

“Yes.” I nodded.

“Though I feel like I know you so well, already.” Jack said, and I recognized the jokingly tone most standup comedians used coming up. “Because I was hosting the Royal Variety Performance last year and Prince Harry was attending, so I was reading a lot about you to come up with jokes. Sorry that sounded so creepy.”

The audience laughed, and I smiled, politely, looking down, to try and mask how uncomfortable the mention of my boyfriend was; I knew for a fact my management had alerted Graham that I would not be taking any questions about Harry.

“Yes, Jenifer,” Graham looked at me attentively, “you’ve been living in the U.K. for a while now, haven’t you?”

I smiled. “Since September, yes.”

“What are your thoughts? What do you think?”

“Well…” I sighed.

Trying to remember the funny interview answer that Janine had rehearsed with me for that question – don’t kid yourself, nothing on interviews is spontaneous -, my mind went to Beezus again.

It was so hard to pretend I was happy, enthusiastic and excited at that moment. It was so hard to pretend I was okay; to be ‘on’.

“I know this sounds really weird, but I wasn’t prepared for the amount of British accents.” I told
him. “We have British people in America, of course, but it’s not as much as here, of course. But my
crazy head, for some reason, was not ready for the amount of accents here. Like, everyone is
British.” They laughed at the obviousness of my answer. “Which makes sense, of course! But for
some reason I was caught off guard by that. Every single person is British. I love it.”

“It’s probably the first time someone has said the line, everyone is British, I love it.” Graham
joked, and his audience laughed.

“Can I just say?” Tyler interrupted, before he could ask another question. “Did you notice she’s got
a bit of an accent herself, now?” he looked at me, grinning.

I blushed. “She has!” Graham agreed.

“Oh, my God. I’m so sorry.” I said, lowly, embarrassed. “I promise is not intentional! But it has
been pointed out to me before.”

With the corner of my eyes, I caught a glimpse of Tyler’s watch. Nine hours, forty-five minutes
since Beezus went into surgery.

“I haven’t seen Jen since May,” Tyler added, “and we saw each other again a few days ago in Paris
to promote the movie and she had an accent!”

“It’s not a full accent, though.” Jack argued.

“No.” I defended myself. “Listen, I promise I’m not those douche people who live in England for
like, two months and suddenly decide they have an accent! It’s not on purpose!”

“So she says…” Tyler murmured, jokingly.

I mock slapped him in the arm. “I’m serious! English is my second language, so, you know,
technically my brain is constantly learning it. And because I’m an actress, I think my brain knows
that when I listen to a new accent a lot it’s probably in preparation for a role so it assumes it has to
mimic it. I don’t even notice it’s happening. I’ll try to stop, though.” I smiled, blushing.

Orlando looked at me, seeming amused. “Say beautiful.” His accent was thick and wonderful and
when I repeated the word, so was mine.

“Beautiful.” I noticed I had said it in ‘British’ and quickly corrected the pronounce, blushing
harder. “Beautiful! Crap!”

They all laughed loudly, and I joined, embarrassed, covering my face with my hands.

Graham went on to ask Orlando about his experience with changing accents for movies, which
moved into asking about his new movie, and that gave me a few minutes for myself, which I
enjoyed to marvel in my anxiety over Beezus.

In the previous premieres, I had been sending Beezus short videos with the cast and crew, all
saying she was missed, so she knew that she should have been there; that that movie was hers as
much as it was ours; she was, after all, a part of the team.

Then, when Kit called the previous night to tell me she was going to be prepped for surgery, she
had asked to talk to me. She thanked me for the videos and for the good luck, and, as I heard Kit
tell her he was would be right back – which I understood as her being alone – she quickly changed
the tone of the conversation from one of hope, to one of doubt.
“Jenifer, listen,” she told me, “I have to be quick in case Kit comes back. I need you to promise me something.”


She sighed, heavily, before going on. “If I die—“

“Beezus, stop.” I tried.

“No, you stop.” She interrupted. “I don’t have much time. Maybe literally. So I need you to promise me this. Jenifer, if I die, I need you to look after Kit.”

I gulped. “You’re getting new lungs! You’re gonna be fine!”

“Don’t say that. You don’t know that.” She argued. “Listen, okay? He’s gonna be sad. He’s gonna be hurt. And I know that’s going to happen and I know it’s normal under the circumstances, but he’s gonna drink. And he’s gonna stay home and he’s gonna refuse to get out and I need you to force him.”

I felt my heart painfully beating in my chest, as I still refused to indulge her. “You’re going to be fine!”

She ignored me. “He’s going to get into a really bad shape and he will listen to no one. And he will probably miss work and push his family away… But you, you’ve always seemed to have this weird relationship with him. You give each other crap and you don’t take each other’s bullshit and he is going to need that. He’ll need you to slap him out of it. I need you to do it, Jenifer, promise. I need to know that he’ll go out. And he’ll go back to work. And he’ll keep living his life. And he won’t give up from being happy. Promise me you’ll help, promise.”

Her voice broke, and I knew she was fighting back tears as much as I was. I was so out of my territory.

For someone who had played a number of characters that faced death, I didn’t actually have much experience with it myself. My first grandmother died before I was born. A grandfather when I was too young to understand. The other two sometimes seemed more dead than alive, but were stubbornly ready to live for another ten years. Other than that, I had no idea what actual grieve was.

I wondered how did I manage to win an Oscar for a grieving mother and had, in a weird, dark moment, marveled in the conclusion I probably was a good actress, after all.

I thought of Harry, and the friends and family he had lost, including his mother. He was always so quiet when it came to Beezus’ disease. He was always so… attentive. To Kit. To Beezus. Always trying to give them space and helping with whatever they needed, probably because he knew how much it hurt.

I knew that if it was me in her place, I would be asking someone to look after him too, and I knew Beezus needed to know Kit would be okay.

“I promise.” I told her, “I’ll take care of him.” In my mind, I was begging God to please not make me have to.

‘Please, let her live’, I thought, in a prayer, ‘Please.’

“Well, Orlando is not the only one who’s been named the most beautiful man alive.” Graham was
saying, bringing me out of my trance. “Earlier this year, Jenifer, too, was called the most beautiful woman alive.” The audience applauded, and I suppressed a scoff, knowing that was probably my smallest achievement ever. “And she was also once Maxim’s hottest woman in the world.” He looked at me, with a serious expression on his face. “Congratulations. How... How did people react to this? Was your family proud?”

I gave him a sarcastic smile. “So proud.” My tone was enough to get them laughing. “Yes, because, you see, an Oscar? Big deal. They don’t care. But when people decide I have a good face, that’s when they get proud. Clearly they have their priorities in check.”

I paused, as they were loudly laughing at my tone, and gave them time to breathe.

“They probably feel flattered.” Jack offered. “They’re like, yes, that’s our genes! We made her, so technically, we’re also the most beautiful woman alive!”

The audience laughed again.

”...No, no, I’m kidding... They were proud when I won the Oscar, they were proud when I won the Emmy and Tony and all. But they...” I sighed, trying to think of how to explain my family’s reactions to that. “They seem to think I was the one who made the decision of being Most Beautiful Woman Alive? And I... didn’t? That’s not how it works? At all?” They laughed, “I have nothing to do with this, so they just... very snidely...Like, I spent all holyday season hearing them refer to me like that casually in conversation, ironically, of course, like... Hey, Most Beautiful Woman Alive, are you gonna come and help us with this? And, it’s like... I just had to ignore it at some point.”

"Well, about your boyfriend? I imagine he had to feel at least a little proud.”

This was tough.

I was too tired and worried about Beezus to come up with a gentle enough way to avoid Harry questions, and I knew how much he hated getting media attention. How do I defuse this? How do I change the topic without being rude? It’s a comedy show, I can’t be rude. They’ll hate me.

“Was he- was he making fun of you too? Or- or did he agree?” Graham went on when I was silent. "Or was he like, 'yep. Most Beautiful Woman Alive. That sounds about right, I agree'?" I sighed, smiling as I felt myself blush. “He... uhm, he agreed, actually.” I told him, knowing my mind did not have enough energy to avoid the question as I knew I should.

Jack smiled at me. “Didn’t he win ‘Best Facial Hair’, too?! I remember I joked about it on the Royal Variety show.”

“Oh, you did!” Graham laughed. “Didn’t you list all his military achievements just to later say you were actually most proud of the Best Beard award?”

The audience laughed, and I couldn’t help but join them.

“I did!” Jack nodded. “I joked his biggest achievements were being the world’s best beard and dating the world’s hottest woman.”

“Aw!” I let out, flattered, remembering the joke Harry had told me about the previous year, when Jack had made it.

“Did you make fun of him for the Best Beard, Jenifer, or were you proud?” Graham asked.
I don’t know if it was the rapidity of this conversation, of the lights, the cameras, the audience all looking at me, or the fact a good friend could potentially be dying as I had to smile and give an interview. But the fact remained that all my better judgment seemed to have vanished.

“You know,” I started, a little voice at the back of my mind telling me I shouldn’t, “that was a mix of both.” I admitted. “Because in part, I agree, of course! But then, it’s like… that’s a thing? How long has that been a thing? You know?” I joked, making them laugh.

I had missed this – being able to not have to filter my answers. It was fun talking about Harry. It was fun talking about my boyfriend. It felt like not hiding; like we weren’t doing anything wrong, which, of course, we weren’t.

But the fact remained I simply didn’t talk about Harry. One, because I knew he was a very private person, and two, because I knew his family would hate me for it.

“But do you like guys with beards, or do prefer them shaved?” Graham asked. “Because some woman don’t like all of…” he gestured to his face, “that.”

I took in a deep breath. “…I like it.”

“Well, Prince Harry has a tamed beard.” Jack argued. “Some hipster guys make it a whole statement to have a beard, those are longer.” He ironized.

“Yeah, those… those are pretty, but… they’re pretty to look at.” I replied. “Not to be in a relationship with, if you know what I mean. That’s just a lot of trouble.”

They laughed.

“How long have you been together now?” Graham asked, “Because you said that with living here since September your brain started to cling on to the accent, but you’ve been dating for longer, haven’t you?”

My brain seemed to have simply checked out at that point, though inside I still felt very weird to be openly talking about Harry.

“Two years.” I told him, and he looked surprise. The audience let out a sound of awe. “Well, officially dating it’s a year and a half. But we’ve been together for about two years now.”

“That’s a lot! Good for you!” Graham said, and I bit the inside of my lips to keep myself from bursting into nervous giggles.

“But with the accent thing,” Tyler argued, “you’ve only now started to get it because only now you’ve been actually seeing him more, right? Before than it was a long distance type relationship.”

“Right.” I nodded. “Now my brain is like, woah, full-on British!”

They laughed.

“How did it work, though?” Graham asked. “I imagined it’s difficult, that kind of relationship?”

I nodded. “It is. You know, I’m really not the right person to ask. Because my views on it have changed drastically since… you know,” I struggled to answer while trying not to at the same time, “meeting him… I’ve always been, Tyler knows this, the biggest defender of not going into that kind of relationship. Because, you know, relationships are hard enough on their own without adding distance to it.” I took a deep breath, and shrugged. “Yet, here I am.”
“He changed your mind? That’s sweet.” Orlando added.

“Well, you know, with the career we have,” I told him, “a long distance relationship is part of the deal, you know? Because we travel so much. So I think I’ve always just thought, you know, I better not even want to do it, because who would be crazy enough to get into this mess that is my life?”

I was so glad when Tyler interrupted, because I knew I was not about to stop talking.

“So, people,” he started, “what Jenifer is saying is that love is all about finding someone crazy enough to want to be with you.”

The audience laughed.

“Yes, yes,” Graham agreed, chuckling, “and, at the risk of pushing my luck with this question, do you think… do you think we’ll see you in a tiara one day? If you know what I mean?”

I felt all the air leave my lungs and suddenly the whole room was spinning. This was it. I went too far. How do I get out of this one?

I looked around, as the whole studio fell into silence looking at me.

“You know…” I started, careful, “I am going to play Rapunzel in Disney’s live action adaptation of Tangled. So, technically, yes!”

He smiled. “Okay… not what I meant, but I’ll take it.” The audience laughed. “Actually, we heard about that and we got you something to get you on the spirit of the movie.” He turned around to grab something from a cabinet behind him. When he turned back, he was holding a life-sized, beautiful replica of Rapunzel’s tiara on Tangled.

The audience let out a collective ‘woah!’.

“So you are just determined to see me in a tiara, huh?” I asked Graham, jokingly, making the room laugh.

“I am!” He said. “Indulge me, Jenifer, it’s for you, here! Try it on, try it on!”

As the audience cheered, I held the plastic, golden tiara on my hand trying to come up with an excuse not to give the media this picture.

“You know, I have my hair done…” I argued, making them laugh.

“It’s funny you don’t want to try it, because we actually found something here,” Graham added, turning to the screen behind him, “I think you’ll like it. It’s from an interview you gave a few years ago. Can we play the video?”

With fear clenching my stomach, I saw my own young face on the screen. I must have been eighteen and I was sitting in the Ellen Show’s armchair giving an interview.

Ellen’s also younger face asked young-me: “The show, your show, The Mediator, is based in a Meg Cabot book series. She also wrote The Princess Diaries. If they were to, say, remake that, would you like to play Princess Mia? Are you a Meg Cabot fan?”

I saw my young face light up at the question. “God, yes! I love her. And, as much as I think no one could do a better job than Anne Hathaway, I think I would say yes just because I feel like I was
made to wear a tiara.”

The clip ended and the audience cheered at the irony of my unadvised words. I heard their excited screams as I buried my face in my hands. Now I remembered the interview; I was joking, of course. But the irony of the joke would be, I knew, lost on no one.

“Put! It! On!” Jack started, riveting the audience, who joined him in chanting. “Put! It! On!”

“Okay, okay!” I laughed, so they would stop, and they cheered again. “But just because you went to the trouble of finding that clip!” I joked.

I adjusted the tiara on my hair, knowing I would be seeing my own face in the news and online for days to come, and smiled, sarcastic, at them, who applauded enthusiastically making me smile.

“I wanna try it.” Tyler asked, and I giggled as I took off the tiara and handed it to him, who put it on his dark curls. “I feel like I was made to wear one.” He said, and the audience whistled at the sight of him. Then his voice got small as he added, in a joke: “Unfortunately Harry doesn’t like me like that, so…”

They laughed again.

Graham looked at me. “Now, Tangled… Oscar Isaac is going to be in that film with you, isn’t he?”

Oh, yes. The one other bit of news I wasn’t ready to start thinking about. Disney had cast Ophelia’s boyfriend, the man whose life I once threatened to make a living hell. And whom I now would have to act against for two months – it was a short movie – and even kiss. Should be fun.

“And you’re good friends with his girlfriend Ophelia Callis?” Graham added. "Is it going to be weird to kiss your friend’s boyfriend? What do you think of their relationship?"

As the screen behind him showed a picture of Ophelia and me together, I smiled.

“God, Ophelia is like the little sister I never had. I love her. I, uhm…”

This managed to be even tougher than the Harry questions. Because my brain was still dead and unable to do what my publicity team had taught me, I went ahead on being honest again.

“I actually hated him not long ago. Which should make for an interesting work environment.” The audience laughed loudly.

“Did you really?” Graham asked.

“Yeah.” I nodded, awkwardly. “I mean, I pretty much threatened to physically hurt him if he hurt Ophelia. As any sister would!” I argued.

“What did he say?” Graham asked.

“He seemed pretty scared. I can be scary.”

Tyler nodded enthusiastically. “I can attest to that!” the audience laughed.

“No, yeah, I basically told him to keep in mind I had many ways to make his life a living hell.” I added, casually. “And now we have to kiss. Should be fun.”

They laughed.
“Are you on good terms now, though? Because we have pictures of all of you together.”

The screen behind him showed paparazzi pictures of Ophelia, Oscar, Harry and me leaving Taylor’s building after Ophelia’s birthday party in March.

“Oh, yeah, we’re good now.” I told him. “I mean, I will not hesitate to make his life a living hell should he chose to hurt her. But other than that, we’re cool. He’s cool.” The audience laughed.

“Look at all of you together, though.” Jack said, pointing at the picture. You could see, in a line, Ophelia and her red hair, followed closely by Oscar, then Harry and his red hair, and me right behind, holding his hand. “They’re like the reverse Harry and Jen, Latino brunette and pale ginger!”

The audience laughed, as I realized he was right.

Tyler turned to look at me. “I hope for your sake, though, that Ophelia won’t be on set when you have to shoot the kiss scene. ‘Cause I saw the Bad Blood video and she seems pretty accurate with that bow and arrow!”

We laughed.

“Oh, no. I hope she’s not there. I won’t be able to do this in front of her.” I confessed. “I haven’t thought too much on it, yet, though.” I looked at the audience. “The movie will be good, don’t worry! We’ll work it out, we’re professionals!” they laughed.

“At least he’s good looking.” Graham argued.

“I wish I had your problems, though.” Jack said, before adopting an ironic tone. “Oh, I will have to kiss a handsome Latino man. My life is so hard.” We laughed.

“Well, yes. I mean, if I have to I will kiss my best friend’s boyfriend. For the art!”

They laughed.

Orlando looked at me, grinning playfully. “Well, if Ophelia wants to get back at you, she could always just kiss Prince Harry.”

The audience laughed, but I jokingly kept my expression cold and serious as I looked at him.

“I can be pretty lethal too.”

They cheered and Orlando laughed.

Graham looked at him. “If you had to kiss Jen or Ophelia, who would you choose?”

There was an awkward silence as I avoided his eyes.

“Be careful, mate.” Jack told him. “This is basically choosing which boyfriend would you rather have mad at you.” We all laughed. “And I know for a fact Prince Harry is really tall!”

“You know, I…” Orlando started. “I think it would be more interesting to chose between the boyfriends.” The audience cheered, excitedly, making us laugh. “I mean, Prince Harry or Oscar Isaac? That’s a tough choice.”

“Again, Orlando,” I looked at him, serious, “I can be pretty lethal.” He laughed. “Back off!”
There was a pause as the audience laughed.

“Orlando wants to be a princess too!” Graham joked.

“I would love to.” He nodded.

Tyler took off the Tangled tiara he still had in his head and handed it to him to the sound of the laughing studio. Orlando beamed as he put it on.

“I have to say, though.” Tyler started, looking at him, who was on my left, from my right. “I’m a little offended you didn’t even considered me. I mean if you’re kissing dudes, Orlando, I would like to apply.”

The audience cheered. Orlando laughed and there was a pause as, at the sound of laughter, he considered Tyler for a minute before leaning in over me and holding his face in his hands, turning him to himself and kissing him.

I thought I’d go deaf at the sound of cheers from the audience and when they finally sat down again, stepping away from in front of me, I knew my face was in utter shock as I laughed. Then they started laughing at me.

The interview ended up being a great way of distracting myself from the Beezus situation.

After I took pictures with Graham and the other guests, I bid them — and Tyler — goodbye and met Eddy backstage to drive home. My excitement for being able to sleep in my own bed that night was put off by something else.

“He’s gonna be so mad.” I mumbled.

“Nah, he won’t.” Eddy dismissed. “He knows you’re under a lot of stress. And he knows interviewers can be pushy.”

“Yeah, but,” I started, fishing for my phone as I heard I got a message, “but he’ll watch it and see that I seemed way too comfortable with it. He’ll be mad.”

“Just explain.” Eddy went on. “He’ll understand.”

But I wasn’t listening to Eddy anymore, because my text was from Harry, and it read: ‘At hospital w Kit. Come quick.’

My heart raced in my chest. I knew he had been keeping Kit company. But why wouldn’t he tell me if there were news or not? The surgery should be almost over by now. I wondered if it was bad news. If she was out and was fine, wouldn’t he have gone home?

I told Eddy to drive me to the hospital, and luckily, he took my tone to mean I didn’t want to talk anymore.

The drive to London General was longer than anything I had ever had to do. All I kept thinking was what I would do if she died. For all the time I knew her, whenever she would mention the possibility, I simply never accepted it. But now that there was such a strong chance of losing her, I simply could not stop thinking about it. What would I do without Beezus? How was I supposed to live through something that unfair? Without her laughter or witty remarks? How was I supposed to move on with a promo tour? How could I — or anyone — get Kit out of the inevitable pit of despair he would throw himself into like I promised her I would?
If someone as wonderful as Beezus couldn’t have a happy ending was there any chance for me?

Cursing myself for being so self-centered, I stepped out of the car once Eddy had opened the door for me, to make sure he could shield me from the photographers. Luckily, there weren’t many of them, but I was still angry as I walked in silence into the hospital’s glass doors. The vultures couldn’t even respect a moment like that.

The lady in the reception gave me a visitor badge and Eddy stayed in the entrance with Nathan, keeping an eye on the photographers outside, and I walked the now familiar corridors after the waiting area.

Before turning the last corner, I stopped and took in a deep breath, trying to remind myself to look optimistic and hopeful. To be optimistic and hopeful. Kit needed that.

But when I took the last steps, my heels announcing me before they could even see me, I saw him.

Kit was laying inside Harry’s embrace. Harry’s back was turned to me, but I could see Kit was crying as Harry comforted him.

Everything I knew, everything I believed in suddenly vanished. All of my hope and joy and excitement. Everything was gone and I was empty as I realized the truth.

Beezus was gone.

How would anything ever matter again if the bright, witty girl I loved could be dead at twenty-three?!

I braced myself and walked over to him, hearing her voice in my head, not believing that only the day before I had talked to her. ‘He’ll need you to slap him out of it. I need you to do it, Jenifer, promise. I need to know that he’ll go out. And he’ll go back to work. And he’ll keep living his life. And he won’t give up being happy. Promise me you’ll help him, promise.’

But how could I help him? How could I help, if I knew he was right? There was no joy anymore. There was nothing if Beezus could be dead.

“Guys?” I asked as I approached. They looked at me.

Kit looked paler than I had ever seen him. His face was gaunt and flaccid, his eyes were red and puffy. He looked like I felt: dead inside.

Kit took a few steps ahead in my direction and threw his arms around me in a hug, crying on my shoulder suddenly. My heart dropped heavily as I felt myself getting nauseated.

‘I promised to help’, I told myself, ‘I have to help him.’

Seeing the despair and tears on my face as I hugged Kit back, Harry smiled. I thought it was weird, before he finally spoke.

“Jen, she’s fine!” He told me. “Beezus made it. She’s alive.”

Chapter End Notes
Heya! I loooove this chapter! I just love the idea of Jen sitting there trying to think of a* efusive* way to talk about Harry, but failing miserably. Can you imagine the adorable smile on her face as her cheeks blush?! Shes adorable. Also BEEZUS IS FINE! HOW GREAT IS THAT?????? IM SO HAPPY SHE LIVES! I love that character so much!

Next chapter almost made me cry when I wrote it: J and Harry spend New Year’s together and he gets a bit too drunk and tells her more than he wanted to about how he truly feels about her quitting her career. And then she tells him something he was starting to think he would never hear. IM EXCITED!

Let me know if you liked the chapter, send me a message? I love to hear from you!
The sky was painted with every color when the clock hit twelve, bringing forward the first day of 2017. We watched the Copacabana firework show from the infinity pool in the terrace of the Fasano Hotel in Rio - one of the best views of the city.

Harry’s lips framed mine for the first time that year – the year that would come to be one of the biggest and best I had ever had, the last year of Jenifer Silva as an actress – and I was filled with a blend of excitement, arousal and overwhelming happiness. His arms wrapped around me so tight it felt like I was going to break, but I didn’t mind, because that had been the best day I had had in weeks.

“Happy New Year.” Harry said, simply, with an air of a smile tugging at his lips, resting our foreheads together.

“Happy New Year, Mr. Prince.” I replied.

I rested my head on his shoulder in a hug, and looked around at the friends we had brought with us.

At our left, Taylor had her phone raised high as she filmed the firework show with such shine in her eyes she looked like a five year-old, Adam was hugging her from behind, but instead of looking at the sky, his eyes were on her. He smiled as if she was the best show around.

Earlier that very night, as I walked in my Tabitha Simmons Chrystal white sandals to her and the other girls – all of which, like me, were dressed in white for the New Year – I asked about their resolutions, and Taylor had been the first to smile broadly and raise her champagne flute in the air.

“Getting my new album out… and moving in with Adam.”

As a newly found believer in serious relationships and moving in with the love of your life, I had squealed so loudly and joyfully even I almost didn’t recognize myself.

“We talked about in Christmas,” she went on, “and… I think we’re gonna do it.”

“Good for you.” I told her. “I recommend it.”

“How did you become the relationship example?” she asked me, surprised, and I shrugged.

“Honestly, I’m just as surprised as you are.”

I looked at Harry, who now had his head raised as he watched the sky light up.

The truth was I had no idea when was it that I had become so open and whole, so absolutely okay
with being in a serious relationship. I couldn’t point out exactly when my fears had vanished, but I knew it was about the time he made his way into my heart. And I loved it.

“I’m so glad we came!” We heard Zoe’s voice and I looked at where she was now hugging her husband, Jake, who hugged her back, seeming calm for the first time since they arrived the day before.

I liked having them there – and, more importantly, I liked them. Off all of Harry’s friends, Lizzy and Zoe were my favorite, and I liked having the chance to get to know Zoe better. We had invited Lizzy and Guy, too, to spend New Year’s with us, but they had plans already in America with Lizzy’s family.

Jake and Zoe had been a little harder to convince, due to their two baby girls, Harry’s goddaughters, India and Zalie – names I couldn’t have made up if I tried.

They hadn’t been away from them for more than one day since they had been born, and though they were already toddlers, they didn’t feel good about traveling so far for three days – the most of time we managed to get out of them. Finally, after Zoe’s parents agreed to taking the girls, they agreed to come, and had even managed to have some fun on the previous day and on the thirty-first, when we had gone to the beach, and to sightsee.

“My New Year resolution is to start and finish the Capital Ring Walk around London, seventy-eight miles in total.” Zoe had told us earlier that night. “Jake and I wanna take the girls, this way we get to exercise and show them around town. We like the idea of them growing up knowing parts of London even us didn’t at their age.”

But as of the last two days of 2016, we had other places to see. We went to the Redeemer Christ and the Sugarloaf Mountain, and I had fun watching my British friends trying to pretend they weren’t almost dying at the heat.

The paparazzi were there, of course. And by ‘there’ I mean everywhere we went. That happened because, unlike in Abu Dhabi, Rio didn’t exactly have private beaches. And, unlike when we were in Abu Dhabi, it was summer now. And a holyday. One of the highest amount of tourists per square meter in town, which meant the paparazzi had known to expect work. And because we really had nowhere to run, they easily found us. And proceeded to follow us around – thankfully at a respectful distance – to get pictures of us on the beach, restaurants and even the hotel pool.

We didn’t care as much, too much to do and think about to worry about them, but our security had their plates full. We had known to expect them, though, and so we were prepared for them – including mentally. There was really nothing to be done, as we knew that with as many of us there, there would be no hiding. If they hadn’t come for us, they would have come for the others.

For instance, double Academy Award winner Ophelia Callis, who just so happened to be standing a few steps behind us in the Fasano Hotel, making out with her boyfriend as the firework show colored her red hair a number of different tones.

Ophelia’s New Year resolution was to do more theatre – she wanted to be in a Royal Shakespeare Company play, and this information had my heart clenching in guilt.

Ophelia, Taylor and Zoe didn’t know yet that I would be walking away from my career. As Richard had asked me not to tell anyone until he and Janine had figured out the right time to inform the media and industry, I decided it would be best to listen to them and leave the number of people who knew about it as short as my management and Harry.
I smiled at Ophelia when she told me her resolution, remembering the times all I wanted in life was to get another role. Another movie. Another musical. Just one more award, I kept telling myself. Then I would have gotten everything I wanted. But now that I did – now that I had everything I had ever dreamed of having – the question had become, now what?

As of December, after the promotion tour for Heathers, I had started to study the script for Tangled to prepare for the role and movie we would start shooting as of January, and I happily identified with Rapunzel much more that I thought I would.

I didn’t feel trapped in a tower, but I recognized her undying wish of seeing what else was out there; of discovering things away from her comfort zone. And, after realizing her dream, of setting out to find a new one. It felt exhausting and I couldn’t wait till all my last projects were done and I had my whole life and future ahead to do with it as I pleased. Without the necessity of explaining my intentions to a team of studio people who had invested in me; without having to plan my life two years ahead and without having to worry about remaining relevant.

Most importantly, though, I liked Ophelia’s resolution because it would mean that if she got it, she would be living in London right near me. London quickly had started feeling like home, especially as I had more and more friends around – not just Ophelia, but also Alli, who hadn’t come to Rio because she was off to Ibiza with her new boyfriend, George Percy, and all the new friends I was making, like James and his boyfriend, Craig.

“Oh, I’m that one!” James shouted from Taylor’s side pointing at one particular set of fireworks that had just exploded into a huge, pink flower. Then, it had suddenly shifted colors to look like a rainbow. “Ooh, I’m definitely that one!” Craig giggled at him.

James was the kind of friend I loved to have. He wasn’t just a cool person to hang around with, he was the kind of person that, however different and special, made me feel normal and grounded which, with the other friends I had and the life I lead, was always something good.

“Fun fact, the traditional Copacabana firework show dates back to the indigenous people from Rio who, even before colonization, used throw colorful feathers in the air to mark the New Year.”

As our friends laughed, I sighed, frustrated, suppressing an eye roll at Kit.

“That is not even a little bit true.” I told the group.

“You know he’s just messing with you, right?” Harry grinned.

“I know, and it’s working.”

I gave my right an annoyed glance, watching as Kit and Beezus, in a tight embrace, seemed to be slightly dancing on the spot to the sound of fireworks, laughter and music coming from the sky, the beach and all around. They were giggling at each other, amused, and my annoyance instantly dissipated.

The mere fact that Beezus was there with us was reason enough to make me smile, after so long wondering how much time we would still have with her, I was glad that I didn’t have to anymore.

She had stayed in the hospital for three weeks after her surgery. When I came back to the country after the promo tour of Heathers, she was still there, doing lung tests daily and earning deep breathing exercises. Her recovery, like her surgery, was a success, and soon enough she was home with Kit.

Harry and I had dinner with them before I left for Brazil and Harry left for Sandringham, for
Christmas. She was more smiley than I had ever seen her, as she asked all about the Heathers promo tour she missed, even though she still looked pale and skinny – something that would take her a while to fix. She only wasn’t more smiley than Kit, who kept looking at her as she spoke with the silliest smile on his face.

I had never been happier than on that particular night, eating pizza with my very much alive friends and my boyfriend, knowing in only one year I’d have my future bright open ahead of me.

After the surgery, Beezus was scheduled to attend to the hospital frequently for a battery of tests, but all being well, she was cleared to travel by New Year’s eve. Then she and Kit met Harry and me on the last day of the year in Rio to celebrate the ending of one of the hardest years we had all had.

Beezus and Kit had spent the previous New Year’s in Rio and, though they had only been there for a few days, Kit seemed to think he knew more about the country than I did.

I don’t think he was doing it on purpose, however. It had started as a mere coincidence. On his first day in the country two days before, as we watched the view from the Redeemer Crist, he leaned in to me and said:

“Rio was actually the first Brazilian capital.” He smiled. “Apparently though most people think it still is, they changed it to Brasilia later on, a city designed just for this purpose.”

I looked at him, ironic, knowing he was probably just repeating something a native told him the last time he had been there with Beezus, but couldn’t help myself when I asked:

“You do know that I was born here, right?”

Maybe he hadn’t realize it was me by his side when he said it, maybe he though I honestly didn’t know, but from then on he seemed to have made it his mission to annoy me with as many fake facts about Brazil as possible.

“Brazilians don’t mind if you talk to them in Spanish.” He told our friend group later on, right before turning to the bartender in the hotel bar and saying. “Holla! Como estas?”

“Kit, stop embarrassing me.” I begged.

But from there, his stories only got weirder.

“You know, the real story behind the Redeemer Christ statue is that Jesus appeared in a dream to the mayor in the 1900s and told him to have it built.”

“What?!” I said, and Beezus just laughed.

“Fun fact: caipirinha, the typical Brazilian drink, is a mixture of coconut water, milk, white wine and olives.” He said, loud enough so I would hear that night in the New Year’s Eve party the hotel was throwing for VIP guests as he got his caipirinha from a waiter. “Gracias!”

I sighed, frustrated not only at Kit, but at everyone else who, like him, seemed to think the whole thing was hilarious.

“Oh, Kit, what can you tell me about the Rio architecture?” James asked him, earlier that day at lunch when we went for barbecue, as if Kit was some sort of specialist.

“Well, that’s a great question, James.” Kit replied. “The Rio architecture, or aRIOtecture, as
specialists call it—“I started shaking my head impatiently, “was inspired by Asian artists who came to the country on a religious Buddhist mission in 1873. They drew most of their inspiration from Irish temples and Mars.”

“Wow, that is so interesting.” James told him, seriously.

“Oh, my God!” I let out, frustrated, making the others laugh. But again, as it had been happening since she pretty much came back from the dead, Beezus’ laugh calmed me and, again, I was just happy she was there. I was happy she was alive. And I was even happy that I could be a part of what was making her laugh on that trip, even if it annoyed me.

Beezus’ New Year’s resolution was very simple.

“I want to not almost die.” She had told us earlier that night, making us laugh and raise our glasses.

“To not dying!” we toasted, happily.

“What about you, Jenny?” Ophelia had asked me.

“I just…” I started, knowing I couldn’t tell them my real resolution because it involved retiring, so I made up another one, that however misleading, was just as truthful. “I just wanna keep doing what I’m doing. I think I’m doing fine.”


“Your resolution could be to do some strength surgery on your ears so they can handle the weight of this bling!” Taylor joked, widening her eyes at my earrings. “Girl, how many carats are these?!”

I smiled, blushing, carefully touching the yellow diamond drop earrings on my ears.

“Christmas gift from Harry.” I told them, smiling.

“Sweet Jesus.” Ophelia let out. “What did you get him?”

I grinned. “Let’s just say he’s satisfied.”

They giggled.

Though I liked giving them incentive to think dirty thoughts – and though the dirty thoughts were very much funded -, I had actually gotten Harry a hoverboard for Christmas and a fancy beard trimming kit from Sephora. Now his beard always looked and smelled even better than usual, and he kept sliding through the house instead of walking, which was amusing to watch.

Vodka, however, was not as amused. She seemed to think the hoverboard was either the enemy, a toy, or another animal – we weren’t sure. All we knew was she seemed to want to either destroy it or play with it, and she always barked excitedly after Harry when he got on it. And then when he slid after her, she ran away faster than we had ever seen her run before.

Then, two days later, he got home with another one.

“Did you break yours?!” I asked, concerned.

“No.” He smiled. “This one’s for you.”

Harry’s plan was simple, he wanted us both on hoverboards, so we could dance together. So that’s how we spent that day, tumbling around and trying to choreograph our own romantic dance routine
on hoverboards.

Finally, as it was bound to happen, we fell to the ground together, laughing loudly as we did. My legs were on top of his and we just laid there, with no energy to stand up as all our strength had gone into laughing.

Vodka licked Harry’s hand, concerned with our fall, and we let a moment of silence go by as we calmed our breaths. Then, I scoffed at the memory of the look of terror on his face right before we fell to the ground, and the sound of my chuckle, Harry started laughing again and I joined.

Happiness was that - lying there, in the hardwood floor of my kitchen, with my boyfriend and our dog as we could do nothing but laugh.

Still, I couldn’t help but wonder how much more expensive his gift to me was. We had never been the couple to exchange fancy gifts – when you can afford to buy whatever you want, you just do it, and so there’s nothing for other people to give you that you would actually need. So our gifts were usually on the thoughtful side, such as when he started taking Portuguese lesson as my Christmas present the previous year, and when I threw him a surprise party for his birthday in September to let him know I was making an effort to get along with his friends. But now he was giving me yellow diamond jewelry! Though I absolutely loved it, I couldn’t help but wonder if the seriousness of his gifts were following the seriousness of our relationship.

“T”

—I know! With you! Tonight could be amaaaaaaazing!” Harry’s heavily accented voice could be heard through the party as we danced to the Foxes’ song as if there was no tomorrow – or, better yet, as if tomorrow was the day the New Year would begin, instead of that night.

Laughing, I followed his voice with Ophelia holding my hand. We found both of our boyfriends – plus Adam – dancing excitedly together in the dance floor. Taylor was a couple of steps behind them, laughing as she held her phone up filming them.

Oscar looked like he knew what he was doing, and Harry had some swing, but mostly he and Adam simply danced like the British men they were: badly. Which was highly hilarious.

“See I got a wild heart and I can’t control it, it keeps on letting me down!” Harry sang, his smile broadening when he saw me approaching. “Love! You’re here!” His arms wrapped around me and he brought me close in a hug. “Listen to this song! Isn’t it great?! It sounds like something you would say!” And then he started singing again. “Should be running away tonight! Should be finding a place to hide!”

“Look around, Mr. Prince.” I told him, with a smile. “I’m not running anymore.”

“Damn right.” He agreed, grinning, before leaning forward to kiss me strongly.

It was weird being the only sober one amongst my friends – and not only because being sober amidst a bunch of drunk people was an interesting experience, but mostly because I was usually the first one to get drunk. Since, however, my ulcer incident, I had been carefully avoiding alcohol.

If I was still seeing a shrink, Dr. Arrow would be the first to question how the absence of alcohol was altering the dynamic of my interpersonal relations with my loved ones, but since he had decided I was healthy enough to continue on my own, I had to think of it alone.

At first, not drinking was a problem. My throat ached for a drink every day and I felt nauseated constantly. It was almost as bad with coffee, but I got over that pretty quickly. Soon, being sober
started to feel better. Started to feel natural. And I realized that, with not being scared of falling in love and with knowing now that I would be leaving acting, I didn’t feel the need to avoid sobriety. I started to wonder if alcohol had, as Dr. Arrow had claimed many times before, been my scape from the reality I wasn’t comfortable with. If that was the case, I was now not only apparently okay with said reality, but I liked it.

I considered writing an email to my old shrink, and had fun imagining what I would write: ‘Look at me, Dr. Arrow, healthy as shit!’

Being sober also meant that Harry could have his fun without worrying about keeping his eye on me. Which resulted in me keeping my eye on him, especially when, a few hours after that dance performance, we were stumbling back to our room in the Fasano and I was half carrying him, half laughing at his still ridiculous drunk self.

“I knooooooow,” he sang, his arm over my shoulders, supporting himself with a hand on the wall so he wouldn’t fall since I wasn’t exactly strong enough to carry him, “with yooooou-“

“Do you want some help there, Jay?” Clark asked, as he and Eddy followed us to our suite.

“No, I got it.” I smiled.

Nathan was taking the first shift in the Hotel entrance and Louis was at the elevators to keep an eye on whomever came up.

Harry suddenly took his hand from the wall and held my waist strongly, turning me to him. “Tonight!” He sang, making me laugh, and then he dipped me. “Could be amaaaazing!”

“Okay, Foxes, we’re almost there now.”

Smiling, I closed the door of our suite once Eddy and Clarke were done making their sweep.

“Oh, I don’t feel good.” Harry complained, still leaning against the wall where I had left him to go close the door.

I suppressed a smile as I passed an arm under his to take him to the bed.

“Sleep it off, You Royal Drunkenness.” I told him. “You’ll feel better in the morning.”

His throat made a weird sound before he turned around. “Nope. Don’t feel good at all.” He said, quickly stumbling his way to the bathroom.

I followed him, hurriedly, and pulled the toilet seat up right before he threw up.

“It’s okay.” I told him. “Now you’ll feel better.”

“Ugh.” He groaned, miserably, making me giggle.

He stood kneeled by the toilet for a little before it appeared like he was done throwing up, then he stumbled backwards and slid down to the floor with his back against the wall.

I got up and walked to the mini fridge to get him a small bottle of water.

I sat by his side as he drank, his eyes closed and cheeks red from the alcohol; he seemed to be feeling better as he took deep breaths.

“Vomit-free since 93”. He mumbled, giggly, and I smiled as I gave him a questioningly look. “Like
in How I Met Your Mother?“ He explained. “When Ted said he didn’t vomit for almost ten years…”

“Were you vomit-free since 93?” I asked and he scoffed, amused.

“Please!” he dismissed, drunkenly. “I’m not even vomit-free since 2013.” I laughed. “Hey, call The Sun, babe! There’s a good quote for them from Prince Harry!” I laughed more. “Prince Harry claims he has committed vomit since 2013, against his better judgment.”

I watched his intoxicated expression; eyes closed and loose smile, and couldn’t help by feel my heart filled with love. “You’re adorable.” I mumbled.

I had thought he wouldn’t even realize I was there, but he turned his head to look at me, seeming disbelieving. “It works well for me that a drunken mess is considered adorable in your book.”

I laughed. “I’ve been worse.” He giggled.

“I wish I could kiss you, but I still have a little vomit on my mouth.” He said, and I laughed.

I leaned down and kissed his neck. “There.” He smiled. “You can kiss me tomorrow.”

“Okay.” He agreed. “Sorry I spoke about vomit. That’s not very romantic.”

I laughed again.

“Again, I’ve been worse.” He smiled. “Remember when I barged into your apartment to let you know you would be lucky to have me?”

There was a long, silent pause as I remembered the day, and thought he had fallen asleep, but then he opened his lips and started singing, suddenly.

“Santa Feeeeeeeee…”

I laughed.

“That’s my go-to song.” I shrugged.

“I am there,” he sang more, to the rhythm.

“That’s not the words.” I told him, amused.

“I have…” he mumbled, trying to remember how the song went. “I have gum in my hair…”

“Excuse me?!” I laughed and he shrugged.

“At least it rhymes.” He offered, making me laugh some more.

I turned to sit facing him, and he leaned in to lay his head on my shoulder, resting his hand on my thigh.

“You were so beautiful.” He whispered, drunkenly still.

“I were?” I asked, playful.

“You still are.” He corrected. “But I just… back then… while you sang, I just couldn’t stop thinking it.” He sighed. “God, this girl is beautiful, I thought.” I smiled. “You were wearing a…
black dress, looking all adult and serious and sexy, but you were drunk and singing.” He giggled. “You were telling me that I would be lucky to have you and I knew I would… I kept trying to make you want to be with me, but I didn’t even know why would you…?”

“How could I resist?” I asked. “You’re amazing.”

He smiled. “And then you left.”

His smile faded, and so did mine, remembering our breakup in 2013.

“I would google you a thousand times a day.” He admitted, and though I felt weird knowing something I wasn’t sure he would have said if he was sober, I liked knowing he had as much of a bad time getting over me than I, him. “I would watch you going out from the paparazzi pictures, hating that they were still harassing you, but loving that I had a chance to see you… and then I started seeing you with that guy.”

“Trevor?” I asked, about the guy I had almost dated after him.

“Trevor, shmevor.” He mumbled, making me giggle. “Super model, blonde guy… God, I hated him.”

“You didn’t even know him.”

“He had you.” He replied. “And I didn’t… It was enough.”

“You had Fake Tan.” I argued.

He scoffed. “Please… After you I never managed to sleep with anyone without thinking about you to get hard.”

I had to bite my lip now to stop myself from smiling. That was a bit of information I knew he wouldn’t have volunteered soberly.

“Could be worse…” I tried. “You could have called someone the wrong name.”

“Oh, I did.” He said. “A girl I met at a club a good… two months after we broke up. I called her Jen and she just… took off. Never called me.” I giggled. “Not that I wanted her to. I just wanted you back.”

“Is that when you called me?” I asked, remembering the drunk dials I had gotten from him.

The first drunk voice message he had left me in 2013 was after a month we had said goodbye. I remember how Thomas had told me in São Paulo when we met for the World Cup that that was when his friends had taken him out and tried to set him up with Chelsy again. He had gotten angry, drunk and went home to call me.

Even if I hadn’t saved the voice messages as audio files on my phone – and even if I hadn’t listened to them hundreds of times after he left them so I could remember the sound of his voice, I think they were forever scratched on my mind. The first one sounded like:

‘Hey. Jenny. Pick up… I hate my friends. I miss New York. I miss you… I wish you were here. I wish… I wish you were here. I… I’m hurting and I hate that you’re not here. I love you.’

The second one, after another month had gone by, had apparently been inspired by the girl he called Jen accidently. It made more sense now that I knew that. It went:
‘Manny. Her name was Monica! Which I would have known if I had been paying attention. But how could I? you were in Victoria Secret last night and all I can keep thinking about is how insanely hot you looked on that last white piece… it’s like you were made to wear wings, Jenny, what the fuck is up with that?! No one should look that natural with wings… I wonder if Manny likes wings… or is her name Michele? Shit.’

The third one came right after that, from the same night, and it was one of the most heartbreaking ones.

‘I hate you. I just hate you so much… how can you just… move on like that? You just went out with your supermodel friends and partied like I don’t exist is like you’re not even hurting which you probably aren’t…’ hiccup sound, ‘and I hate that. I hate that you can just move on and I’m stuck here googling pictures of you because I’m so scared I’ll forget how you look.’ He sighed. ‘I don’t think I will. How can I? Your face is burned in my mind… I hate you.’

Then, about forty minutes later, came the last one:

‘I don’t hate you. I love you. I’m so in love with you it hurts. I love you so much my fucking skin burns just by remembering the feel of kissing you… I love you so much I wanna throw everything up and just get on a plane to New York. But you moved on, didn’t you?’ he snickered, bitterly, ‘Of course you did… Look at you. You’re… you’re amazing. You’re gorgeous and fucking sexy… you’re goddamn Jenifer Silva. I just… I just wish you were here. I just wish I had you… I just-‘

And before he could continue, the message was over and he never called again. At the time, my heart broke not knowing what he wanted to say and never had the chance. Now, I felt amused imagining for how long he must have talked before either passing out or realizing the message was over.

Now I knew that he had almost left another voice message on my birthday the following year, sober this time, saying he still loved me, reason why Fake Tan had broken up with him.

“Harry…” I started, soft, laying my head on his hair, smelling the mixture of alcohol and perfume he emitted, filling my heart with uncontrollable joy. “I’m here now.”

Though he smiled, his drunken expression was still sad, and his voice was nothing but a whisper when he spoke next.

“But for how long?”

My heart broke and I stroke his hair gently.

“I don’t wanna frighten you, Mr. Prince, but I’m not going anywhere.”

“You’re retiring.” He argued, still soft as a whisper.

I felt my expression twisting in confusion. “So?” he was silent.

“I don’t want you to leave me.” He admitted.

“Harry, why would you think that that means I’m gonna leave?”

“You said you wanna be normal.”

I raised my head to look at him. “I did?”
“You said you’re excited to… to fall into oblivion.” He quoted. “That you’re excited about being normal… But I’m not normal… and you don’t want me to walk away from my title and family… so if you- if you want to be normal why would you be with someone who isn’t?”

“Harry…” I started, feeling my heart breaking in my chest.

“If you stay with me, I’m not- I’m not normal… and even if you retire, that means…” he struggled to speak, “even if you retire to be normal, being with me, you never will be. You can never be normal if you stay with me.”

I didn’t know what to say, so I just watched his chest rise and fall as he breathed heavier, his head still in my shoulder. He slowly leaned down, and laid his head on my lap gently. His hand held on to my knee and he slowly caressed my skin.

I loved him so much.

“Harry, I-” I started, but he interrupted me.

“Have you ever considered that birds are just worms with wings?” he asked.

“What?”

“Birds. Birds are weird, Jay.”

I giggled, realizing his sharing time was over and he had gone back into weird-drunk mode.

“Come on, let’s go lay down on the bed.” I tried to pull him up.

“No!” He complained, hugging my legs.

“Yes…” I insisted, trying not to laugh.

“Why?!?”

“Because we’re on the bathroom floor.” I argued. “Not exactly the best place to sleep.”

He sighed, deeply, and gave my naked knee a kiss. “I am highly comfortable.”


“Fine…” He complained again, and struggled to get up. I stumbled on my stiletto heels to drag him to the bed, and then I had to make a decision.

I could either struggle to walk him around the bed to lay him on the left side, like he wanted, or I could lay him down on the right side, which was closer, and hope he was so drunk he wouldn’t notice.

I had an idea, and took him to the bed, laying him to the end of the bed. He was so drunk he didn’t realize it, and so he thought it was the left because it felt like it.

I smiled, watching as he hugged his pillow and sighed deeply.

I leaned down and gave him a kiss on his forehead.

He raised his hand and held on gently to my hair.
“If I wasn’t about to die I would go brush my teeth so I could kiss you.”

I laughed again.

“You can kiss me in the morning.” I promised.

He sighed. “Okay.”

“And you can kiss me in the day after tomorrow, too.”

“Really?” he asked, smiling.

“Really.”

“Can I kiss you the day after, too?”

“Sure.”

“Yay.” He said, and I giggled.

“In fact you can kiss me next month, too. And the month after that. And next year, if you’d like.”

“I can?” He asked, his eyes still closed, sounding disbelieving and more sleepy.

“You can.” I assured him. “I’ll be right here.”

“Do you promise?” he asked.

I smiled. “I promise, Mr. Prince.”

When I came back into the room the following morning, carrying a plate with French toasts, a small bowl of fruit salad and a cup of earl gray tea, Harry was just stepping out of the shower.

“You’re alive!” I marveled, smiling, as I laid the food on the nightstand on the left side of the bed.

“Just barely.” He mumbled, returning my smile just slightly, wrapped up in a robe, drying his wet hair with a towel.

I sat on the right side of the bed and he made his way to the left.

“Don’t worry, you’re not the only one all dead today. Only Taylor, Beezus and Kit showed up for breakfast downstairs. The rest are all still recovering.”

“Even Jake and Zoe?” He asked, sitting in the bed by my side and grabbing the cup of tea.

“Yep.” I told him. “Last time I saw them last night they were making out against a wall, looking like they were about to make baby number three.”

He smiled. “God, I don’t remember drinking that much since…”

“2013?” I asked, grinning. He looked confused, and I giggled. “Just something you said last night.”

“I don’t remember much of what happened after I owned Adam on the dance floor.”

“You mean when both of you were so embarrassing we had to drag you out of there before someone filmed it and posted it online?”
He closed his eyes, blushing. “I could swear I was doing well.” I laughed. “Thanks for the food.”

I reached for my bag on my nightstand and found him an aspirin. “Here.” I gave it to him, who took it silently.

“It feels very weird being the one hangover while you’re sober.”

“I know, right?” I smiled.

I laid on my side, watching him as he ate his French toasts and fruit salad quietly, eventually leaving all in the nightstand and finishing his tea as well. His eyes were puffy and red as he squinted at the food, and for some reason I felt my heart aching with love.

Maybe it was because usually, when he was hangover, I was too, and so I had never noticed how cute he looked while trying to hang on to his own sanity after a party night.

“What?” He asked, noticing I was staring.

I smiled and shook my head dismissively. He blinked, and went back to his breakfast, but I kept my eyes on him.

I remembered talking to Zoe on the previous day as we lounged by the pool. She had just gotten an email from her parents letting her and Jake know the girls were doing okay, and they had sent pictures, which she showed me.

Zalie and India, both blonde with pretty, big, blue eyes were wrapped up in thick, winter onesies, one pink and white, and the other gray and pink, with woolen scarves and hats and boots that looked too big for them. They were standing in a snowy garden, with Zoe’s mother behind them helping them up – as her father probably took the photo –, and they were smiling as if it was Christmas day again as they held the white puffy snow in their baby hands.

“Oh, my God, they’re the cutest!” I had told Zoe when she showed me the pictures.

“I know, right?!” She gushed, staring at the pictures with a loving smile on her lips. “Jake is going to lose it when he sees my parents let them out in the cold. He’s so protective.”

“He’s so paranoid.” I corrected. “They’re wearing comfy, thick onesies. They’re fine.”

She smiled, rolling her eyes. “Yes, but when it comes to them he can be very perfectionist. If he can’t make sure himself that they’re okay, he assumes they’re doing badly.”

“God… what a loser.” I joked, giggling, and she joined me.

“Just you wait,” she said, “there’s no way Harry isn’t going to be even worse than Jake… He’s gonna install cameras in their room and keep watching them twenty-four seven.”

I smiled. “I’ve known him for more than four years now and I can promise you that is exactly what he will do.”

She laughed, and I felt a warmth in my stomach that had nothing to do with the thirty-eight Celsius of that summer day.

I looked at Zoe, still staring at the sweet picture of her babies and suddenly, before I planned it or understood it, I was imagining I had a picture too, of my babies. I was imagining I could hold them in my arms, and I was imagining how sweet Harry would be as he tried to protect them. I could
even see the smile on his face, full of joy and love, just like I felt.

I looked at Harry now, lying puffy-eyed in bed with his face above his teacup, letting the vapor ease his headache. His strong jaw, orange hair, thick beard and thin lips were as handsome as I knew them and I couldn’t take my eyes from him.

“Que foi, Silva?” He asked again, this time in Portuguese, why I was looking at him, making me smile.

I considered what I had felt seeing Zoe’s daughters’ picture and what I was feeling now: my heart full of love for this strange, handsome, patient prince that had eased his way into my life.

In my own language, without giving it too much thought, I told him the truth:

“Eu quero passar o resto da minha vida com você.”

Harry seemed to consider my words for a second, finally giving up, he sighed.

“My Portuguese is still not that good.” He admitted, making me smile.

I leaned forward, resting my head on his shoulder and wrapping an arm over his chest, and he returned his mug to the nightstand so he could turn and lay on his side, looking at me.

“I said…” I started, feeling my heart jumping in my chest, “I want to spend the rest of my life with you.”

I saw surprise flicker in his eyes and an almost inaudible gasp leave his now parted lips. I resisted an urge to giggle, but the smile on my own face I couldn’t control. I felt happy. I felt as unbelievably happy as I used to think people shouldn’t even be allowed to be.

“…what are you saying?” he asked, finally, whispery.

“I don’t know yet what I’m gonna do with my professional life after I stop being an actress.” I told him. “And I have time to figure that out, I don’t mind not knowing yet. I still have this entire year of work… But when I think about what I want my personal life to look like this year, and next year, and in five years, and in ten years and-and… forever, well… I-I want you to be there.”

He didn’t say anything. He seemed to be frozen in place – his expression still of shock. A long time passed while he just watched me. I don’t think I had ever seen him more surprised than in that moment, but inside, I was full of peace. The more I watched him, the more I knew I meant what I had said: he was what I wanted. Like Rapunzel, I had now everything I wanted.

Love was my new dream.

“What does this mean?!” He asked, softly, still not daring to move.

I smiled broader, “As I said, I still have this entire year of work to get done.” I told him. “So, for now, it doesn’t have to mean anything…”

He nodded, seriously, and I saw him gulp.

“Okay.” He uttered. “But…?”

“But…” I added, “on my last birthday you told me that I should let you know when I felt ready for us to move forward…”
As understanding started to make his way through his mind, I saw a smile tugging in at his lips.

“You told me then that I was ‘it’ for you…” I paused. “Well, I thought you should know that… I wanna be with you. Forever. You’re it for me, too, Mr. Prince. Rank and all that comes with you. Normal or not. I want you.”

He smiled and, before I had time to understand what was happening, he wrapped his arms around me and turned us on the mattress, lying on top of me. His lips on mine; my heart in his hands; our futures as enlaced together as possible.

Chapter End Notes

WOAH. OKAY. ITS ALL HAPPENING. YOU GUYS WE’RE SO CLOSE YOU DONT EVEN KNOW HANG IN THERE! Now J has decided what she wants her future to be like, she needs to start sorting out her details. Next chapter: J gets into a big twitter feud and the world finds out about her plans.

THANKS FOR READING! You're wonderful and I love you! Have a good week!

PS: Sorry about the delay in posting! I'm on my parents for winter break and I have no internet here =( Next week we're back at it though! =D
“So, you’ve had a busy few months…”

As I knew the camera was filming me, I giggled gracefully, giving it my best angle as I kept my eyes in the interviewer, just like Janine had taught me.

“That might be an understatement.” I joked.

“I don’t even know where to start… Vogue named you one of the best dressed of last year, congratulations! And congratulations on all the awards and nomination tonight. You’re nominated for Heathers, and you’ve already won a People’s Choice Award for this movie, and a SAG award, a Golden Globe, a Bafta Award… you thanked your boyfriend in your speech for that one, that was adorable.” She went on, speaking fast as the red carpet interviewers usually did, as to try and get as much information out of a celebrity as possible.

I tried to keep my face in emotionless poise as she mentioned Harry – I knew with thanking him on my speech I had opened the door for everyone to assume it was okay to ask now, but I had to be strong. There were a lot more important things to talk about.

“And then you won a Grammy just last week, your second one, you’re the youngest person to have all of these awards and an Emmy. That had to be a great honor!”

I smiled, looking overwhelmed which, truly, I felt.

“Oh, my God. So much. I…” I sighed. “To be honest I still don’t know exactly how that happened. I remember, you know, the countless days of work and everything that came with it. But I didn’t actually expected for this to happen, especially this fast, so it’s still very shocking that I have all of this.”

“Also a great speech when you accepted your second Grammy for the soundtrack of Heathers,” she grinned, wickedly, and I mimicked. “You had a bit of a Twitter beef drama because of your nomination. Is all forgiven and forgotten? What’s happening there?”

—

The new year started with me, my friends and my boyfriend enjoying Rio as much as we could, but quickly turned to shit when the next week arrived. As of early 2017, Oscar Isaac and I flew back to Los Angeles to start shooting Disney’s adaptation of Tangled, in which I was playing Rapunzel and he was playing Flynn Ryder.

As it was award season, we only had Monday through Saturdays to shoot and Disney had decided the shooting schedule would not go beyond March, so we were running against time. Working with
Oscar proved a lot easier than I had imagined – he was a good actor, a good professional and, after some bonding time over New Year’s, we even managed to become friends, which made work a lot easier. The fact our characters were barely acquaintances for most of the picture also helped, of course. But the real problem came, not from Oscar, but from Twitter which, now that I think about it, actually makes a lot of sense.

The Grammy nominations had been announced in December and, though a lot of famous professional musicians and artists didn’t get one, the Heathers cast did, for Best Score for a Visual Media, which basically means best soundtrack of a movie. In two years I was nominated for two Grammys, and as wonderful as that was to me, it was actually infuriating to some people.

Some people in this case meaning Justin Bieber. Now, it is worth remembering that Justin hadn’t been quite a fan of mine since 2013 when my phone was stolen and texts were leaked by TMZ which showed a conversation I had had with Selena in which I basically called him a low-life coke addict – actually, no. I didn’t even say that. I said he had coke addict friends who were constantly ruining parties when Justin brought them, which was true, by the way. But Justin knew how to hold a grudge and he seemed to think I was at fault for Selena breaking up with him, so he basically never spoke to me again.

Admittedly, I didn’t give a shit. I never really liked him, anyway, especially on the last few years, when he had grown into an annoying dick. Now, to be fair, I could have gotten away without this drama if it weren’t for a certain answer I gave during a Q&A the cast of Heathers did for Buzzfeed, in which someone asked which song we had stuck in our heads at that moment, and I told the livestream: Love Yourself.

“I hadn’t pictured you for a Bieber fan.” Our mediator intervened.

“I’m not!” I told him. “I like the Halsey cover. And technically Ed Sheeran wrote that song, so if anything, I’m an Ed Sheeran fan.”

Though I didn’t think much of it then, it was enough to have the beliebers asking for my head on a silver platter on social media, and soon enough my mentions on twitter were being flooded with a storm of ‘DIE SLUT’s again. Justin himself took to twitter to rant about his ‘unfair persecution by the industry’s so called artists’ – his words, I swear.

“So I’m not good enough for a Grammy nom but MY music is good enough to be stuck in some of yall’s head. Fuck this.’ And ‘they be giving Grammy noms to certain people who aren’t even singers… unfair and ridiculous. When has an actor deserved it more than a professional singer?!
It’s not what it should be about.’

Now, in my defense, I was having a stressful week. Shooting on a hot studio while wearing a heavy wig is utterly difficult, I hadn’t seen Harry since New Year’s, my management was pestering me about ‘the right time’ to announce the retirement and, to be quite honest, when I read that he had tweeted that, I was quite hungry. It also didn’t help that this was my first award season fully sober.

So, yes, I might have snapped back. And I might have made Clara take a picture of me laying by my pool in Los Angeles with my Grammy Award by my side – which may or may not have been sporting its on pair of sunglasses -, which I then posted to Instagram and twitter with the caption:

‘What a beautiful day to tan by the pool with my Grammy Award… so many “’artists”’ cant do the same… #blessed’

Passive-aggressive? Maybe. Deserved? Yes. After that I logged off of social media and focused my energy on work, which I needed, but Clara maintained me well informed that my little response
was still news after a week.

Life went by, and, amidst the craziness of shooting a movie and recording a soundtrack for it, I still had to attend award season and promote our nominations with the cast of Heathers, and in itself, that was a whole other ordeal.

When Heathers came out on December of 2016, it quickly became the biggest thing to happen to pop culture since Mean Girls – and, as a Mean Girl fan, I do not make that comparison lightly. There was, however, really not other way to put it.

In three weeks of release on December of 2016, Heathers became the highest grossing movie of the year with a record-breaking opening weekend and a top-selling soundtrack. Our faces were splattered on Billboards all over the world and on every merchandising product imaginable – notebooks, phone and laptop cases, mouse pads, shirts… they made us into bubble head dolls, Barbie announced a Heathers line, and the studio quickly sold the rights to a novelization book.

Heathers went viral – it quickly became a number of different memes, reaction images, and it was made into its own makeup and nail polish line.

However exhausting and busy our promotion tours went, things only got harder once Award Season started. I barely had time to talk to Harry after New Year’s eve, which was good in the sense that I didn’t need to worry so much about what might be going through his head after I told him I wanted to spend my life with him, but still made me miss him.

Janine and Monica, trying at the best of their ability to handle all the publicity opportunities my newfound fame brought, were hysterics at all the craziness surrounding my name after Heathers came out. They kept saying that I was now ‘an icon’, and, as such, things would never be the same.

Apparently, being an icon involved being at more risk than ever as my management office and twitter replies started getting more stalker correspondence – and belieber hate - and so I was unable to continue delaying the inevitable and Richard won the battle for hiring me another bodyguard. I would have insisted that was ridiculous, but even I couldn’t deny the need for a second one anymore. At some point in that January, specifically after my twitter drama with Bieber, I became the most followed person on both Instagram and Twitter and the paparazzi following was harder than it had ever been. I remembered only feeling like this when the press had first found out about me and Harry, or when I was out with Taylor on Manhattan, but if this was my new normal, than it made sense that Eddy would need help protecting me.

Still in England, I told him that, as the person who would have to be around this new bodyguard more often, he should have the first choice in who we hired, so he interviewed candidates and brought me the one he felt more comfortable with. That’s how we hired the middle-aged, former military man called Johnnie, who was available to start a trial period in January and didn’t mind traveling around with us. So we brought him to Award Season, knowing that if he could handle that, he could handle anything.

To promote the movie through award season, the cast of Heathers started January by taping a Lip Synch Battle episode in New York, along with three more talk shows - Seth Meyers, Jimmy Fallon and Jimmy Kimmel.

The Lip Synch Battle was especially fun for me because Kit was there promoting his new movie, and I was able to get him back for his ridiculous, annoying fake facts about my home country during New Year’s Eve.
They paired him with Tyler to make it a boys against girls competition. Their first song was Bye, Bye, Bye, by NSync, which I had to admit was good. Our first song was a homage to Mean Girls, and we sang Jingle Bell Rock, doing the choreography from it. The song shifted into a mashup, we tore apart our Lady Santa Claus costumes, and danced our way to Crazy In Love, by Beyoncé – all modesty aside, I must say, to perfection.

Then the boys took over, as we had rehearsed early on, and we all danced together to High School Musical’s We’re All In This Together. Over all, I’d say it was pretty hilarious – especially if the millions of views the video got are to be believed.

Evidence of the Heathers’ popularization was the People’s Choice Awards, the fan voted ceremony which always opened Award Season. Fun fact: we won every category we were nominated for – all eight of them!

Tyler won Favorite Movie Actor and Favorite Dramatic Movie Actor and I won its respective female versions, the cast won, together, Favorite Thriller Movie and the most expected one, Favorite Movie, which I got to thank in their names. But weirdly, the ones I liked the most were Favorite Social Media Celebrity (which I cheekily thanked to every drama thirsty follower I had) and The DailyMail.com Seriously Popular Award – which, trust me, it’s a thing.

I didn’t know it was a thing. To be honest, I found out then and there. I knew I was nominated for a popularity award, but I didn’t know that was the name. It was, as it is obvious by the title, sponsored by the British celebrity “news” outlet – which kept on making up ridiculous rumors about me and Harry and pretty much everyone I knew. So, as I went to accept my award that night, there was very little I could do about my true feelings about it.

“Thank you so much to everyone who voted for me, that is so kind of you.” I said in the microphone, smiling at the audience and the cameras. “It means a lot that you would give your time and energy to make me happy, I truly appreciate it. However… I do have to admit it feels a little weird to win an Award that’s basically from the Daily Mail… As you may or may not know, they’re a British tabloid and I’ve been living there for the past few months…”

There was a timid applause from the crowd. I smiled. “What can I say? They buy invasive paparazzi pictures and makeup ridiculous rumors about me and Harry and pretty much everyone I knew. So, as I went to accept my award that night, there was very little I could do about my true feelings about it.

As anyone could have imagined, that gave me another week of headlines for ‘dissing’ the Daily Mail. The publication itself started running even nastier than usual stories about me, including one that claimed my mother hated Harry and his family so much she was threatening to disown me if I didn’t move out from England immediately. This was hilarious because anyone who knew my mother would know that if she didn’t disown me after my book came out there was literally no scenario in which she would consider doing so and, even if she did, it’s not like I would need her money.

However, I was not happy about the arguments they had used to base this ridiculous allegation: they were claiming that my mother was appalled at the possibility that I would turn out like Harry’s mother, the late Lady Diana, if I didn’t take my distance from him.

My mother was so offended that they would say these many lies that she called Harry to make sure he knew she loved him. When Harry told me about this, he also told me they ended up spending a good half an hour on the phone talking about food and my mom taught him how to make Buddy Bean soup, which he promised to make for me when I came back to the country.
“However much I enjoy all of this publicity you’ve been getting,” Janine told me a few days later, “I’m afraid you might have made things harder for yourself with this. They won’t leave you alone, now.”

“I’m not afraid of them.” I told her, shrugging.

“I know.” She assured. “And, well, there’s no such thing as bad press, but, honey, you have a retirement announcement coming soon. It would be good to have the press on your side.”

“One of the reasons I am retiring is so I don’t owe them any more of my time.” I told her, and sighed. “I think the closer I get to leaving this business the more I lose my patience…”

—

As the month went by, the nominations for the more serious Awards came out and, one by one, all our fears proved to be unfounded. Our fears revolved around the fact that with all the mainstream attention and popularization of the movie, with all the pop rock music and young cast, Heathers wouldn’t be valued by the critic as the serious movie it was. But we were wrong.

At the Golden Globe Awards, we were nominated for Best Motion Picture (Musical or Comedy) and its respective awards for Best Actor and Actress, for Tyler and me. Our director was nominated for Best Director and both Emma Stone and Anna Kendrick were nominated for Best Supporting Actress. We also snatched nominations for Best Original Score and Best Original Song, for Seventeen – my duet with Tyler.

Though our director lost, me, Tyler and Anna won our awards and the whole cast won the Best Motion Picture award, which was not only new to me – as I had never been in a ‘best movie’ before – but it was excruciatingly exciting for what it meant.

It meant that we were a favorite for all the others – including an Oscar!

At the SAG Awards, we were nominated for Outstanding Performances by a Female Actor in a Leading Role (me!), a Male Actor in a Leading Role (Tyler), a Female Actor in a Supporting Role (Emma and Anna, again!) and a Cast in a Motion Picture.

We won all of it. Except, this time, Emma won the supporting actress award instead of Anna. Things were getting weird and exciting, and when the Bafta nominations came out, we were almost numb with joy at the realization we were nominated for twelve awards.

I particularly cared about the Bafta awards because it was the British one and, as a new resident of Great Britain, I cared about what they thought of me over there. So I put particular thought on my outfit for the ceremony – which I was lucky enough to get ready for in my own room, under Harry’s lustful eyes the whole time -, and set off for it after getting a good luck kiss from my boyfriend.

As I had expected, the monologue jokes at the Baftas gave particular focus to the fact I was living there now.

“One of our nominees tonight, Jenifer Silva, has been living in London for about four months now.” The host mentioned at the start of the show, as I sat on first row, smiling, hoping he wouldn’t say anything bad. “Last week she got into drama with the Daily Mail for harassing her mother and the week before she had a passive-aggressive exchange with Justin Bieber over Twitter. I mean, only four months living here and she has already mastered the art of hating the Daily Mail and being passive-aggressive… that’s as British as you can possibly get. Congratulations, Jenifer.
Welcome to our humble island.”

The audience laughed, and applauded, and I joined them, feeling weirdly at home.

The host waited, grinning, until the audience was silence to move on.

“The only way she could possibly become more British is if she were to, say, date Prince Harry and carry a lap dog around.” The screen behind him flickered and showed a paparazzi picture of me and Harry, holding hands, walking through Hide Park while I held Vodka in my arms.

Me and the audience laughed again, and I buried my own face in my hands, blushing.

As a more serious ceremony, we lost a lot of the Bafta Awards we were nominated for, like Best Film, Best Direction, Best Actress in a Supporting Role, Best Cinematography and Best Film Music. But there were good news, and the awards we won were: Best Sound, Costume Design (for our wonderful eighties pieces), Editing (which was particularly flattering to me as a producer because I had had a lot of say in the editing process). Also Adapted Screenplay and Actor in a Leading Role (Tyler had never won these many awards in a row before, and he was getting more emotional at every acceptance speech).

And then, when they announced I had won my category, for Best Actress in a Leading Role, I felt so flattered and welcomed into that country – officially – that I was in tears before I even got to the stage.

The last time I had won a Bafta was in 2014, when I was still trying to forget Harry, and so much had changed I couldn’t help but feel overwhelmed.

“Thank you! Thank you so much, British Academy of Film and Television Arts.” I started my speech, breathless, resting my award in the acrylic table in front of the microphone. “God, where do I start? I need to thank our director, Michael, Eric for the wonderful job and opportunity, my beautiful cast for the support and laughter thorough this weird story…” I sighed, as the audience giggled, thinking about what should come next. “And I wanna thank you, you wonderful British people here tonight, and watching from home, for welcoming me into your beautiful country. There’s so much that I love about this country, to name a few things, I love your very talented Carrie Hope Fletcher,” I looked at Carrie sitting beside Anna in first row, who smiled, touched, “your cold days, and, well…” I smiled, “I do love the fifth person in your line to the throne, who makes me feel so at home. Thank you.”

Before they understood what I meant, I smiled and turned on my heels, making my way backstage, knowing I had just accidentally bought myself another few weeks of headlines.

When I walked back home a couple of hours later, my black, mermaid-cut, dress’s train trailing behind me, I was met by a chorus of wolf whistles.

“Looking hot, Silva!” Skippy smiled from the kitchen door, from where soon popped Guy and Melissa as well.

“You look amazing.” Melissa let out, admiring my dress.

“Congrats on the award.” Guy said. “We particularly liked the speech. Harry was blushing like an adorable school girl.”

I smiled, blushing.
When I had left the house for the Bafta Awards, only Skippy had arrived, but Harry had told me he invited the others to come watch as well.

“Thank you.” I said, making some room for my new award on the glass shelf and following the others to the kitchen.

“Girl of the hour-Woah,” Lizzy stopped talking as she saw me, “the television does not make that dress justice.”

I smiled. “Hi, guys.”

Despite talking to her and the others, I walked and looked only at Harry, who smiled as I leaned in for a kiss on my bright red lipstick.

“Congratulations.” He said.

“Thanks.”

“Jenifer, how upset would you be if we stole your dog?”

I turned to look at Natasha, who had spoken, and considered her request.

“Just try.” I joked. “I’ll remind you we live with five body guards.”

Natasha had grown on me over the last few months – something I thought might have a lot to do with how much nicer she had been after we got to know each other. I suspected Harry might have told her about our conversation on New Year’s eve, because she didn’t seem like the same girl who seemed to have it out for me when we met. Or maybe it was just because her daughter was there.

“Would you deny a child this much joy?” asked Natasha’s husband, Rupert, who looked like a younger, more handsome Colin Firth, looking up at me from where he sat on the kitchen floor with their two-year-old daughter between his legs.

Georgia, the adorable, little blue-eyed baby, was excitedly giggling at Vodka, who was jumping in and out of her reach snapping her tail around happily.

“You can leave her here if you want them to be together.” I offered, smiling at the baby. “We’ll take care of her, don’t worry.”

Hugging me from behind, Harry raised a hand. “I don’t mind!”

“That’s settled, then.” I joked, walking towards them and picking up Georgia from her father. “We have a new baby! Hi! Hi, cutie.”

Georgia barely looked at me, as she was still trying to maintain eye contact with Vodka.

“Okay, this is making me a little uncomfortable now.” Natasha confessed.

“Don’t joke about stealing our child, and we won’t joke about yours.” Harry told her, cheekily.

“I don’t mean Georgia, I mean your dress.” She said, stepping down from her stool to grab her child back. “Never hold a baby in couture. You never know what might come out of them.”

Harry and the boys laughed, though us girls were now very worriedly eyeing my dress to make sure it was still okay.
“Women…” Thomas sighed.

“Well, I’d love to hear what my gender is doing wrong, Thomas,” I said, “but I, unfortunately have an after-party I have to be seen at.”

“Your stylists are already in the bedroom.” Harry told me. “I’ll go with you.”

He followed me to our bedroom through the kitchen door, which lead us through the bathroom.

“Did Zoe and Jake didn’t come?” I asked.

“They left right after the show was over.” He told me. “They had to relieve the babysitter… sometimes it’s hard to believe so many of my friends already have kids.”

I suddenly turned in my stiletto heels to look at him, who almost bumped into me halfway through the bathroom.

“I’m sorry I said that in my speech.” I told him. “I know I should have asked you about it beforehand. I didn’t plan it. It just, sort of, came out…”

He smiled. “Did you hear me complain?”

I couldn’t help but smile back. “It’s gonna be a big deal.”

“Maybe.” He shrugged, taking a step closer to me. “But I still liked it.”

“They’ll be talking about it for weeks.”

He leaned closer. “I don’t mind.”

Before I could say anything else, he kissed me.

“And I love you too, by the way.”

I sighed, still smiling.

“They’re gonna make a big deal about it.”

“Maybe not.” He said. “Maybe we’re overestimating our popularity.”

—

We were not.

A full week later, when I walked the red carpet to the Grammy Awards in a red, skintight, strapless Dona Karan dress, with my hair up in a ponytail and nude makeup on, people were still making a big deal about what most tabloids called ‘Jenifer Silva’s love declaration to longtime boyfriend Prince Harry!’ I had both Janine and Monica behind me at every red carpet interview to make sure that as soon as someone asked about it — and we knew they would — they could intervene to remind them I would not be answering questions about my personal life and to escort me out if the interviewer insisted.

Which they obviously did, prompting me to walk away from not one, not two, but three interviews and having people call me ‘sensitive’ and claiming I had no right to not want to talk about it since I had in my speech, anyway.
I didn’t care. I kept telling myself it was just a few more months before I could walk away from annoying, prying reporters.

“At least you know what to expect.” Janine mentioned, as I scorned as we walked away from yet another interviewer. “Tonight you know that if you make the news, it’s still gonna be about this. No surprises. What more drama could we possibly expect? It’s too much for a single award season.”

Sadly, she was wrong – which doesn’t happen a lot.

That night Heathers won the Grammy Award for Best Compilation Soundtrack for Visual Media – the equivalent of the one we had won the previous year, but for a movie album this time, and not a musical.

Smiling as happily as I ever had, feeling myself filled with pride and joy over my second Grammy Award – when I hadn’t even expected I would ever win one -, I climbed on stage with Eric and Marcela, our composer and lyricist, and Tyler, who, with me, was the album’s soloist.

Marcela quickly thanked our cast, studio and director, her family and Eric’s, and turned to me, claiming this time, unlike last year, she thought we deserved a shot at a speech.

Blushing, Tyler gestured for me to go to the microphone, so I smiled, holding the golden gramophone in my arms, and, once again before I could decide if this was the wisest decision, spoke from the heart.

My heart was unfortunately feeling very cocky that night.

That year we were nominated for a movie soundtrack, which meant our category was presented in the televised Grammys, which means that when I stepped in front of the microphone upon Marcela’s invitation, I had the eyes of the whole world on me.

“I just wanna thank Marcela and Eric, for giving us the opportunity to work with you.” I started, shaking ever so slightly. “You know…” I sighed pausing, the words carefully forming in my mind, “Tyler and me, we are actors… and we know we are so blessed to have two Grammy awards when there’s amazing musicians out there who don’t even have one…” I remembered Justin and his ridiculous, childish twitter tantrums, and smiled at my Grammy Award. “…And then there’s the ones who simply don’t deserve one. To hell with them. Thank you for this!”

As expected, twitter was set afire after this – which I promptly ignored. I refused to check my mentions these days as I knew what I would find there: infinite belieber hate. Clara, however, kept me informed of all that was going down, from every ridiculous tabloid headline that claimed to have exclusive details about ‘Justin Bieber and Jenifer Silva’s feud’, to every celebrity that took my side or his.

Jerks like Kanye West and Iggy Azalea seemed pretty upset that ‘poor, misunderstood’ Justin was being attacked by ‘vicious, attention-seeking’ Jenifer. When they expressed their opinions, Justin replied by telling them that he ‘wouldn’t let himself be thrown down by bitches who aren’t even in the game’.

After this, he went on a rant of his own until when, replying to one of his fans, he twitted the following:

‘No worries. Bitch don’t even know what shes doing. Privilege works like that you just take whatever you can either you earned it or nah.’
‘I don’t do that. I work for what I want, always have, unlike some people who prefer to slut their way to the top.’

Boy, oh boy, that was enough of him. Thankfully, I had supporters of my own.

Taylor was the first, and, let me tell you, the classiest. She took to twitter and very directly twitted at Justin’s handle that not only was there no excuse to attack a girl’s sexuality, it was also very misogynistic.

The other girls in our group, such as Karlie, Gigi, Martha Hunt, Lily Aldridge, Cara Delavigne and Hailee Steinfeld, all tweeted their support in a more snappy and indirect way, speaking about the rudeness of Justin’s claims and the sexism a woman faces for simply achieving something a man hasn’t. Cara was the one who replied to this, said by one of the others, saying ‘if we could even call him a man. All I see is a boy’.

Ophelia responded by retweeting a fan who had made a picture montage of mine and Justin’s data, side by side: net worth, awards won and career achievements, which I won by far. She then tweeted:

‘I keep seeing the word ‘talent’ misspelled as ‘privilege’… oh well, you can’t expect someone who doesn’t have it to know how to spell it #oops’.

From what Clara had been telling me, everyone – or, you know, the people she was tracking on twitter and tumblr – seemed to be dying for some sort of response from not only me, but Selena as well.

I had made sure to tell Selena, whom had called to know if I was okay, that I understood if she stayed quiet since she was more than just a little too close to this. I told her I understood if she needed to stay out of it, as I knew she didn’t agree with him. But despite my reassurance that we were fine, a good two days after people were still talking about it, she retweeted someone who had twitted the Gary Sevakis quote: ‘The only thing bigger than God’s great universe is a man’s ego’. Which was pretty self-explanatory, and everyone was able to understand.

But the real highlight of this fight arrived when I made my response – which at first, I had planned on making very simple and, once again, passive-aggressively: it started with me twitting a picture of two black shirts, one with a print of a skeleton hand giving the middle finger, and another with the inscription ‘two words, one finger’. My message was clear: fuck you. My caption, however, read simply: ‘Hm. Unsure of which shirt to go with today. What do you guys think?’

Ophelia was the one who quickly replied with an image of her own. It was clearly a picture of a simple, white tee-shirt, to which she had added the words: ‘cultural appropriation is for small dick, talentless jerks’. When I finally stopped laughing, I was able to read her caption: ‘what about this one?’ she was asking me, referring to Justin’s clear and ridiculous attempt at acting black – accusation we weren’t the first to make.

I replied her with: ‘I love it. Doesn’t go with my jeans, though. Have to protect my position on vogue’s best dressed list… LOL’

She twitted back with: ‘You’re absolutely right. Cultural appropriation isn’t very fashionable. Unfortunately it doesn’t stop some people from doing it…’

We were so entertained with ourselves we almost didn’t catch Justin’s comeback when he twitted: ‘LOL come see me I’ll show you the small dick.’
I decided this asked for something more than passive-aggressiveness, so I twitted back: ‘Child, sit down. This isn’t about you. I’m having a fashion emergency which is a lot more relevant to me than you.’

Alessa, however, who had been retweeting fans’ snappy comebacks against Justin since the whole thing went down, was quick to jump in by twitting him: ‘I’ve wore heels bigger than your dick.’

After I favored it, it was like I had twitted it myself, which the press and everyone else seemed to be highly entertained by. The hashtag #childsitdown was trending the whole day, along with my name and Justin’s, and after a whole week, when I was walking the red carpet to the Academy Awards, it was still all people were talking about.

“Jenifer, look over here!”

“Jenifer! Jenifer!”

“Jenifer are you gonna makeup with Justin?!”

I had to endure his fucking name even as I posed for red carpet pictures, which thankfully, wasn’t enough to ruin my mood.

I was nominated for an Academy Award for the second time in my life and I wasn’t even twenty-seven years-old, nothing could ruin my night, not even the prying reporters. Even if they did ask me if I was going to take a restraining order against ‘all Daily Mail reporters’, or if I was gonna sue them like I sued TMZ, or about my boyfriend or Justin’s latest tweet rant about how I owed him my fame and relevance.

“I hate that word.” I told the reporter. “Relevance. It’s such a boring word… I’m nominated for an Oscar tonight, my second one ever. I like to think that’s got something to do with it… and if it didn’t, being relevant is not my mission in life. Thankfully I don’t care about it.”

The reported might not have understood just how much I meant those words, but I knew the truth. I knew I was walking away from this industry and so I didn’t need to fight to be relevant anymore – something that made me truly happy. Still, the more I was forced to talk about all this annoying drama, the more I knew I was making the right choice. I couldn’t wait to not be an actress anymore.

Still, I was proud of Heathers and everything we had achieved with it. I loved the story, the character, the songs; I loved the cast, the script, the producers and directors that I had helped shape the movie the way it ended up being. I loved that we had given so much time for it, be it on Broadway or on set, and it was now paying off. I loved that people were responding to it, identifying with it, trying to be a part of it as much as we were. And now we were in the Academy Awards and I felt like each person on that team deserved to be there and so I was proud to represent them.

The ceremony started, the host made the usual jokes about us making the eighties mainstream for the first time ever, and referring to my Justin feud, and whatever else he could, but I barely cared because soon enough he was calling the first category and Heathers was nominated for it.

We won best cinematography, best costume design and best adapted screenplay, and I rose from my seat with Meryl, Emma, Anna, Carrie and Tyler every time to clap as strongly as we could, the biggest smiles on our faces as we couldn’t help but start feeling like that night belonged to us.

We won best film editing and our director, Michael, accepted it for us, personally mentioning me
by name in his speech for my ‘creative and valuable ideas or, as some liked to call it, privilege’
though he said he preferred the to call it ‘talent’.

I was so happy when I stood up with the others to give him a standing ovation – the first time, I
was sure, that category ruffled so many feathers.

As we were nominated for Best Original Song with Seventeen, Tyler and me got to perform in the
ceremony, so we were escorted backstage by a handler so we could change – Tyler into a more laid
back, dark black blazer and me into a different, lacey blue dress.

We were positioned on stage exactly like we had rehearsed tirelessly that past week, with Tyler on
one end and me on the other, looking at opposite sides of a catwalk with the audience behind us.

We came back from the break and waited until the applause died down when, to astounding
silence, I started singing.

“Fine, we’re damaged. Really damaged. But does not make us wise!” There was a heavy drum
sound. “We’re not special. We’re not different. We don’t chose who lives or dies! Let’s be
normal… see bad movies… sneak a bear and watch TV… we’ll bake brownies, or go bowling…
don’t you want a life with me?! Can’t we be seventeen? That’s all I want to do… if you could let
me in, I could be good with you…”

The lights dimmed all the way down and blinked, and when they came back, they were only two
holophotes on Tyler and me as I turned very slowly on the spot to look at him.

“People hurt us…” I sang.

“Or they vanish…” He joined.

“And you’re right, that really blows.” I went on. “But we let go…”

“Take a deep breath…”

“And go buy some summer clothes… we’ll go camping.” I attempted a smile, remembering how
hopeful Veronica felt as she sang this to JD, begging him to let go of his craziness to simple be an
adolescent by her side.

“Play some poker.”

“And we’ll eat some chilly fries…” I walked closer to him, who was still facing the other way.

“Maybe prom night?”

He turned, ever so slightly, to look at me, “Maybe dancing?”

Enjoying the eye contact, I raised a hand to him as the song’s beat rose up and the lights shone
brighter. “Don’t stop looking in my eyes!”

“Your eyes!” Tyler joined me. “Can’t we be seventeen?! Is that so hard to do?! If you could let me
in, I could be good with you!”

“Let us be seventeen, if we’ve still got the right! So what’s it gonna be? I wanna be with you!”

“I wanna be with you!” he replied, and we took a deep breath before belting the next words as high
as we could.

“I wanna be with you toniiiiiiiiiiight!”
The song’s beat followed our voices, dramatically, finally dimming down like the lights, until all there was left were our sad expressions as our characters realized their love had no hope, and we sang, almost whispery:

“Yeah, we’re damaged…”

“Badly damaged, but your love is too good to lose…”

“Hold me tighter,” I offered him my hand again, which he walked forward to grab.

“Even closer!” He begged.

“I’ll stay if I’m what you chose…”

“Can’t we be seventeen?” Tyler pondered.

“If I am what you choose…”

“If we’ve still got the right…”

“’Cause you’re the one I chose…”

We let our hands go, and sang together one last time.

“You’re the one I… chose.”

There was a silence as our voices died down together, and then there was deafening applause as we received a standing ovation.

We blinked, sighing, coming out of character, and smiled at each other, than at the audience as we held hands and took a bow, before walking back backstage to change back into our clothes to watch the rest of the show.

When we were making our way out, I checked my phone, ignoring every text and focusing only in the one from Harry, which had a picture of his television from a moment of close up on my face as I sang. I had let my hair down and my expression was of suffering, but his text read: ‘you were amazing and you look so stunning. Sometimes I can’t actually believe that you’re my girlfriend.’

‘Better believe, Mr. Prince. You’re the one I chose.’ I replied.

I was smiling when we finally took our sits again, and quickly smiled more as our friends filled us in on the categories we had lost, one of which was Best Supporting Actress, which Emma won.

Her makeup was smudged as she clung to her Academy in her seat, smiling broadly as we congratulated her excitedly.

‘I leave for like 5 min to perform and Emma Stone wins a fucking Oscar?!!! Fuck me gently with a chainsaw, Heather!’ I twitted, happily, a selfie with her and her award and her character’s most famous line from the movie.

When I did, I caught a glimpse of a tweet from Ophelia, who had tweeted a video from our song, saying: ‘So much privilege in one performance! So proud of Jen and Ty. Sorry, did I write privilege? I meant talent, of course.’

I laughed and favored her tweet, before realizing we were coming back from the break and putting my phone away.
I couldn’t stop thinking about my friends as the show went on and the truth was I couldn’t say who won the Best Supporting Actor Oscar, because I wasn’t paying attention. All I kept thinking was of my friends who had come to my defense at the mere sign of someone attacking me, and of how much they didn’t seem to be willing to let it go.

My friends who unapologetically stood by me through not only this childish twitter feud, but through a phone being stolen, through their personal information being thrown into the web because of it. Through my destructive party girl phase and all the things I spoke about in my book, without ever listening to their publicists when they were, undoubtedly, advised to take their distance from me. My friends who had made my life lighter and brighter as they made me laugh every day at work through hours long of hard choreographies and difficult, dark storylines of murder and bullying.

I remembered the fans, who had sold out every Heathers performance, and wondered, briefly, how many people had had to buy the album for it to be on the top of the charts. How many people, overall, did we meet at stage door every night? How many kids had come by to ask for a signature on their Playbills? Or just to give us gifts they thought would make us happy? Or simply to thank us for being in a show they identified so much with.

I felt my heart breaking in my chest as I realized something: those kids, those children we met, they were so young. They couldn’t have been much more than fifteen, eighteen years-old. And I wondered, with a big weight on my chest, why was it that they identified so much with such a sad story as Heathers?

I was so caught up on this I almost didn’t notice when Eric and Marcela were called on stage when Heathers’ Seventeen won the Oscar for Best Original Song.

Then, I didn’t have time to distract myself again because the next person on stage was Ophelia herself.

She strutted out in her bright red hair, head held high, the confidence of someone who hadn’t just dissed out one of the most popular teen pop stars of the planet.

“As a former winner of the Academy Award for Best Leading and Supportive Actress, I’ll be the first to tell you that the excitement of winning an Oscar isn’t nearly as amazing as the excitement of being nominated alongside talented pears.” She read, from the teleprompter, her scripted line. “This year’s nominees represent the best we, as professionals, have to offer, and as we recognize their talent, we also applaud their effort and are honored to work by their side. Ladies and gentleman, these are the nominees for this year’s Academy Award for Best Leading Actress.”

The screen flickered and the clips from the nominees started being played, as Ophelia’s prerecorded voice read their names and movies. As other clips were being shown, I looked around, noticing everything happening as in a well-rehearsed choreography.

On the stage, an assistant brought Ophelia the sealed envelope with the winner’s name. In front of me, in front row, two men with a big camera were getting ready for my close up when my clip was over. I sat upright, with my shoulders back, trying to breathe deeply and preparing my loser face.

I noticed the Heathers’ clip. There was a song playing, I realized it was ‘Yo, Girl’, a dark, tense song from the moment Veronica realizes JD is coming to kill her. She tried to act normal, because her parents are around, and as her mother tells her that she could confide in her, because she had ‘experienced’ everything Veronica was going through, she – sorry, me – looked bitterly into her eyes and scorned. ‘You don’t know what my world looks like!’ she shouted. The clip was cut, and a close up of my face was splattered on the screen. I tried to smile as the applause filled the room,
louder from our own cast sitting around me.

Ophelia got ready to read the winner, approaching the microphone again, she struggled against the envelope’s seal as she said: “And the Oscar goes to…”

When I had won for the first time, in 2014, I had looked into my heart right at this moment – the moment seconds before the winner was announced, the moment I could see my truth, and I had realized, then, how much I wanted it.

When Ophelia paused as she read the envelope I did the same thing again. I looked into my heart, trying to decide if this was something I still wanted. I thought about Justin and my relevance. I thought about Emma and her beautiful smile as she held her first Oscar, I thought about Tyler who was still somewhat unknown and was now taking award season by storm. I thought about the months of work I had put into Heathers and wondered if I actually wanted this Oscar.

As I remembered the countless kids who had come to stage door to talk to us about their terrible experiences in school, and how much they identified with a song in our show about feeling like you’re hanging on for dear life on a lifeboat just for trying to get an education, I realized I didn’t care.

I was happy I was nominated, and I’d be happy if I won; but mostly I was happy my friends were being recognized. I was happy Eric and Marcela had just won Oscars for a show they had spent years of their lives developing. I was happy Emma had won. I was happy the kids who had such a hard time in school they identified with a story about murdering bullies were seeing themselves represented. I was happy for Heathers, but as I sat there, I knew I didn’t care about award season anymore.

And then Ophelia smiled, broadly, and her voice was at least an octave higher as she practically shouted in the microphone: “Jenifer Silva!”

You know how it goes from here. The applause takes over. People stand up. Heathers’ theme music starts playing and an overly-emotional me shakily gets a group hug from her friends before making her way to the stage, where an overly-emotional Ophelia was trying, and failing, to keep it together.

As I climbed the steps to receive my second Academy Award, I realized that, as much as my anxiety made me doubt it, my friends were right: Justin didn’t know anything about me, or he simple was very stupid if he honestly thought I wasn’t talented. I was the youngest person ever to have won the E.G.O.T. and I was now a two-time Academy Award winner. I wasn’t even twenty-seven and I had achieved more than I even dreamed I could.

As I laughed and cried at the same time hugging Ophelia tightly, I knew I had nothing to prove anymore. The chip was off my shoulder and my armor was down. I had slayed my dragons. I had won my fight.

Now I just wanted to go home.

“Thank you, thank you so much!”

I didn’t recognize my own voice as it echoed through the auditorium from the microphone. The lights blinded me and the familiar, overwhelming feeling of being watched by millions of people settled in my stomach as I tried to think of what to say.

“I wanna thank Michael, Eric, Marcela, and our amazing cast for the efforts and dedication you all
put into this story and for making me the best Veronica I could be. And I wanna thank my family for the continuous love and support. Thank you.” I took in a deep breath, feeling something hot on my throat and, in one second, I knew what I needed to say.

I also knew, in the back of my head, that it would cause a storm and end my life as I knew it. Still, I felt I had to, and so I braced myself and told the world my truth.

“When we were on Broadway with Heathers we would go to stage door and every night a lot of kids, teenagers, would come to talk to us about the show and they would thank us for Heathers, because they… they identified with it. A lot of them told me, more than once, that this was what school felt like for them.”

I bit a lip, trying to stop myself from crying, and took in a deep breath, clenching my Academy Award in my hands with all of my strength.

“If anyone watching now feels the same way about this story I’m going to tell you the same thing I told those kids every night on stage door and that is, I am sorry. I am sorry you’re going through this. I am sorry our educational system failed you. This is not normal. Please know that this is not what getting your education should feel like.” I heard my own voice break and took a second to take in a deep breath. “Please remember that you are worth joy and as much happiness as you can find for yourself and, from someone who has been there, please just hang on. I promise you that it gets better.”

I tried to smile and took another deep breath so that the tears that had gathered on my eyes would disappear. Then I gulped and took one last look around at my peers, whom I so respected, before I said my next words, knowing it would be the last time before I changed everything.

“I know it’s difficult. I know because I’ve been there. I spent years trying to push my own happiness away because it felt so foreign to me, but the moment you accept your life should be about making yourself happy, everything will fall into place.” I smiled, and sighed. “My life has started to fall into place and so, I hope you will understand when I tell you that, after a long time of consideration and careful thinking…”

I paused, breathing deeply again, this time unable to contain a smile on my lips as I finally lay out what had been burning on my throat for so long.

“I have decided that 2017 will be my last year working as an actress.”

There was a long, deafening, astonishing silence as I took a deep breath again.

“So if this is maybe my last chance to say it,” I went on, “I hope you know how proud I am to be considered one of you, and how happy this industry has made me. From the bottom of my heart, to every single one of you, thank you.”

Then I smiled, took a deep breath, and turned on my heels, feeling lighter than ever before.

Chapter End Notes

Oh guys. Twitter feuds. What's there not to love about them? Let's just appreciate Jen’s sassiness for a minute and the squad ready to fight a bitch at any given time. That's friendship right there.
Anyway. Let’s chat! What do you think? What happens now? Next chapter: Jen celebrates her birthday by asking Kate some tough questions about life as a royal… and gets another yellow diamond present from Harry ;)}
Top of the World

Chapter Summary

Jen deals with the aftermath of her retirement announcement and takes another step in her trust with Harry.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

JENIFER SILVA IS ON TOP OF THE WORLD – AND SHE WANTS TO STEP DOWN

By Tim Allen

As I stand on the edge of an infinity pool atop a hill in West Hollywood, I realize that if I were a believer in symbolisms, this would be a hell of a good way to represent Jenifer Silva. The dark haired Brazilian beauty stands, metaphorically, where I then felt like I stood very literally: on top of the world.

Jenifer’s house in Los Angeles isn’t habited by her anymore – it used to be a safe haven when she was still living in California shooting the acclaimed CW hit show The Mediator, which she lead for seven years. Long before her TV stardom, however, Jenifer – who is still known by a few members in her family by her birth name, Rosangela – was already being nominated for critically acclaimed awards such as the Tony, which she later won at twenty-six last year, and the Bafta, which she won both at twenty-three in 2014 and last month.

The latest award season, which was officially finalized at the Academy Awards ceremony six weeks ago, brought Jenifer much more than every single honor she was nominated for: it brought her the perfect platform to announce a decision that, according to her, had been in the making for almost a year prior. Standing on stage as she received her second Oscar for Best Leading Actress, still the only Latina to do so, a teary-eyed Jenifer told the crowd and the world that 2017 would come to be her last year working as an actress.

I met Jenifer for this interview on the morning after her second Academy win, mere hours after her showstopper announcement about this abrupt ending in her career and, although I was eager to ask about it, she first led me to a table in her garden for breakfast. Her assistant, a bright-eyed blonde, British girl, fresh out of University, had laid a California dream meal: toasts, avocado, an assertion of fresh fruit, poached eggs and raw salmon.

Jenifer, wrapped in a short, silk, nude robe, is barefoot and still has smudges of last night’s makeup on her face as she serves herself of some tea. “I used to be a coffee person”, she tells me, “but an ulcer will do this kind of thing to a girl.” Her voice is laid back and casual, but I see the way she eyes my mug as I serve myself some black coffee.

As she eats her avocado on toast, I ask her if the ulcer – which came with a much publicized, weeklong hospital stay in London late last year where she had gastrointestinal surgery amidst shooting of her latest movie, Broken – had anything to do with her decision to leave acting. She carefully watches the koi fish in her small pond by her left as she thinks about my question before answering. “Yes, in a way,” she says, “it’s not the main point, though. It’s not the main reason. It’s
just, in a way, a symptom of a small reason, but even that it’s not the main problem either. The ulcer came as a sign of the amount of stress I was harboring inside of myself. And that, yes, it’s part of the reason why I don’t want to be an actress anymore.”

As a man in his late forties with as much of a regular life as a person can get, it’s tough for me to accept that this girl has that much stress in her life. For what meets the eye is an attractive, rich, celebrity in her mid-twenties who, by all means, should be partying and enjoying all the things she has achieved, such as worldwide fame and a generous net worth – with her profitable acting career and an investment firm well established in Brazil, NetWorth.com puts her fortune in the ten digits scale.

She sighs when I mention that these things should have bought her a right to a comfortable, peaceful life, looking much older than her actual age. “It should.” She agrees, staring wistfully into the Los Angeles view ahead. “Unfortunately the process of getting these things is precisely what, for lack of a better term, fucked me up.”

Out of politeness, I would usually refute this statement, but anyone with internet access can quickly find what she’s talking about. Eight months ago, Jenifer released a much anticipated autobiography tell-all, coming clean with everything she has had to endure since the early age of twelve, when she began her career. From being manipulated into plastic surgery at fifteen, to an abusive relationship with a much older, married New York University boyfriend, Jenifer’s life has had much more stress than your usual mid-twenties girl has.

I ask her if the book was an important part of the process of deciding to leave the entertainment industry, to which she now nods. “I had always avoided thinking too much about all that’s happened to me. My therapists always had to dig way deep to get me talking about any of it. I didn’t want to deal with it. But I was living on a constant fear that someone would find out, and someone would use it to damage my career. And I care about it way too much to let it be tainted by something that, ultimately, wasn’t all my fault.”

“So is not about not caring for your career, then?” I ask. “No.” She replied, quickly. “I love my career. I am proud of every single movie and TV show that I have been a part of. But as much as I enjoy it now, I had to look into what I wanted to do for the next five years, and the next ten years, and the rest of my life, and I simply realized this isn’t something I wanna do forever.”

“So why does forever have to start now?” I ask. “It doesn’t.” Jenifer tells me. ‘But you know that line from When Harry Met Sally, when you realize you wanna spend the rest of your life with someone, you want the rest of your life to start as soon as possible?” I nod, wondering if she might be referring to long-term boyfriend Prince Harry. “It’s like that. Except I haven’t found what I wanna do with the rest of my life, just what I don’t.”

Her phone vibrates at this point, and she takes a break from her poached eggs to check a text that makes her smile. I wonder, once again, if Prince Harry might be involved, but knowing her famous policy of not talking about her personal life – reason for which she has walked out of many red carpet interviews in the past -, I decide not to ask. Yet.

She, however, quickly justified what I consider to be extremely normal, but she apparently judges as poor manner by telling me the text came from her high school friend, Alessa McKenna, whom she refers to as Alli. Ms. McKenna is fairly known for anyone who follows Silva’s career as the person in a lot of her Instagram pictures and with whom most of her twitter interactions happen with. Over the past couple of weeks, when Jenifer started a twitter feud against Justin Bieber after daring to claim she wasn’t a fan of his music in an interview, McKenna twitter her support through the – now infamous – line ‘I have worn heels bigger than [Justin Bieber’s] dick’.
Silva laughs as I inquire about this, giving her phone a loving glance. “She’s always been strong-headed. A lot more than me. Her parents used to think I would be a bad influence on her, because of my acting background, but as it turns out she was the one who taught me not to take anybody’s shit.”

And she doesn’t, indeed. Though she has always confused most of her audience by doing it in a poised, classy way, Silva has always stood up against her judging critics, from twitting at Bieber to ‘Child, sit down’, to public shaming not one, but two of her past abusers on National television while accepting prestigious awards. Though she won’t mention names, it is understood that her ‘he can kiss my Oscar winning ass’ speech was about the same married college boyfriend, and her Tony Awards speech (‘he can suck it’) is about David Cobb’s 2012 cheating scandal.

She won’t stand for sexism either. Her list (of rumored ex-boyfriends) by now include Tyler Alvin, Brody Jenner, David Cobb, Trevor Mack, Chris Pine, Todd Richardson and, of course, Prince Harry, who is more than just a rumor. Because of this, she has been accused multiple times of ‘sleeping around’ (including by Bieber on previously mentioned Twitter feud), and has never stayed quiet about it. Her stances have grown so highly she was named by the United Nations their Goodwill Ambassador for Human Rights, helping in planning and acting for Human Rights causes (she has so far focused on the refugee crisis) and delivering two speeches at the UN’s General Assembly, as well as aiding Emma Watson in her role as Women’s’ Issues Ambassador. Together they have created the White House approved Women’s Spring project and Jenifer’s personal Borderless project.

For someone her age, she is a lot more influential than anyone could have dreamed of ever becoming. She was named last year’s highest paid TV actress for two seasons of the groundbreaking If Tomorrow Comes, and was the previous year’s second highest paid movie actress. Even in her calmest year so far, when she retracted to work on Broadway, she still won a Tony and a Grammy Award, which, coming right after her Emmy and 2014 Oscar win, made her the youngest person to have won all four of the biggest entertainment industry’s honors: Emmy, Grammy, Oscar and Tony. She is twelve years younger than the previous youngest winner (Robert Lopez) who also used to be the fastest to complete the qualifying run of EGOT award wins. She beat him by having won her first award – the Oscar – and the last – the Tony – in under three years, more than seven less than Lopez. Silva is only the thirteenth person to have won all four awards, an honor she doesn’t seem to take lightly.

“I will never get used to that.” She tells me. “Never. That’s never gonna be something I am okay with. I never realistically dreamed of it, and I did it in under three years. That’s insane!”

Her manager agrees with the insanity part, though he claims to have been a lot more optimistic about her chances. Richard Arcthet, who has represented Silva since she was eighteen, tells me he had always known Jenifer was capable of great things as long as she believed it also, and had what he referred to as ‘a pitch of luck’. “It’s all this business is about. Talent and opportunity. Jen has always had the talent, she was just missing an opportunity. The moment she got it, it was obvious to anyone with a good pair of eyes that she would skyrocket up.”

And skyrocketed she has. Like her infinity pool, Jenifer seems to be on top of the world. Specialists say for each dollar Hollywood has invested in her over the last fifteen years of her career she has now made them thirty dollars in profit in return. Why then, is the question, does she feel the need to leave this all behind?

I have a theory and, knowing I’ll have to ask at some point, I decide that was as good a time as ever, so I brace myself and ask: “You have mentioned before that your job has always interfered in your personal life. Do you think this is part of the reason you want to leave? To focus on it?”
I thought avoiding a direct mention of her boyfriend would be ideal, but I knew the question had been a mistake from the moment she sighed, pushing her sunglasses to the top of her head. Jenifer gave me a sarcastic, exhausted look before she replied with: “Don’t give me this crap, Tim. I thought we had something good going here. Just come out and ask what you really want to know.”

This catches me off guard. Actors aren’t always this blunt on interviews. Musicians? Sometimes, as it is profitable for them to appear brisk and as rebels. But actors, they usually want to be liked, and so they usually say what they mean either jokingly or not at all. But not Jenifer Silva. So I finally ask: “Is there any chance you’re retiring to get married?”

She pouts. “First of all, I don’t like the word retired. It implies that I’ll never work another day in my life, which isn’t true. I’m only twenty-six. I’m still gonna work. I just don’t know with what yet. Second of all, no. It’s not why I made this decision.”

Right as I was considering to push for a more complete answer of not, she took another gulp of her tea and added: “So, no. This isn’t about anyone else but me. This isn’t about my personal life. This is a professional decision that I made based on my career alone, and based on how I’ve been feeling about it. At the heart of this decision is the simple fact that I don’t love this job as I used to. Which is not to say, mind you, that I don’t love it. I just don’t love it as much as before. I don’t love it as I know so many people do. And I think I should find something that I would be truly passionate about, it’s only fair to me and to the industry, which I respect way too much to half-ass my way through.”

Words like ‘half-ass’ don’t usually make their way into a celebrity of Silva’s caliber’s vocabulary either, so, instinctively, I look at the open glass doors to her kitchen, where her assistant is sitting with her two publicists, Monica Williams and Janine Merchant. I ask her about the publicists, finding it strange that someone who is about to walk away from this job would still employ them.

“Of course I still have publicists.” She dismisses. “Despite the dramatic announcement last night, everything is gonna be business as usual for this whole year. Things are still gonna stay very much the same for a while. I still have… four movies to premiere and promote and one TV show appearance to get done.”

It occurs to me as I write this, weeks after our conversation, that by then she might not have known the exact depth of what she started that night and I wasn’t going to be the one to tell her. Twitter is still on turmoil over her news, with everyone commenting and opinionating on her decision and her win. Her name is still a world trending topic weeks later and every single magazine and most newspapers had her face on their covers over the next day and week after her announcement. In fact, if you went online after the Academy Awards of 2017, chances are you would have known, even if you didn’t want to, that a big name had made a big decision public.

Even Ophelia Callis’ reaction went viral. The double Academy Award winner from the previous year presented Silva’s category that night and handed her her award, a rendition of how Silva gave her hers on the previous year and another chance for the internet to watch the two girls’ adorable BFF freak out moment which they have become famous for. Ophelia could be seen in the background when, at the end of her speech, the camera panned out for a wide shot, and she looked as shocked as the rest of us felt.

“I sat with her for a good two hours last night at the after-party.” Jenifer tells me, giggling when I ask about Ophelia’s much talked-about reaction. “Explaining that I wasn’t joking and that I was sure about this, and that I had thought about it for a very long time. You know, the kind of thing anyone who cares about a person would ask if they suddenly dropped this kind of bomb. I understand her. I have interrogated her my fair share in the past. We’re sisters. We’ll always worry
about each other.”

“Did she understand your reasoning?” I ask. Jenifer considers it for a while before answering. “I think she did. She just wanted to know if I wasn’t making this decision without thinking, which she knows is not something I would do. At the end of the day, this is what I want to do to be happy, and I know that’s all she wants. I know because is what I want for her, too.”

I consider aloud that for someone she considers a sister, Ophelia was kept out of the loop of the big news just like everyone else. “Everyone was.” She tells me. “I didn’t tell my parents, either. There was only six people whom I told, and four of them were my management team, and only because I feel like they are as much a part of this as I am. I wanted to be sure before I told anyone, and when I won last night, that’s when I was finally sure.”

All this talking after waiting to tell her friends on the right time maybe be why it was only days after this interview that her squad (Taylor Swift, Karlie Kloss, Selena Gomez and company) started showing their support online. Gomez twitted: ‘I have watched this girl grow from a Disney channel princess into a badass woman and I know she’ll be amazing whatever she does next. I love you!’. Swift posted a picture on Instagram of the two of them with the caption ‘Here’s to your bright future and all the success still to come, in whatever way!’

The criticism her friends were defending her from ranged from thinking, like I did, that Silva’s decision had more to do with her boyfriend than herself, and that it was ‘unfair’ of her to give up the kind of career millions of people may never get.

“I don’t like to throw this word around often,” she says when I ask about this, “But that, to me, has got a lot more to do with jealousy than genuine concern or impartial criticism. So just because I have something that other people don’t have, but want, that means I have to keep doing it forever, even if I don’t want to? How is that fair to me? I feel like I have achieved everything I set out to in this career, now I want to achieve new things in a different way, in a different setting, and I have a right to do that.”

We finish having breakfast as our photographer settles her equipment in front of Jenifer’s pool. After we’re done and everything is ready, she takes her place in a positioned white armchair besides a table where her Academy Award sits gleaming under California’s winter sun amidst the day’s newspapers and a tablet opened. The goal for the pictures to go with this story was to photograph her morning after her second Academy Award win in a homage to Faye Dunaway’s famous ‘morning after’ picture from 1976. For this, she woke up and came to greet us without putting on makeup or doing her hair.

The symbolisms here are overwhelming as well, and I ponder about them as I watch Silva being photographed. She’s wearing a very similar nude robe to what Faye did in the famous 1976 photograph, but hers is shorter, showing her tanned and toned, long Brazilian legs. Her long, dark black hair is still smooth down her back as she lays in the chair, though it has light waves after sleeping on the low bun she was wearing the previous night. Her eyes still bare some eyeliner and eye shadow, and her lips are still a numb shade of pale pink. From her ears, as she dreamily watches her golden statue in the table in front of her, still dangle the shining diamond earrings she wore to the Oscars, which, thanks to the Vogue Magazine’s twitter feed, I know are worth more than half a million dollars.

The table in front of Faye Dunaway was a glamourous mess, her Oscar the only shiny thing amidst the confusion of newspapers, lighter and breakfast tray. Jenifer’s has magazines and newspapers, alright, most bearing her face on their covers, buzzing about the previous night’s announcement, but her table is more organized. Planned through. A reflection of her personality, perhaps.
Faye Dunaway was photographed in a hotel, and the pool behind her was bigger than Jenifer’s, but Jenifer’s house has the view. Los Angeles is wide, sunny and beautiful ahead, the sky as turquoise blue as if it had been told it should look pretty that morning for a cover shoot. A lot could be said about all of that which differs them from one another – Jenifer is much younger, and this writer dares say, much more successful for her age than Dunaway, but the most interesting difference, I find, lie on their eyes. Both women bare a striking resemblance of expression, they both look tired, but Jenifer has a light in her eyes that lacked by a number of, at the moment, unimportant reasons from Faye’s.

Jenifer’s eyes don’t reflect someone whose stress has driven her out of a very successful career, they don’t reflect a girl who is desperate to leave or who has been miserable. They reflect a bright, excited, and overall happy young woman who is content with her decisions and excited about the future. “I am happy and excited about what I have done and what I will do this year, but as of next year, I don’t want to be an actress anymore.”

She doesn’t look in her mid-twenties at this moment either. Most people in their mid-twenties are struggling to find a place where they feel like they belong and their passion in life, but as she speaks her mind, Jenifer Silva is a girl who has found it.

“Even as you leave, you know, chances are you’ll never be forgotten.” I tell her. “Your name will always be in history as the first Latin American to win the Leading Actress Oscar and everything else that you hold a record for.”

“I hope not. It’s not what I want.” She replies. I ask her, then, what is it that she wants and she takes a deep breath before speaking.

“I want my records to be taken. I want more actresses to become the youngest to do this and that. Because if that happens, it’ll mean the industry is moving forward. It’ll mean that the talent didn’t stop when I did. And as someone who will always be a fan of movies and TV, I want that. I’ll be watching, and I’ll always want this to continue to grow and evolve and one day I want so much new talent to have had a chance to take my records that the only way someone will remember me will be by trying really hard. That’s what I want.”

She smiles, and puts her sunglasses back on after we’re done shooting. With one last wistful look into the horizon, she adds: “And sleep. I also want to be able to sleep eight hours a night like a normal person.”

From what I can tell, she’s earned it.

___

As anyone but me might have guessed, after I left the stage of the Academy Awards my announcement was all anyone could talk about. Ophelia was the first to grill me about it. Then I was pulled to a changing room by Janine and Monica, who were waiting backstage, and they had Richard on speaker on the phone from his house where he had just watched it.

“I thought we agreed we were waiting for the right time?!” He yelled.

“Which would be when?! I asked. “A few days before I left? That doesn’t make any sense. At least this way they have time to take it in and let it go.”

“Jenifer, we were planning on selling your exclusive interview.” Janine sighed. “We were going to do this right. Prep you to answer all the questions they’ll throw your way. Make sure you knew how to explain your decision…”
“Now they’ll ask you about it on the press room and you’ll just wing it.” Monica added. “I can’t believe you just decided to do this on the spot!”

I sighed, realizing I probably should have trusted my management team, as I always did, knowing they wouldn’t disappoint. I should have known they had a plan. Unfortunately, as I realized it, it was too late. So Janine and Monica gave me a quick ‘don’t use that word, use this, say it like this, not that’ speech and I braved the confused questions in the press room about what everyone insisted was my ‘retirement’ announcement. Though I had been using that word for purposes of fast speech, I didn’t like the idea of people thinking I would never work again in my life after I left acting.

I spent most of the after party doing something I had wanted to do for a long time: talking freely with my friends about it! I explained my decision to Ophelia; Tyler; Emma; Anna; Carrie; Meryl; Eric; Tyler Jesse Ferguson; Sophia Vergara; Gina Rodriguez; and every other single person that I had ever said hello to who seemed to think I owed them an explanation. I did it, though. I explained it. Again and again, because I had wanted to for so long that now it felt freeing to be able to.

That helped me realize, however, that Janine and the others were right: people would need an in-depth explanation. And that’s how with just a couple of phone calls, a reporter from Vanity Fair showed up on my door the very next morning to photograph me paying homage to 1976’s famous Faye Dunaway picture and to talk about what had been on my heart when I announced what I wanted to do after that year was over.

Then, as people didn’t seemed to understand I would, I went back to work. I spent the next four weeks after the Academy Awards doing what I did best: waking up at an ungodly hour and heading to warm studio, letting myself be dolled up in makeup and a heavy week and spending the next ten to twelve hours filming the same scenes over and over until it looked perfect. When Tangled was done, I attended the Disney wrap party, said goodbye to Oscar and Ophelia and got on a plane back home, feeling like I was leaving a war zone back to my peaceful bed.

Unfortunately for me, the Vanity Fair interviewer wasn’t the only who thought my Oscar announcement meant that I would be getting engaged to Harry some time soon. Apparently every single paparazzi on England had the same idea because, from the moment I set foot on the country I was being followed by twice as much of them as before. Luckily, I now had two bodyguards to protect me, which I had grown to not only understand, but appreciate.

On his part, Harry was being nice enough to pretend things were as normal as ever. He had been kind enough not to bring up my New Year’s confession again, and he had been kind enough not to tease me about everyone’s assumption that I was quitting acting for him – especially because he knew it was such a sexist and unfair assumption (not to mention untrue). So, for the two of us, as the world was aflame outside, life went on as normal as we could make it.

Just a lot more of a… big deal.

In my ankle boots, I followed Harry back into the stadium to where sunlight and the noise of thousands of people were coming. Manchester United was facing Liverpool that afternoon and Harry and I were not there for work. On that day, we were there on a date. A simple, normal couple watching a football game together.

It felt nice, being there as if the world wasn’t upside down all around us. It felt good, as if I didn’t have to worry about every single person in the world’s opinion of my much publicized Oscar announcement of walking away from acting.

In many ways, this was what this date was about. Trying to move on. Trying to show people things
were business as usual for us – as we knew they would see us there. It wasn’t like we could hide in an open-wide stadium where there was a televised sports event going on. Even from our secure VIP seats, we knew they were filming us. We knew the images would be online instantly. We knew there was no way to run and, the beauty of it was, we didn’t want to. Even if we did, we wouldn’t be able to as, even if they hadn’t seen us, the Beckhams did.

Harry was the one he saw first, as we were making our way back to our seats after we left to get drinks during the halftime. David Beckham was wearing a cashmere sweater under his jacket and a wool beanie looking as handsome as the whole world imagined he would up close.

At other points in my life, I may have found strange to be standing in designer jeans, with my boyfriend who was a prince, talking to David Beckham about the great game we were in the middle of watching. At some point over the last couple of years, however, every ounce of surprise I had in me had somehow vanished and I had learned to be very okay with these kinds of unusual developments. So I was standing very casually talking to them for a good minute after David greeted Harry like an old friend, and they side hugged, laughing, as they asked the usual ‘how are you doing?’s.

“David, have you met Jenifer Silva?” Harry asked, resting his hand on the small of my back.

The handsome man stared into my eyes, making me forget my own name and coolness for a moment, and smiled, making me forget how to breathe for an even bigger one.

“Haven’t had the pleasure. Hello.” He said, shaking my – now very weak – hand. “This is Brooklyn.”

Gesturing to the equally as handsome teenager behind him, he introduced us to his son, who gave us the kind of smile the new generation was apparently using now, without actually smiling, but rather pouting charmingly as if they were about to take a selfie.

We were talking about the game and life in general for a while, before Brooklyn asked if we minded taking a picture.

“Sure.” I smiled, resting my arm over his shoulders as Harry stepped back and his dad snapped the picture on his phone.

“Everyone now. Harry, get in there.” David said, turning his back at us and raising the phone to take a picture with the three of us in the background. Harry stood by my side and we smiled, before bidding our goodbyes as we went to find our seats and David and his son went back to theirs.

“So I met David Beckham.” I said, finally feeling a little stunned as we sat back down at the end of the VIP section, with only a wall behind us and enough empty seats around to feel like we could talk without being heard.

“I finally know someone you didn’t.” Harry bragged. “This feels weird.”

I smiled. “I used to fantasize I was Posh Spice and married him.” I told him. “He’s so handsome.”

Harry sighed, ducking down lower in his seat at my left. “She says, to her boyfriend.” He mumbled, contradicted, making me smile.

He was so cute when he was jealous, so I just watched his adorable pout for a while before he finally looked confused and leaned forward to see something in the empty seat in front of us.

“Look,” he said, “it’s you.”
Someone in the row in front of us had left a tabloid magazine behind. It was called Stars Watch and had a paparazzi picture of me on the cover. I felt the unfortunately familiar, uncomfortable feeling of being invaded in the pit of my stomach as I looked at it.

Sure enough, that was me. My slick, black hair falling from my shoulders, my big, brown eyes and big, red lips; I was looking happy and relaxed and I recognized - by the clothes I was wearing – the day the picture was taken.

“It’s from when I went shopping with Liz, Natasha and Zoe last week.” I noticed. “I didn’t even notice we were being followed.”

“Look, Johnnie is already getting famous.” He commented, pointing at my new additional body guard, clearly visible behind me in the picture, looking serious.

I smiled. “I’m sure he’ll be thrilled.” I said, sarcastic, picking the magazine from him and flickering through the pages.

“Is that Kit?!” Harry asked, looking at it from the corners of his eyes.

I went back a couple of pages to find the one he meant and, sure enough, it was our friend Kit, his long, curly hair and Kardashian-worthy serious smoulder to the camera.

“It is… ten things you don’t know about our hottie of the week, Kit Harington.” I read, and grinned. “This should be fun.”

Harry leaned closer to read. “His favorite color is blue.” He snickered. “Please. It’s obviously black. It’s all he ever wears.”

I giggled. “He is twenty-nine years-old!” I read, faking excitement. “Bitch, please. Anyone with internet access can know this.”

“Apparently his type is blonde, tall women who are dog people.” Harry read on, mockingly.

“Last I checked his wife was brunette and they had a cat, but okay.” I commented, making him smiled.

I took a picture of the page and texted it to Kit and Bee, with the words: ‘I am learning so much.’

I kept on reading, just for the hell of it as the halftime was still on, and then I got to a particularly interesting part.

“I mean, it says he likes dirty talk.” I ironized. “How would they even know that?”

“Safe guess.” Harry replied, shrugging. “What man doesn’t?”

I realized something, and my eyes left the magazine to look at him, staring ahead at the field where the players were now taking back their positions to the roar of the crowd.

“Really?” I asked. “…Do you?”

Harry shrugged, grinning slightly. “Sure.” A smile took over my face as I thought about it. “What?” Harry asked, as I didn’t stop looking at him.

“It’s just… I don’t know, dirty talk sounds fake to me, you know? Sounds like that really obnoxiously vulgar stuff they say on porn.”
Harry considered my points. “You’re just supposed to be authentic.”

“Authentic?”

“Yeah… You know…” he scooched down in his chair so he could lean in closer to speak in a lower tone, making sure no one could hear us. “You just tell the other person how they make you feel, what you want them to do to you, what you want to do to them… That kind of thing.”

“Hm.” I thought about it. Then, I mimicked a sexy porn star voice and touched his ear with my lips as I whispered, “Oh, honey, I want you to give it to me good.” Harry laughed through his nose. “Put your man-meat inside my sandwich.”

He laughed loudly. “Oh, wow. We found something you’re bad at.” He teased.

“Okay, okay… I get it. Too much.”

“Yeah, you’re supposed to keep it simple. Just go straight to the point. Call things what they are and stuff.”

“Alright…” I moved in my seat, coming closer again, blocking the view to my mouth in his ear with a hand so people couldn’t read our lips even if they tried, as I knew they would once videos of this went online. “Oh, Harry-“

He laughed some more. “What’s up with the voice?”

“It makes me feel like a porn star, I’m getting into character.” He shook his head, in disbelief, so I tried using my normal voice. “I want your dick inside of me. Like that?”

“You can be more specific…” he said, and I could tell he was loving the fact I was uncomfortably bad at this.

I tried thinking of what I wanted and all he had said, and at some point, the joke turned on me, because I started enjoying thinking about it a little too much.

I confessed this in his ear. “I’m thinking so hard about dirty talk I’m actually getting horny now…”

When I assumed that aloud, I felt it harder, my body responding to it. I noticed, with some pleasure, Harry’s cheeks were reddening and the grin in his lips was no longer of mockery, but of mischief.

That’s when I knew it was working.

“I’m tingling inside just thinking about it,” I said, watching his grin turn into a smile against his will. “It feels nice, it feels good”. I whispered, my hips moving slightly in my seat. His eyes caught that. “It feels so good.”

I intertwined one arm in his and held his hand between my both. I whispered again, “Remember New York? The first time we did it? I wanted you so bad I couldn’t even wait, I just had to have your hand in my pussy-“

I wasn’t sure that was the word I wanted to use, and I was glad he couldn’t see the expression of awkwardness on my face, but the effect on Harry was obvious and so I took it as a good sign. He took in a sharp deep breath, his eyes moving around us, making sure no one could see or hear what we were doing.

I bit my lips, entertained now, and when I spoke this time, I let my lips rub against his earlobe.
“…and you did it so good… Your hands are so big and strong… they felt so good there,” I saw as he got chills all over his skin, “I came before you even put your cock inside of me… I had never come twice in a first time with anyone before, but you made me come twice that night…” I stroked my nose against his neck before whispering in his ear again. “I want them there again. I want your hand there again, rubbing me really slow…” I closed his hand between mine, pressing strongly, and started provocatively massaging his fingers. “Up and down, Harry, I want your hand in me, ah!” I moaned.

Harry looked at me, biting his lip, the naughty grin still in his lips. He breathed heavily, then stared ahead, his eyes were unfocused, his mind elsewhere – I had a feeling I knew where.

“I’m so horny, Harry,” I said, softly, as my fingers caressed his palm slowly, my other hand sliding gently up his arm. “I’m so tingly in there, it’s driving me crazy, Harry. I wanna climb on your lap and feel your cock rub against me-“

Harry was blushing now; his smile had grown bigger as he looked around embarrassed, in disbelief.

He held my hand so I’d stop rubbing his fingers, then looked at me.

“You need to stop now.” He said, looking at me in lust.

I sighed, resting my chin in his shoulder, our faces close, staring at him attentively.

“You don’t like it?” I asked, sounding purposely sad.

“You’re- hm- I like it a bit too much, and, uh-” He sighed. “We’re in public.”

I smiled, playful, then, leaning in again, I spoke softly in his ear. “Are you getting hard, Mr. Prince?” I felt his shoulders move up and down as he took a deep breath. “Is your dick hard?” I nibbled his earlobe. “If only we weren’t in public I could reach down and feel it. Hm!”

I laid my hand on his thigh, pressing it carefully; my other hand enlaced our fingers together, and I fiddled them suggestively, in slow moves.

“I get more horny just to think of your hard cock right over there,“ I pressed his thigh, letting a heavy breath strike his neck, “I wanna put it in my mouth, I wanna lick it very slowly to watch you go crazy with pleasure; I wanna suck your cock really slowly, Harry, would you like that? Would you like my tongue on your cock? Up and down…and up… and down?”

He was still breathing heavily, staring ahead, a grin on his lips; I noticed the knuckles of his other hand seemed tense as he pressed the chair arm strongly.

“I wish you’d take me right now,” I whispered, “I wish you’d take me from behind, so you can press my breasts while you do it…“ I suggested, watching his eyes pause on my crossed legs, moving up and down, slightly. “I want you to take me from behind so I can have your cock and your hand giving me pleasure at the same time-“

Harry fidgeted in his chair, coughing uncomfortably; he gave me another desperate look, biting his lip before I leaned closer to his ear again. Before I did, I could see him closing his eyes. I smiled when my lips touched his ear.

“I wanna feel you shove your cock inside of me and pound me against a wall until I can’t breathe anymore, God! I’m almost coming just thinking about it…” I saw him gulp, strongly. “I’m all wet already, I’m so wet, Harry; I want you inside of me so bad…”
In a quick move, Harry stood up and started making his way to the stairs, holding my hand and pulling me after him. I noticed he was still holding his jacket, but this time he was carrying it in front of him.

We climbed the steps fast, “we’re leaving”, he told the guys, who were waiting for us by the doors. I couldn’t bring myself to stop smiling, no matter how hard I bit my lips trying to look like I didn’t know what was happening.

We made our way through the floor, and passed right by the elevators, which had a line, climbing the stairs down. As we passed by one of the lower levels, I stepped it up to whisper in his ear.

“Bathroom.” I begged, suggestive.

“No.” He said, firm.

He stopped in the midsection of the stairs to turn to me, pressing me against a wall. The quick move, our running, his piercing look had me breathless with desire. He put his hand on the wall, the one holding the jacket, and glued his body to mine so I could feel his bulge on my crotch.

I let out a small sigh that his eyes didn’t miss.

“You wanted this,” he whispered, low enough that only I could hear him, “now you’re going to wait until we are home so I can fuck you the way you said you wanted me to.”

I smiled, and he pulled me by the hand down the stairs again. I didn’t dare look the boys in the eyes.

The entire car ride was torture. The silence was deafening, although I wouldn’t be able to hear anything anyway since I had blood flowing so fast through my veins I had my ears buzzing with excitement.

Our hands were still intertwined, pressing against each other strongly.

We hopped off the car in a hurry, and managed to walk into the building in a very civil manner, smiling to the doorman politely as we tried to leave our security behind to get started on the elevator. As soon as the doors closed, he barely let me do anything before he cornered me at the wall again, pressing himself to me. One hand in my neck, he kissed me passionately thrusting himself against me as I slid my hand down his abs. I found the edge of his shirt, pulling it up so I could put my hand down his pants.

I felt his tongue more eager in mine as I grabbed his cock as I wanted to do in the stadium – he was hard.

When we heard the elevator dim, the sound that meant we were home, with a nibble of my lower lip he turned and pulled me out.

He struggled to find his keys and opened the door in a hurry. After it was slammed shut, Harry slammed me to it impatiently. I couldn’t stop smiling at the desperate look on his eyes.

He turned me to face the door; pressing himself against me, he quickly pulled my coat out, holding it in my back so my arms were stuck. His hand wrapped around me, quickly pressing my breast, and then sliding down my body until it was between my legs, under my jeans. I closed my eyes when I felt his fingers between me, biting my lips at the sudden explosion of pleasure.
“Is this what you wanted?” he asked, soft, in my ear. He nibbled my earlobe before pulling my coat out completely, throwing it blindly behind me.

He started kissing my neck furiously, as, with my arms free, my hands went behind me, to get a grip of his hair as he kept on thrusting himself against my ass. His hands unzipped my jeans and pulled them down to my ankles in one quick move. He kissed my behind, sliding his hands over my legs as he stood up.

I was already aroused after the stadium and the intense car ride, but when his fingers started moving quickly inside of me again, it was a matter of time before I was moaning breathless against that door.

I squeezed Harry’s hand twice, our code to let him know I was there. I moaned, desperately, as I came. What he usually did when I signaled I was done was to let me catch my breath, but he didn’t this time.

Harry lowered back down and pulled my boots out, and then my pants, as I tried to calm my breath. Then he turned me around again, and kissed me strongly, with a hand moving in me again; then he picked me up by my ass and I wrapped my legs around him.

He walked us into the apartment, knowing Vodka was in the security apartment, and we stumbled our way across the sitting room to the hallway to our bedroom, but he was impatient. So he stopped by the dining room and, after he sat me down on the dinner table, I pulled his shirt up throwing it far away. He did the same with my shirt, and I pulled his zipper open and pulled his dick out, massaging it as he unhooked my bra.

He pushed me down, to lay on the table, pulling my underwear out in a fast move. He ran his hands through my body once, stopping in my breasts. He licked my nipples slowly and I wrapped my legs around him, bringing his bulge to touch me again.

“I want you in me.” I pleaded, breathily.

“No.” he said, staring at me. “You’re gonna come twice before I’m in you.”

His other hand sliding down my thigh, pulling my knee up. He pulled the other too, and kneeled on the floor slowly, leaving a trail of kisses down my inner thighs as he did.

Then he gave me one intense look before his tongue licked me there, from the very end until my clit. Strongly, excruciatingly slowly; he made the way back and up again before I felt the circular movements he started to make.

My head fell in the wave of pleasure that struck me; I felt my spine bend as my chest went up. I couldn’t control the sounds coming out of me, but I tried to bite my lips. I felt his tongue penetrate me as his finger kept on circling my clit and I could barely breathe anymore. It was like my body couldn’t possibly focus on the two at the same time. But I focused on it, the waves of bliss through me; I closed my hand in a fist and banged on the table a number of times every time I couldn’t think of what else to possibly do to demonstrate how good it felt.

“Harry- Oh, my- FUCK!”

I didn’t make sense, and I didn’t want to. I squeezed his hand twice when I managed to breathe again when I was done.

My chest moved up and down dramatically as he made his way back up to me, kissing every bit of my skin in the process. He stopped in my nipples again.
“I love it when your nipples are hard.” He mumbled, licking it delicately, pressing the other gently.

I ran my hands through his hair, trying to catch my breath; but we weren’t done.

I pushed him, sitting up, maintaining eye contact as I climbed down from the table. I bit his lower lip, and his chin, and kissed his neck strongly as my nails gently slid down his body until my fingers found his cock again, harder than before.

I kneeled, bringing his underwear down. I licked the knob of his penis first, slowly, before putting it in my mouth, just the knob, sucking it quickly. I licked it whole then, from the top until the end, until I heard Harry let out a moan. Then I put it all in my mouth, or as much as I could, and sucked it fast, seeing as he tumbled before leaning down and supporting himself with a hand on the table. I sucked him, getting a grip of the base, slowly twisting it for a long time before Harry got a grip of my hair and pulled me up gently.

“No!” he said. Still holding my hair, his lips found my neck. “A little more and I won’t handle. And I wanna come in you.”

I was okay with that. I felt his teeth as he nibbled my neck. His hands slid down my body again and he picked me up. He kissed me as we made the way to the bedroom. I couldn’t handle another second without him in me, so I bit his lip in frustration.

“Condom!” I moaned.

Harry let me down as soon as we entered the room, and turned to the bathroom. I waited for him leaning against the closed door behind me not daring to move.

When he came back, stopping me from pushing him to the bed, he turned me to the door, thrusting his boner against my ass. His hands caressed my breasts before making the way down between my legs.

His lips were in my ear, “Do you still want it like this?”

I felt his finger stroke my clit slowly, as his other hand grabbed a grip of my hair to make me look to the side – the side his lips were in my neck.

“Yes!” I pleaded, my voice week.

His hand left my hair; he grabbed his boner, leaning down a bit; his hand in my clit made the way down, and found the knob, helping it in until he was inside of me.

I bit my lip, feeling myself stretch deliciously as he filled me inside; his hand went back to my clit, circling it gently; the other grabbed my hair again; he pressed his face on mine, his lips near my ear, the door on my other side, as he started moving.

The sound of our heavy breaths filled the hallway as he grinded against me. My left hand slid down his arm, and found his hand in me; intertwining our fingers, I gave him my rhythm; we started going faster. I pressed my ass against him harder, making us go faster. I felt his breath getting heavier in my cheek. We grew louder, more desperate as our muscles tensed with passion as the waves of pleasure moved through us.

I felt the hard wood door on one side, and his tense, muscly body on the other; I had a smile on my face as I heard him let out a cry. I heard my own voice as I joined him.

“Harry!” I moaned, as he pounded against me harder and harder. “Harry,” I moaned, “I want you in
my ass.”

He paused for a moment, making me frustrated.

“Are you sure?”

“Do it!” I cried. “Slowly, but do it!”

He seemed to think for one second, before his hand reached down from my hair. He threw me in the bed and I caught my breath as he reached in the drawer in the nightstand for our lube. I tried to focus on the pleasure and arousal I was still feeling, instead of the panic and anxiety of the last time I had done that – or, better, the last time that had been done to me.

“You’re the boss,” he said, softly, as he climbed on top of me, “we do it your way, alright?”

I nodded. His arms held my hips as he pulled my ass up, leaving me in all fours. I felt him kiss my back a few times, as his hands stroke my breasts, before moving down. One was between my legs again; the other put the tip of his cock in delicately, slowly. And then he stopped.

He caressed my clit, still kissing the skin on my back, allowing me time to relax; to appreciate it. when I felt ready, I leaned back, and he entered me.

It was weird at first, as I knew it would be. But the pain I had expected wasn’t all there. There was some discomfort, as I got used to his bulge filling me. He didn’t move, except for the hand between my big lips. He was still caressing me there, trying to relax me – and succeeding. I could hear a very low, very guttural desperate moan coming from him as he so clearly struggled within his own pleasure to give me time.

Then I grinded my hips against him, and he started moving, slowly.

I felt his fingers inside me in the front, and him pounding against me in the back, and there was so much new things to feel I wasn’t sure I was in my body anymore. The spasms of pleasure hit me once more, in levels I didn’t know, bigger levels than ever before, and I moaned loudly.

“Am I hurting you?” Harry asked, pausing.

I shook my head vigorously, “Don’t stop!” I begged.

He didn’t. Not until my hand was grasping the mattress violently, and my moans turned silent because I had no energy to speak anymore. I felt his breath heavy on my neck, and he laid a kiss there after we reached climax together, exhaustively falling flat on the bed again.

We let out a heavy breath, and he pulled out slowly.

Harry came back from the bathroom to lay down next to me. I hadn’t moved yet – I didn’t dare move a muscle as I was trying to hang on to everything my body had just felt.

We pulled the covers above us, and stood there, quietly, with our eyes closed, the back of our hands stroking each other. He held my fingers with his, stroking them gently, as we still tried to steady our breaths staring at the beautiful sky he had had painted in the ceiling for me.

He looked at me. “You’ okay?”

I smiled, turning to lay on my side to look at him.

“Yeah.” I smiled.
“That was…” he started, slowly, softly. I giggled at his difficulty of finding an appropriate adjective. “Fantastic.”

“Yes.” I said, sighing. “That was kind of awesome.”

“Did I hurt you?” he whispered, and I loved the concern in his voice.

In fact, I loved his voice. I loved the look on his eyes, watching me as if I was the only thing that mattered in the world. I loved the color of his hair, of his eyes. I loved the shape of his nose. His beard. And I loved how different he was from every single man I had ever known.

“You didn’t do anything I didn’t want you to do.” I told him.

“That wasn’t the answer I was looking for.” He complained, and I leaned forward to kiss him.

“That was amazing.” I told him. “Is that a good enough answer?”

Smiling, he brought me close again, holding me tighter.

“I love you.” He said.

I smiled, realizing I didn’t mind if the world was upside down. I didn’t mind if everyone was losing their minds over my decisions. I didn’t care about everything that might go wrong, because he was there. I had him.

People might think I was stepping down from it, but as long as I had Harry with me, I was as much on top of the world as I had ever wanted to be.

Chapter End Notes

Well. That was interesting hahaha I dont really know what to say about it… this chapter was kind of about the aftermath of Jen’s announcement and some normal couple times (both in public and at home). Also, it’s about J overcoming her trauma of what Adam did to her (the first and only time she did something in the back door, if you know what I mean). I really like that she was able to enjoy herself since she trusts Harry and knows he wouldn’t hurt her, and I wanted to explore that.

Next chapter: THEN it’s Jen’s birthday and she talks to Kate about being a royal and gets a present from Harry, sorry I got the chapters confused. Also she talks a lot about being a royal with Harry, which should be fun =)
The Talk

Chapter Summary

Jen considers with all seriousness the possibilities of being with Harry forever and what it would mean for her.

Chapter Notes

Days that start sunny and warm in a yacht in Mikonos very rarely end badly, and my twenty-seventh birthday was no exception.

I was floating in the sea as happy as anyone that didn’t want to believe they were getting older could be. My eyes closed, the warm breeze touching my skin, the smell of salt and the sound of my friends laughing aboard the boat nearby was all that I needed after the first few weeks of shooting the movie adaptation of Hamilton - An American Musical.

The great thing about playing a supporting part – such as my Hamilton character was - , was that I had less screen time, and so my schedule wasn’t so hectic as I had gotten used to. That was good because it allowed me the liberty of scheduling this little holiday in Ibiza with my friends for my birthday. The bad part was that, as I was used to doing, any free time I got was automatically filled with more work.

These days I was busy helping Revlon cosmetics develop a nail polish line – meeting with their creators and scientists to choose my favorite fifteen colors that would be marketed next summer. It was fun, and a little weird.

The euphoria surrounding Heathers still hadn’t died down. People were still quoting it, from social media, to real life; from normal people, to famous brands and publications. Faster than any movie before, Heathers had achieved pop culture phenomenon status. The record breaking box office release, the electrifying pop-rock soundtrack, and out big award season wins only made it more appealing to the public, and so it appeared that Heather was simply not going to die down. From what we could see, it seemed as if the movie had made its way into the classics.

Richard and Janine were a little bitter that my big mainstream break had happened just as I announced I was retiring, and kept asking if I was really sure I didn’t want to postpone my ‘retirement’. Richard’s new thing was sending me scripts for movies I was supposed to be so enchanted by that I would immediately give up the idea of walking away from the industry and ask for an audition.

But I had more to worry about. For instance, Hamilton and You Will Come Back To Me. My Brazilian movie was almost done. After countless conference calls and video conferences with my co-director and producers, the final editing was almost over and we were about 82% confident we would be ready to premiere in Cannes in May – which would give us huge visibility and publicity.

But then, I hit pause and got on a private jet to what at the time was an undisclosed location. Harry had planned my birthday in secret, refusing to give me any details. The truth was I was so tired I didn’t really got as curious as I normally would. But when it was revealed, not only that we were in
Greece, but that most of our friends had flown in earlier that same day to spend my birthday with us, my little heart was filled with a mixture of joy and love. I was so excited to enjoy the time with some of the people I loved most in life it was as if my exhaustion was instantly drained.

We were staying in a little villa on a small island in the south of Mykonos, small enough that all the locals seemed to know by name, and small enough that there was, as far as we could see, no paparazzi around – at least for the first couple of days.

Jake and Zoe couldn’t make the trip this time, as the girls had the flu and they wanted to be around them, but we had managed to convince Natasha and Rupert to bring Georgia with them so they could join us this time.

Lizzy and Guy had come too, to celebrate with us their big news: they were having a baby! They had told us the news during a dinner party in their house only a couple of weeks ago, and wanted to travel as much as they could before they were London bound for most of the near future.

To everyone’s surprise, another couple to join us was Kate and Will. They weren’t used to leaving the kids behind, but as they hadn’t traveled together without them since they were born – except for work -, and since they were now a little older, they decided it was a good time to get some time for themselves.

Taylor and Adam, whom I had also invited, were busy with work and couldn’t make it, same as James and Craig, and Beezus – who was rehearsing nonstop for a dance competition – and Kit – who was shooting a movie.

But I had managed to drag Oscar and Ophelia along. They had been living in London now for a couple of months; both doing different plays on the West End. Slowly but surely, I was dragging my best friends to London after me.

I had also invited Selena, who was excited to come and introduce us to her new boyfriend, none other than Orlando Bloom.

“Don’t act like we’re friends just because we did that one interview together.” I told him, as soon as they arrived. “You’re dating my friend now, I still have to decide if you’re worth it.”

“Welcome to the club.” Oscar told him, grimly.

“I mean, have you seen her?” I asked, side-hugging Selena and pointing at her face and body.

“Jen, please.” She asked, blushing, covering her face with her hands.

“Look at this, take a good look at this.” I went on, ignoring her. “What are your credentials?!”

“I once punched Bieber in the face.” Orlando told me, shrugging, making Selena laugh.

“Okay, that works.” I nodded.

After that, we kept joking about forming the ‘I hate Bieber’ club.

“I’m sure someone must have done that already.” He said.

Alli and George Percy – now a couple as official as couples could get – completed the group, and together we enjoyed the beauties of the place together, as I tried not to lose my mind that I was now a twenty-seven year-old woman.
“You say it like it’s so much…” Orlando teased.

“It’s almost insulting that you think you are old.” Guy agreed. “Except for you,” he gestured at me, Ophelia, Selena and Alessa, “we are all over thirty here.”

“And, you know, I think my thirties have been my favorite time.” Natasha added. “On your twenties everything is so messy and confusing. When you turn thirty things start to shape up and make more sense…”

“Not to mention, if you’re lucky, you get one of these!” Rupert agreed with his wife, kissing their two year-old daughter Georgia’s cheeks loudly, making us smile.

“Well, I don’t have one of those, yet.” I said. “But I do have a crushing fear that I am making all the wrong decisions and I will bitterly regret everything in a few years.”

“Yep, that’s your twenties alright.” Will agreed, seriously. “Don’t worry, it gets better.”

“And you know what’s the best part about this year!” Alessa smiled, wickedly. “Ten year high school reunion!”

I made a pout. “Ugh! You don’t think I’m going, right?”

Ophelia grinned, amused. “Oh, my God, I can only imagine you at a ten year high school reunion!”

Oscar smiled at her. “Hey, Jenifer, what have you been up to? Oh, you know, won a couple of Academy Awards…”

The group laughed.

But I was not about to ruin my birthday by thinking of high school. That day, we lounged by the yatch all afternoon, tanning and eating fish prepped by the aboard chef, laughing and taking pictures for Instagram.

“When did it become normal for me to hang out with celebrities and aristocracy?” Alessa marveled.

Then I gathered up my courage and walked to the end of the plank, took impulse, and jumped down into the cold sea, feeling energetic and excited.

“Is there anything that you do badly?” Natasha asked from atop the boat, holding baby Georgia.

“Why? Was my jump good?”

“You could compete in the Olympics.” She shook her head in disbelief, and Georgia reached down to where I was. “What? Do you want to jump too? Well, sorry, baby, mum is not about to let you die.”

She turned around and went back inside to distract Georgia from wanting to come to the water.

“Seriously, though, is there anything you can’t do?” Oscar asked.

“Cook.” Alessa offered.

“Stay calm.” Selena agreed.

“Interpersonal relationships.” Ophelia smiled.
“Thank you!” I shouted at them.

Back in the plank, Harry was now very carefully walking to the end of it.

“Fifty pounds say he won’t.” Guy started.

“I’ll take that.” Will agreed.

“Come on, Harry, do a backflip!” George yelled.

Nervously looking down at me, he considered the request and tried to turn around on his feet for a backflip.

“Think of it this way, Mr. Prince,” I shouted up at him, from where I was floating down below, “it’s just water. It’s not gonna hurt unless you hit it with your stomach.”

“With my luck, it’s exactly what’s going to happen.” He joked.

“Gingers were not meant to put their sensitive skin through unnecessary harm, Harry.” Ophelia told him.

“He is not going to do it…” Guy dismissed.

“You underestimate the lengths he’ll go to to impress Jen.” William told him.

“Come on, Harry, grow a pair and jump!” Lizzy shouted. “Harry, Harry, Harry!” she chanted, and the others, except her husband, joined her.

“I just bet he wouldn’t!” Guy told her. “Don’t push him!”

“Harry, I’ll give you a hundred pounds if you jump right now.” William told him.

“Don’t jump, Harry, you could die!” Guy tried to dissuade him, and Harry was now nervously laughing.

“Come on, Mr. Prince, live a little!” I shouted. “I wanna see Guy lose fifty pounds!”

Guy shot me an annoyed look, and I laughed.

“Harry, I used to be a cheerleader, look at me.” Alli told him from the boat, she turned to the side so he could see what she was doing. “You have to take impulse like this, bending you knees. Arms back, then just as you jump, jump back! And throw your arms back above your head and pull your legs up, like this.” She tried to teach him a backflip, and I scorned.

“You were a cheerleader for, like, two months!” I shouted.

“But I remember the basics of a backflip!” she replied. “I mean, I never managed one, but I remember the theory…”

“Harry, just jump.” Kate told him. “Just have fun.”

Harry took a deep breath, still with his back to the ocean to try a backflip, and prepared.

“Wait! Somebody give me a phone! I need to film this!” Rupert asked, looking around the boat.

“I think mine is by the table with my sunglasses.” I told him. “The password is 1989!”
“Alright, go!” He said, pointing my phone to Harry. “Whatever happens I’ll just email this to The Sun!” we laughed.

Harry took another deep breath, looked back at the water, took a slight impulse, and another deep breath. After what felt like an hour, he finally got an impulse and jumped down on his back, trying to throw his arms and legs back to do a backflip. He couldn’t, so he ended up falling flat on his back on the water to a painful sound.

We all cringed, laughing, and I swam to him, trying to look serious.

“Are you okay?!” I asked when he emerged.

“That…” He started, eyes closed in pain. “Hurt.”

“Alright, fifty pounds, pay up.” Will was telling Guy on the boat.

“That wasn’t a backflip!” Guy replied. “He fell flat on the water, that was pathetic!”

“A backflip was not the bet, the bet was that he would jump.”

“I don’t think that counts, though.”

“Just pay me, Guy!”

“Harry, are you alive?!” Kate shouted.

“I’m fine.” He replied, sounding casual, before dropping his tone so that only I could hear. “…My back hurts so much.”

I giggled, wrapping my arms around him to caress his back. “You should have just jumped normally.”

He smiled, awkwardly. “You underestimate the lengths I’ll go to impress you.”

I kissed him, both because that was a crazy good line, and because I just loved him so much. I felt his arms wrap around me and our legs intertwined because of the tide. The contact and the kiss made our skin feel hot in contrast with the cold water, and I started tingling inside at the touch of his tongue, and the pressure of his fingers on me.

“Get a room!” George shouted down at us.

In the privacy of being alone in the water, and the feeling of freedom the open waters afforded, we only wanted to kiss more, which we could so rarely do out in public. So we ignored him, and I felt Harry’s hand under my bikini’s bottoms as I gripped his hair between my fingers. His tongue felt wet and soft on mine, as I framed our lips together. I loved the feeling of his arms muscles around me so tight, keeping us together so strongly, making our skin hotter and hotter despite the cold water.

All I wanted was to keep kissing him forever.

“Rup?” from the boat, Natasha called her husband. “The captain said there’s a little slide at the end of the boat if we want to play with Georgia. One of us has to stay at the end to catch her, but I think it could be fun.”

“Yes, it’s so hot and she wants to get in the water.” He agreed. “You want me to go down to catch her?”
The image of sweet, little Georgia in baby buoys made me pull away from Harry in a hurry to yell at them.

“We’ll catch her!” I said. “We’ll meet you there!”

“We will?” Harry asked, confused.

“Come on.”

We swam around the boat to where Natasha was going to meet us, the back of the boat had a lower, small deck for us to climb back on after jumping, and to the side there was a tiny slide that ended in the water.

“Maybe I should go in to catch her myself…” Natasha considered, looking apprehensively to the slide.

“Don’t worry, we won’t let her drown.” Harry told her, hanging on to the end of the slide. “Come on, the poor thing is melting on this heat!”

Adjusting the buoys on Georgia’s arms, Natasha sat her atop the slide and slowly let her go.

“Yay!” Harry said, smiling, as he picked her up just as her feet touched the water. After realizing she wasn’t going to fall, Georgia giggled, making us smile. “Did you like it? You want to go again?”

“Okay, here we go.” Natasha said, as she repeated the process.

“Let her actually slide this time,” Harry told her, “instead of just holding her until she’s with me.”

Georgia made the same panicked expression until she was safely in Harry’s arms, when she broke into a fit of excited giggles.

“Oh, my God, she’s so cute!” Natasha squealed. “I have to film this, be right back!” And turning back inside the boat, she shouted as she ran, “Rupert, where’s the camera?!”

Harry looked at the baby. “Oh, mummy is gone… what should we do? Do you want to swim? Let’s swim…”

I smiled as I watched him swim back from the slide to where I was, sitting in the edge of the boat’s deck with my legs on the water, pulling Georgia forward just slightly so she could do her own little swimming – which was more like splashing her arms in the water hoping it would help.

“That’s right…” Harry encouraged. “Good job, G.”

He picked her up under her arms and threw her up in the air about half a meter, letting her submerge a couple of centimeters before bringing her up again. She laughed, delighted, and the sound made us smile as our hearts ached with love as it usually happens when cute babies giggled.

I watched as he smiled broadly looking at her, and couldn’t help myself picturing our own baby in his arms.

“Natasha is going to kill you.” I warned when he threw Georgia up again, this time a little higher.

“She’s fine, aren’t you?” He dismissed, still speaking on a baby voice that he used with her. “Mummy worries too much.”
“Right.” I laughed, sarcastic. “I doubt you wouldn’t do the same if she was ours.”

“I’m not gonna be an annoying, overly-protective father.” He told me, still using a baby voice and looking at Georgia. “I’m gonna be a cool, fun father. Yes, I will. Don’t you think I will, G? Yes, I will!” I giggled, and he put Georgia on his shoulders before swimming closer to me. “Besides,” he started, now on his natural tone, “you are going to worry enough for the both of us.”

“Me?” I asked. “I can be fun, too!”

“Of course, yes.” He nodded. “But your anxiety will make you all paranoid about our children like they’re about to die all the time. It’s a good thing, it’ll be a good balance. You keep them alive, and I keep them happy.”

I laughed, and reached for Georgia, who came to my lap. “So you have our whole parenting plan figured out, huh?”

“Of course.” He smiled. “And did you notice?”

Looking at Georgia’s cute blue eyes, distractedly, I replied, “notice what?”

“Us. Since you told me that on New Year’s eve, about being with me… forever. Whenever we start talking about the future… It stopped being about what we would do, and started being about what we will do.”

I bit my lip, smiling slightly, and turned the baby on my lap so her legs could touch the water too.

“I hadn’t noticed that.” I lied.

“Deal.” He said. “Tell me if you’re freaking out.”

I smiled, wrapping my arms around Georgia. “I’m not freaking out.” I told him.

I didn’t quite know how to explain what was happening inside of me, but it would be a lie to pretend I hadn’t noticed the change. After admitting to myself, and to him, that I wanted us to be together forever, things stopped being so fatalist. It stopped being about when we would break up, and became about if. And soon enough even that if started feeling as a stretch. We knew it wouldn’t happen.

We were in love. We had chosen each other. And though our worlds were completely different, now that I was leaving part of mine behind, it started feeling possible that one day – maybe sooner rather than later – our worlds would be the same.

The only thing left to figure out was the how; was the details surrounding that hope that we could live together without having to justify ourselves. What did it mean that we wanted to be together? What could it mean? I knew the answers, somewhere deep inside my head, but I was still so scared to think about them that I would rather pretend I didn’t.

I remembered when Janine and Richard got married, the conversation I had with Janine to make sure she knew what she was doing. I remembered how she had told me that she and Richard had had the talk about marriage, and so they both knew what to expect from each other and weren’t jumping into a life together without knowing exactly how it would be. This way they knew what they agreed and disagreed on, and had a chance to talk about it before there was no way back anymore. This way there would be no surprises and they knew what they would have to work hard on.
My 2017 was pretty much all planned: I would finish shooting Hamilton, premiere You Will Come Back To Me, film Doctor Who and then premiere Broken, Tangled and Hamilton, promote the Doctor Who episode and that would be it. But as I knew I would be completely free next year, as I tried to plan it, I started to realize there was very little I knew for sure that I wanted. One of those things was Harry.

—

That day was spent like that: swimming, tanning and doting on Georgia. Drinking champagne – or, in my case, pink lemonade. When we laid down on the highest part of the boat to wait for the sunset, the boys were still on the water playing water polo. Natasha had gone to lay Georgia for a nap in one of the cabins and so it was Alli, Kate, Lizzy and me.

“It’s so weird that you are pregnant.” I told Lizzy. “I feel like I just met you when you had just gotten married, but it was more than two years ago.”

She smiled. “Well, we’ve been trying for a baby for a while. So for me it actually felt like time would never pass.”

“It’ll be so weird to see Guy as a father.” Kate marveled. “He has always been such a party boy. Well, then again, so were Will and Jake…”

Lizzy giggled. “Yes. I used to think Natasha would be weird as a mother, too, but now I can’t even see her without Georgia.”

“I’m still struggling to remind myself pregnancies are good news now we’re older, instead of scandalous gossip material, like in college.” Alessa joked, making us laugh.

“With you and Guy having a baby, the next should be Mel and Thom.” Kate said.

“We’re all so old.” Liz added. “Soon we’ll all be married and our kids will be the new hot, party people.”

We smiled.

“Liz?!” Guy shouted from the water.

As Lizzy got up, he and the others were at the deck ready to walk back in and Guy couldn’t find his towel.

“The crew put all the towels on the hooks by the mini bar.” Alessa told Lizzy.

“Where?” She asked, and Alli got up.

“I’ll show you.”

They walked downstairs to help the others, and I was left with Kate on the white, plastic mattresses as we watched the sky turn from clear blue to slightly orange.

I turned to look at her, slim and beautiful laying with her designer sunglasses, her puffy, soft brown hair up on a ponytail as she stared at the sky in amazement. It was weird to think this woman would be Queen of the United Kingdom one day, but it was even weirder to think she was my boyfriend’s sister-in-law.

I had grown so used to Harry and his family that it sometimes startled me to remember they were
royal. To remember that the nice, old man that helped me with my garden was soon to be king, and that William would follow him.

It was difficult to remember that if a few things went wrong, Harry would have to do it too.

“Can I ask you a question?”

Kate looked at me. “Sure.”

“Can you maybe not tell anyone I asked?”

She put her sunglasses up on her head to look at me. “Okay.”

I took in a deep breath, feeling as awkward as no one ever should, and tried to make my voice sound casual and laid back.

“Being married to William… being a part of the… family… what-what is it like?” I asked, avoiding her eyes and staring ahead. “I mean, what does it… involve? Like, what-what changes?”

She was quiet, and I wondered if she could tell why I wanted to know. I started to overthink my question. Did she understand? Did she think I wanted this? Did she think I didn’t?

“I mean, what do you have to do, you know? Like,” I stuttered to explain, “I mean, what-what-how does it go? Like, what do you have to do exactly?” Kate was still quiet – or maybe she only wasn’t speaking because I wouldn’t let her. “I’m not saying I- well, I kind of am. But not like that. I mean… I mean I guess, sort of like that. But not in a weird way. I hope this isn’t offensive. I mean, I know it’s none of my business-“

“Jenifer, breathe.” Kate said, and as I looked at her I realized she was smiling, seeming amused, and I giggled nervously.

“I just mean…” I started, calmer.

“I know what you mean.” She said. “I’m just thinking of how to answer you.”

“Oh. Okay.” I said, and then I waited.

I waited. And I waited. And it felt like I had waited the whole day as my stomach twisted nervously, but the sun still hadn’t set when she spoke again.

“What’s important to understand is that William and Harry have different positions in the line of succession.” She started. “And that is mostly what guides the deciding process. So, for instance, when I married William he was, as he still is, the heir to an heir. If all goes as planned, he’ll be king one day after his father, and even though that’s a long way ahead, when we got married everything sort of reflected that. With Harry, well, he is an heir’s second son and he is lower on the line now, because of George and Charlotte.”

“So that means things wouldn’t be as much of a big deal?” I asked.

She sighed. “Well, it’s complicated. There’s no handbook for these things, you know? So it’s complicated. I know for a fact they wouldn’t feel comfortable with having a royal as an actress. But, well…”

“…I won’t be one anymore.”

“Yes.” She nodded.
“So…” I started. “How… how is it? How- what-?”

“So…” I started. “How… how is it? How- what-?”

“Some of the royal family have proper jobs.” She explained. “Like the Yorks, and their father, Prince Andrew, who has worked with economics before. And even Harry and William have had normal, military positions, and William now rides the air ambulance. But, usually, what’s expected is that those on the top of the succession line will be working royals.”

“What does that mean, exactly?” I asked. “Is it like what Harry does? Helping charities and representing the Queen abroad?”

“Basically, yes. You choose areas you’d like to focus on, study charity organizations that work towards that issue and become a patron. That means you’ll be involved on event planning and will help them raise awareness and funds to do what they must.” I nodded. “And, yes, sometimes the Queen needs help, especially because she doesn’t travel overseas anymore. So we represent her on diplomatic trips, meeting dignitaries and fortifying diplomatic relations between the U.K. and other countries.”

“Oh.” I nodded, considering her words. It sounded very similar to my work with the U.N., which I loved.

“It would also mean wearing mostly British brands, to promote the national fashion, never wearing anything too short or tight…” She added. “Or transparent. There’s also some rules about always wearing pantyhose and closed toe shoes, but those can be worked around.”

“Are you kidding me?” I asked, serious, and she smiled.

“Sadly, no. I’ve gotten a lot of criticism about my fashion choices.”

“That sucks.”

“It’s not that bad.” She shrugged. “Marrying into this family means you’re marrying the country, too, Jenifer.”

“But Harry is fifth in line.” I said. “You said it yourself things wouldn’t be as much of a big deal with him.”

“No, I said it’s complicated.” She reminded. “There’s no rule. But the thing is, Charles is already of a certain age. When he becomes king he will need help to get the royal work done, and with George and Charlotte still so young, chances are Harry and his wife would be required to help.”

I nodded, slowly.

“But, still,” I started, “it’s not like he’ll be king.”

“He probably won’t. But probably is the key word.” She replied. “The thing is, when they welcome you in, they look at you and see someone that might, if things change, be queen one day.”

“If a lot changes!”

She sighed, smiling patiently. “Yes, but Jenifer, it’s just how it works. They need to look at you and be convinced that you wouldn’t ruin everything. They, and I don’t just mean the family. I mean the government, the people, they need to be able to trust that if it comes to it, they’ll be safe in your hands.” She must have seen the weirdness in my face, because she giggled next. “I know it sounds so strange. But think about, if we died, they would be left with you as their Queen. As head of estate of many countries. The diplomacy of most of Europe would be in your hands. When they
look at us, that’s what they see. They see a future that, although improbable, could happen.”

I sighed, deeply and melodramatically, trying to soak in everything that she was saying, trying to figure out how I felt about it, but still too overwhelmed to be able to.

“Sorry, I’m not being very encouraging, am I?”

I smiled. “No, you’re great. Remember, you told me once that it was best for me and Harry that I figured out if this life was for me or not.”

She nodded, slowly, still watching me from the corner of her eyes, and then voiced the question in my heart:

“Is it?”

__

Two days later, our friends went home to their jobs, kids or whatever, and Harry and I were left alone to enjoy one last day in Mikonos on our own – not that we minded, of course. We enjoyed the privacy.

On our last night, Harry had me dress up for one last romantic dinner on the terrace of our villa house, atop of a hill with an amazing view of the village and the sea below.

When we walked out, I couldn’t stop smiling at the sights and the sweet sound of violin from the musician he had hired.

“This is becoming somewhat of a birthday tradition.” I joked, remembering our first fake romantic dinner on 2013 and the one last year. “Private dinners with violinists.”

“I hope you’re not complaining.” He replied, pulling the chair for me.

“Hell, no.” I smiled.

“Mademoiselle.” He said, ceremoniously, before pulling out the shiny cover on my plate, revealing a rectangular and velvet box underneath. “Your birthday gift.”

I smiled, picking up the box with a childish smile that made him chuckle as he took his seat.

“I thought the trip was my gift.”

“The trip was a gift for us. That is just for you.”

When I opened the jewelry box, I saw the most beautiful bracelet with yellow diamonds intertwined with clear ones. I gasped, “Oh, my God! This is…” I touched the cold rocks not daring to think about their worth; there was only one word I could have possibly use to describe it. “Beautiful!”

Smiling smugly, he reached out and picked the bracelet. I gave him my arm and he gently closed it around my wrist.

“Now it is.” He corrected me.

“It matches my earrings!” I marveled, touching the yellow diamond earrings he had given me for Christmas. “You’re spoiling me, Mr. Prince!”
“I’m not denying that.” He joked.

“Well, and I am not complaining, either.” I said, still staring at the shining rocks around my wrist, just lose enough that it stood a little down my arm when I rested my elbow on the table and held my head up on my hand. “I mean, I feel like it matches my personality, you know? Like I was born to wear yellow diamonds.” He smiled, amused. “You can keep them coming, by the way. I almost have a whole set.”

“I’ll keep that in mind.” He said, with such mysterious intensity in his eyes it was hard not to look away, but I tried.

His eyes were so blue, his hair so orange; his strong jaw and shoulders; his smile was so handsome and happy and it made such joy twist around my stomach. I wasn’t sure how could anyone not fall in love with that man.

“If I ask you some things…” I started, feeling the smile fade from lips, worried. “Can you promise not to overthink the reason why I’m asking?”

“You’re the over-thinker of this relationship.” He said, just as a waiter from the villa staff wheeled a small cart near us.

The very nice lady served us Greek risotto with avocado salad and, after she gave me my Swiss lemonade after serving Harry some white wine, she left us alone again to enjoy our dinner.

“What do you want to know?” he asked, and I avoided his eyes by pushing my food around in my plate.

“You can’t ask me why I’m asking you this.”

He was smiling when he said, “Okay?”

Bracing myself, I started.

“Say we get married.” I paused, focusing my eyes on my glass both to order my own thought and to avoid his look. “I’ve just… I’ve just been wondering what that would… mean. How-how would that… be? I mean-” I sighed. “I mean, people say healthy couples talk about it before, you know… making any decisions… and, and… you know… one year ago, on my birthday, you said that you wouldn’t try to make us more serious until I told I was ready. And I can’t know if I am until I know what it would mean, you know, getting serious… like, I’m not- I’m not saying we need to do anything right now. I’m not saying, I’m not…” I sighed. “I think we should talk about it without any pressure and any expectations, just completely honestly, so we know what we’re doing and if we’re headed on the same direction… so I guess my question is… what would it mean? Getting married?”

Harry put his fork down. “What exactly are you asking?”

I took in a deep breath. “Well, say we’re getting married. Would we do it like Will and Kate? Would there have to be the whole engagement interview and the big wedding with the whole world watching? Does that mean we live in England? London? Kensington Palace, or could we keep our house? Is it true I have to wear pantyhose all the time and-”

“Oh!” he interrupted, smiling amused again. “I don’t mind answering, but you have to slow down or I’ll forget the questions.” I rested my back on the chair, taking in another deep breath. “It’s… complicated.”
“Kate said the same thing…”

“You talked to Kate about this?”

I felt myself blush, “…kind of.”

He fought a smile. “Well, the thing is, we could fight all of it. I won’t be king, so we could insist
on having a private engagement and wedding and a private life away from all of it.”

I looked at him. “But?”

He sighed. “But the truth is my grandparents are old, so they need help. And my father will need
me, because Will and Kate won’t be able to do it all on their own. And I know it’s 2017, but in the
United Kingdom, and most of Europe, my family still plays a significant role in diplomacy—”

“Okay.” I nodded. “Harry, I don’t want you to justify it or to try and explain it. I understand your
family’s work is important.”

“You do?” he sounded genuinely surprised.

“Yes.” I smiled. “You help so many people. I admire it. Just… just cut the crap and be honest, it’s
what this is about. I need to know the real answers.”

He nodded. “Okay… well…” he cleared his throat, seeming lost in thought for a moment. “We
could push for a private engagement and wedding, but when Will and Kate got married they had a
gigantic influx of revenue from tourism, so chances are they would ask us to do it like they did to
help the country. Since I won’t be king it could probably be a lot smaller, though. Maybe not
televisioned.”

“Public engagement announcement?” I asked.

“Yes. The press and people need to be informed by palace officials.”

“Engagement interview?”

“Probably. And photo-call, too.”

I nodded. “Big ass wedding with a carriage ride later?”

He smiled – probably at my choice of words. “Yes. And appearance on the balcony of
Buckingham, as it is traditional.”

“Would you wear that handsome military uniform?”

He giggled, blushing a little. “If you want…”

I smiled, both surprised and glad that the topic didn’t make me feel nervous. At least not anxious-
nervous; just… excited-nervous. It felt so… new.

But I liked that we could talk about this, that I could answer the burning questions in my mind
without fearing judgment. I didn’t feel like he would get his hopes up or that I had to hold back –
after all, I had done it enough until now. Now I could let it go. Now I could ask all that I wanted.

“Do I wear a tiara?”

“It’s not a rule.” He explained, still smiling. “But if granny offers you one, it would be… expected
of you to accept.”

“And we could live in our place?”

He made a pout. “We could try and convince them… they can’t actually say no, but I already know what they would say…”

“What would they say?”

“That it would cost too much taxpayer money to give our building a proper security scheme—“

“We already have that!”

“We have that for me, technically. If we got married it would be two royals living there. They would need to amp it up.” He shook his head. “They would probably argue that it would make our neighbor’s life hell and so we should probably accept an apartment in Kensington, which would be free, secure and traditional. Not to mention a lot bigger.”

I nodded. I loved our apartment, they first place I had ever felt truly at home, but I could get used to an apartment like Will and Kate’s.

…and I would get a title? Like Kate is a duchess?”

“That… also depends.”

“Of what?”

“It’s usual that princes get dukedoms when they marry, like Will.” He started. “But I’m not an heir, so we could get a lower title, like Earl.”

“Like your uncle!”

“Yes.” He nodded. “We could ask for a lower ranking title so that we could try and live a less pompous life, or so that our…” He eyed me, worryingly, “our children could live more normal lives.”

I avoided his eyes again. “Okay…” I started. “But there would be a title?”

“At the least, you would automatically become Princess Henry of Wales. If I get an Earldom, you would be a Countess. If I get a dukedom, you would be a duchess and so forth. But it’s granny’s choice. You would likely get an HRH status, though… Ah, that’s Her Royal Highness.” He explained.

There was silence as I paused my questions letting all of that information sink in. Weirdly, I wasn’t surprised. Harry was a prince. The fact that his future wife would have a title was probably the first thing I learned about him. It was just hard accepting the concept that the future wife could be me.

I still remembered when he had been engaged for the first time, to Chelsy; as most people in the world, I, too, had been glued to my computer, watching the video of their engagement photo-call, as Chelsy looked so out of place and nervous with a big, round cut diamond ring on her finger. They hadn’t done an engagement interview like Will and Kate. Harry had told me she had asked not to do it, citing nerves. He had said he should have known even then she was having second thoughts. Though not much was revealed of their wedding plans before the engagement was called off, it was known that Chelsy would take Harry’s title. So I just knew that’s how it went.
“Is that all you wanted to know?” He asked, after I had been quiet for too long.

Coming out of my trance, I shook my head, dismissively. “And I would work on royal duties, like you, Will and Kate.”

“You could politely refuse this work…”

“Harry…” I started.

“But because my grandparents are old and so it’s my father and Camila, it’s understood that Will and Kate will need more help soon. So, yes,” he nodded, “you would be expected to take on patronages of charity organizations and defend causes and make speeches, cut ribbons, shake people’s hands, always smiling and sympathetic, always nice and polite, always willing. You would be expected to make tours abroad with me, and maybe even alone at some point, and maybe in the future we would go to weddings of other royal families, or important events like that.”

He said it fast, looking down at the table with no emotion of inflection on his voice. It was like he wanted to get it out, quick and easy, like ripping a Band-Aid. Instead of getting annoyed at his unwillingness to answer calmly, which was my first reaction, I realized he was scared.

Harry had gone through this before. He had fell in love, proposed, gone through the whole engagement ordeal just to be dumped later. He knew this was the ‘bad’ part. He knew this was the part Chelsy had broken up with him about. These were the reasons she had left him; because she loved him, but didn’t love him enough to be okay with all that came with him.

“Christmas?” I asked, ignoring the worried, impatient look on his eyes which were quickly replaced by confusion. “Your family usually spends Christmas together, right? Is that like, a rule?”

“Will and Kate spent it with her family once.” He said. “The rule can be broken.” I gave him a long look. “…but, yes, we would be expected at Sandringham every year for the 24th and 25th of December, at least.”

“I’m not complaining.” I said, playful. “You know how my family gets on Christmas…” he smiled. “Kids?”

I bit my lip, playing with my fork to avoid what I knew was the triumphant return of the amused smile on his lips.

“Yes, please.” He replied, making me smile.

I still didn’t look at him. I focused on the questions. On the plans. On the life I was trying to picture in my head and on how I felt about it. Did I like it?

“More than one?”

He picked his wine glass. “As many as you’d let me put in you.” I giggled, rolling my eyes, and he tried again. “Five?”

“Five?” I asked, appalled.

“Don’t act like you don’t want a litter of babies, Silva. I see the way you look at Georgia, Arthur, Charlotte, Zalie, India, George, Kidd…”

“Okay, okay!” I interrupted him, laughing. “But five?!”
“How about this,” he started, diplomatic, “what if we agree on more than one for now, and then revisit the subject after we have the first?”

“People do say most parents change their minds after the first one… Okay. Sounds good.”

He smiled.

“And, uh… they would have titles, too? Like George and Charlotte?”

He sighed, considering it. “It’s up for debate. They could. Or we could give them lower titles, like my uncle Edward and his wife, who gave their kids only Lady and Viscount titles. Or we could not give them titles and try to help them lead a more normal life, like aunt Anne’s kids, Peter and Zara.”

I nodded. “But?”

He smiled. “But we would be expected to give them titles, yes.”

“And they would have to work like royals, too?”

This, he needed time to think about.

“Well, by the time they’re out of college, which is usually when we start…” he said, “George and Charlotte would be older, and because they are children of an heir, they would be expected to help, so… not necessarily. Maybe they could, but nothing too much. They wouldn’t be expected to do much. Think of the Yorks, my cousins, you know?”

“Eugenie and Beatrice?”

“Yes. They have titles and sometimes do the occasional royal work, but they have proper jobs that don’t actually have anything to do with the monarchy. It’s a matter of… balance, in a way.”

I nodded again, and quickly realized I didn’t have any more questions. So I smiled, and sighed.

“Okay.” I said, and picked up my glass, downing almost half of my lemonade.

“Is that it?” he asked.

“Yes.”

I started eating, still considering all we had talked about.

“Deal.” He called, and I looked up.

I thought about it, visiting my own mind and trying to feel a rapid heartbeat or nervous knot on my stomach.

“I’m not freaking out.” I told him.

“Can I ask you something?” he asked, and I was sure I looked conflicted. “It’s not why you’re asking me this.”

I smiled, relieved. “Okay.”

“If…” he started, careful. “If at any point, preferably as soon as you realize it, you think there’s any aspect of all of this that you don’t think you can be okay with… Tell me.”
I had again the heartbreaking realization this was about his previous engagement.

He looked at me, intensively, making sure I knew he meant it. “Just… just… tell me. Okay?”

I realized as he said the words ‘tell me’, he meant that I could do it right then if I already thought I couldn’t handle it. So I folded my napkin beside my plate and stood up, walking around the table to him. He made room for me as I approached, and I delicately sat down on his lap, instantly feeling warmer just by being around him.

One of his hands rested on my tight, the other around my back, on my waist. I rested my arm around his shoulders, intertwining my own fingers together as I looked him closely.

Instead of the goodbye I knew he expected to hear, I told him the only thing that mattered.

“I love you.”

Chapter End Notes

GUYS. GUYS. WE’RE SO CLOSE. SO CLOSE. STILL A LITTLE TO GO BUT SO CLOSE. I CAN’T WAIT.

I love this chapter, and the talk with Harry it’s probably one of the first scenes I thought of even before I started this story, so posting this really gives me a feeling of how close we are to the finish line. Let me know your thoughts?

Also, if you were Jen, and you were the one discovering the answers she does during this talk (and the one with Kate) would you let him go?

Next chapter: The worst month of Jen and Harry’s lives as a deep secret related to Harry’s mother is about to come out right when Jen is too busy with work to be able to help, making her come to a realization about her priorities. WE’RE SO CLOSE.
Chapter Summary

Jen has to decide between the most important movie premiere of her life or helping Harry.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

May of 2017 was my own personal circle of hell.

The media was still on my case about quitting, inventing new and more crazy rumors as to why every week; one day I had cancer and needed time to recover; the other I was pregnant – yet again – and needed space to raise Prince Harry’s bastard child; then I was going on a music career. And then, of course, there was the usual ‘she’s engaged to Prince Harry and is quitting to be able to be a part of the Royal Family, that is so un-feminist’.

At this point in my life I had so much going on that I had no time to worry about any of it, so I just took to twitter to quote a Taylor song that said ‘the rumors are terrible and cruel, but honey NONE of them are true’ and called it a day. ‘Let the world burn’, I thought. ‘I have shit to do’.

The good news was that Heathers was still a big deal five months after its release. The movie had left the theaters but the soundtrack was still on the top of the charts and the borderline cult following we had achieved was not about to let it go that soon. We had a massive fanbase on social media and it only jump started everything all of us did these days, from Tyler’s run on Bonnie and Clyde on Broadway, to Anna’s singing career, to basically everything I did.

Heathers was almost instantly iconic and we would forever be remembered for those characters.

Hamilton, the movie I was currently filming in England, was insane in its own, controlled level. Firstly, it was the biggest budged film I had ever been a part of; never underestimate America’s ability to invest in things that make them feel patriotic. It was weird shooting it in England, of all places, but the studio behind it had better resources there and the architecture of the country was a lot more nineteenth century than most places in the U.S., so we had no choice but to travel to small British towns and pretend it was America.

I had finished my hardest scenes – such as my three solos and most bulky dialogue -, and was now only doing reaction shots and scenes in which I was needed with the rest of the cast, as well as location shots. All of this while still participating – through video conference – in promotion, distribution and marketing planning meetings for my Brazilian movie.

In May, I took two weeks off Hamilton to travel to Brazil to premiere You Will Come Back To Me nationally, then flew back to Europe straight to France to the Cannes film festival for the international premiere.

Cannes itself was nice, if you didn’t have to be on interviews ten hours of the day, which I was. It felt like I lived, breathed, ate, listened, and slept that movie. It was all I could think and talk about. I promoted it to every media outlet that would hear me, I tweeted about it incessantly, I went to
every talk show I could, wrote essays for the Huffington Post and Times about the dictatorship, democracy and torture and conceded interviews to literally anyone who would stop and listen to me. I had put too much into this movie to let it go badly for lack of promotion, so I threw myself into it as hard as I could. I didn’t care that I was leaving the business, and that I hated interviews. I had created that movie. I had written the script, I had cast it and directed it, I had been the one to beg studios for a budget and to plead with local authorities for permissions to shoot on location. That movie was my baby and I was positive it was the biggest and most important thing I had done on my career and I would do all in my power to see it go well.

And then one interviewer decided to take advantage of that.

During Cannes, I was doing the junket interviews with Caio, the Brazilian actor who was my character’s love interest in the film. He introduced Agatha to the fight for democracy and they were briefly involved before he was killed and she was captured. Caio and I had scenes in public locations together and so the paparazzi saw had a lot of pictures of us from the time we were shooting. On top of that, we both went to the All Star version of the Brazilian Master Chef and people seemed to think we had a lot of chemistry, so inevitably there was a rumor we were fucking at the time we worked together.

Now, in real life we were indeed good friends – I liked having Brazilian friends for a change -, but the truth was the last time I had seen him was almost a year ago when we were shooting the movie. Not to mention even then we were both in happy relationships with other people, and so this whole thing was disrespectful in itself.

So after a busy and exhaustive day of junket interviews, sitting in the same room with a poster of my face behind us as a different team of interviewers walked in every ten minutes to ask us the same questions again and again, one of them pushed it too hard. He insisted on asking if we were in a relationship at the time we worked together, even after we had sarcastically said we had had a brief marriage and were hiding a child somewhere.

“No.” We told him, annoyed at the necessity of explaining the joke. “We’re just friends.”

“But, Jenifer, you do have quite a record, don’t you?” he went on, looking at his notes. “We have Tyler Alvin, David Cobb, Brody Jenner, Chris Pine, Tod Richmond and, more notoriously of course, Prince Harry. All in the last few years.”

I felt my grip on the chair’s arm tighten, as I got angrier. He looked at me in silence for a long time, waiting for me to comment.

“No.” We told him, annoyed at the necessity of explaining the joke. “We’re just friends.”

“But, Jenifer, you do have quite a record, don’t you?” he went on, looking at his notes. “We have Tyler Alvin, David Cobb, Brody Jenner, Chris Pine, Tod Richmond and, more notoriously of course, Prince Harry. All in the last few years.”

I felt my grip on the chair’s arm tighten, as I got angrier. He looked at me in silence for a long time, waiting for me to comment.

“I feel my grip on the chair’s arm tighten, as I got angrier. He looked at me in silence for a long time, waiting for me to comment.

“Do you have a question?” I asked.

“Well, it’s been pointed out this is the first time you act against someone closer in age to you, which is a topic coming up more frequently lately, about all of Hollywood. And I was wondering if you feel like this industry might have influenced you to pick older men in your personal life, which seems to be your type.”

I blinked slowly, mentally digesting his words.

“Do you have a question about the movie?” I asked, making no politeness efforts.

“Well, specifically about the movie, yes. You two share pretty intimate scenes there,” he smiled, but I didn’t mimic him, “I was wondering as someone who has expressed in the past she looks forward to having a family, do you think this will be a challenge in the future? Explaining to your kids about your intimate scenes and all your ex-boyfriends who are so documented in the media?”
I sighed.

“I find it weird,” Caio intervened in his thick accent, “and, frankly, quite rude and sexist, that you didn’t feel the need to extend this question to me.”

“Well, of- of course, if you wan-“

I interrupted him. “Do you have, and this is the last time I’m gonna ask this, a question about the movie?”

“Well, yes, that is my question. I was wondering if that concern might be the one of the reasons you decided to leave the industry-“

“Miss Silva, we can’t hear you if you take that off.” An assistant interrupted as I pulled my microphone out of my shirt, laying it on the table.

“I know.” I told her. “I’m taking it off because we’re done here.”

“Oh, Jenifer, please, I hope you don’t think I-“ the reporter tried.

“Sir, please. We both know what you’re doing.” I told him. “The thing is, there’s a line of actual journalists waiting to ask questions that are pertinent to my job, so I have no obligation to sit here and try to justify my life choices to someone I don’t even know. Have a good day.”

I noticed Caio taking his mic off too, and looked at him. “You can stay!”

“I’m not staying with him alone.” He justified, and so we left together to get a glass of water and stretch our legs as that team left the room and they brought the new one in; Janine came to tell us they had apologized and begged for some more minutes of interview time, and we refused. They got enough publicity as it was.

Most of the headlines read ‘Irritated Jenifer Silva Walks Out of Interview’ or ‘Jenifer Silva Flips At Reporter Who Pointed Out Ex-Boyfriend’s Age Gap’, focusing way too much on my manners and way too little on the actual context, so I was called crazy and told I was having a meltdown, and accused of leaving the industry out of nerves.

Now, after all of this, after I put more than three years of my life into that movie, after I had endured torture scenes in which I hanged from a pole by my knees with my hands tied behind my feet while acting being raped, electrified, water-boarded and beaten, after all of that… people were going to see it. People were going to have opinions. People were going to judge it. Critics would write reviews and recommend it or not. Rotten tomatoes would give it a grade. People would decide if it deserved English subtitles or not.

Cannes audiences were ruthless. They sometimes booed movies they didn’t like. With the cast and crew inside of the theater! What if they booed us? What if they booed my movie? My baby? I was so exhausted by everything going on, I actually didn’t care anymore, I just wanted it to be over, be it with good critics or bad. That was a lie, I cared about very little more than I cared about that movie. But I convinced myself that I didn’t so that the blow would be lessened if the reviews were bad.

As if my professional life wasn’t messy enough, there was my personal one to top it. Harry was going through some shit and for the first time in a while, it actually wasn’t about me!

Some guy his mother had dated after divorcing his father was selling letters she had sent him on an auction, letters with sentimental – and, rumor had it, even sexual – content. Personal
correspondence that was never supposed to be seen by anyone other than the person she had trusted them to, and that dick was selling them to the highest bidder. Harry and his family were rightfully livid, and the press was buzzing with trying to guess the content of the letters. There was, however, very little Harry and his family could do.

They had talked to lawyers about a cease and decease order, or about suing him, but apparently had no case. They had tried to talk to the man personally, who claimed it was his right to sell, and even looked into buying the letters themselves, but had been advised not to.

Apparently, it would make it look like they had something to hide and raise even more public curiosity. Not to mention the public would disapprove of this way of spending money they would assume – wrongfully – would come from the taxpayers, and doing it secretly was too risky.

They could do nothing but wait for the worst, and it was killing Harry. The worst part: I couldn’t even be there to help.

“There’s an article online about it.” He told me on the phone when I called him during one of my press day’s breaks, when I was still on Cannes.

“I’m sure there’s a lot of them.”

“Yes, but this one talks about a documentary.” He said. “The Secret Tapes. I heard about it before. I mean, I know there’s a lot of documentaries about her, and dad always urged Will and I not to see them. But they’re saying these letters could be as revealing as this documentary. I wanna watch it.”

“Don’t.” I asked.

He was silent for a while. “You’ve seen it.”

“Yes.” I admitted. “Sorry, Harry, it was before we met. But, listen, this isn’t something you should see, okay? Your mother is who you remember her as. Not what some conspiracy theorists claim. Just focus on what you know of her. The good things.”

“That’s the thing, isn’t it?” He asked. “I barely remember her anymore.”

Feeling my heart break, I tried to think of how to convince him not to watch it.

The Secret Tapes documentary was based on Andrew Norton’s book Diana: Her True Story, and it narrated the story of how Harry’s mother had answered personal questions about her life and marriage to a friend who recorded those answers secretly and later gave them to Norton to write about. Diana had chosen to tell her story as she knew the world didn’t know the extent of what had been going on in her life and the fact she had been so honest about the unfortunate set of events that had unfolded was, at the time, a huge revelation and had left the royal family without a reaction. She mentioned the cheating, her issues with bulimia, and even suicide attempts.

Mostly, I didn’t want Harry to watch it because she was very honest about moments Charles had left her hurting, and I didn’t want him to have reason to have anger towards the part of his family he still had. There was people who didn’t believe the documentary, but it was hard not to when it was so clearly her voice on the tapes, and I didn’t think, at that difficult time – or ever really – he would be able to deal with all that was said in the film.

“Harry, please don’t watch it, okay?” I asked again. “Just don’t. It’ll be no help… I’ll be home soon. I’ll be home really soon. Just hang on.”

You Will Come Back To Me was premiering that night on Cannes. Everything I had worked so
hard for the last three years for was hanging on the balance. All my work was into that one night and the reviews we would get. I was the most famous person on cast and production; without me there, it wouldn’t bring as much notoriety. The movie wouldn’t have as much publicity. I had put so much into it… they need me.

With my heart on my throat, I remembered the scene in the documentary Harry’s mother mentioned that her marriage truly began to fall apart after he had been born. If he watched it, it would destroy him and I knew it.

Harry needed me.

—

“Remember when you said you wanted to make a Brazilian movie and we said no?” Janine was shouting on the phone that I had pressed between my shoulder and ear as I tried to find my keys to the door after flying home from Cannes only a few hours after talking to Harry.

“Yes.” I told her, distractedly.

“Well, Jenifer, guess what?! You made that movie anyway. And now it is premiering as we speak and you are not here!”

I sighed, unable to find my keys, and Johnnie hurried to my side after helping Eddy bring my luggage up from the car. He picked my purse and looked for the keys as I gave Janine a little more attention.

“Janine, I know, okay?” I told her. “But it’s an emergency.”

“Jenifer, this movie has nothing without you here.”

“It’s a good story!” I argued. “It’s a good movie and a lot of people RSVPed for the premiere, it’ll be fine. The press will see it and write reviews anyway. It’ll be fine.”

“Do you have any idea how much money hangs in the balance?! If the movie goes badly-“

“Janine, I’ll call you back.” I interrupted, as Johnnie finally opened the door and he and Eddy started wheeling my luggage inside. “Let me know how the premiere goes.”

“I don’t even know what I’m doing here without you!” She shouted. “This is your movie, Jenifer. You’re ruining everything!”

I hanged up the phone, sighing, and walked in.

If I was being honest, I knew I was going to fly back home the moment Harry had called. He had sounded so… helpless. And sad. He had stood by my side through so much and flown half the world to help me, and I would be damned if I wasn’t going to simply fly from France to London to help him through this very shitty time.

The first thing that struck me when I walked in was the smell of alcohol. That smell hadn’t been in that apartment since I had had my ulcer burst and had to give up alcohol – prompting Harry to take off all that we had of it. But now there was an unmistakable smell of vodka and whisky through the house and I knew what I would find before I even found Harry behind the piano.

The second thing that struck me was the music. Harry was playing some messy, off-key blues that was both making me sad and also making my ears metaphorically bleed. He didn’t notice I was
there until I was almost in front of him.

“You’re home!” he shouted, smiling drowsily as he stopped playing for a minute, before going back at a blues note. “How long have I been playing? Is the premiere over?”

“No.” I said, eyeing the bottles over the piano. “You watched it, didn’t you?”

He kept playing.

“Do you think I could have a future in music?” He asked, drunkenly, while still jamming the keys angrily. “I could die my hair and go live in Louisiana and play for a, hic, living.” He hiccupped. “Not that they’d let me, let’s be real. I’m… I’m stuck here. We all are. This is such—“ He laughed, bitterly, finally stopping the music. “This is such bullshit, isn’t it?!?”

Still exhausted from work and the flight – and the worry -, I approached and sat beside him in the piano stool.

Harry smelled of alcohol. His beard and hair were disgruntled and sweaty and his red, puffy eyes made me wonder if he had cried. He never cried. Did he cry?

“Harry…” I started, without knowing how to finish, feeling a knot on my throat at the sight of more misery than I had ever seen on him before. I caressed his back, desperately trying to think of a way to help.

He leaned forward and rested his head on the upper part of the piano, hitting the keys with his fingers rapidly following no specific pattern.

“I wish I had kept on having piano lessons.” He mumbled. “Mum wanted me to. Then again, there’s a lot of things she wanted that she never got, huh?”

I waited. Both because I knew there was more he wanted to say and because I knew there was nothing I could actually do. There was no way I could ease his pain. There was nothing I could do to help, and I hated me for it.

“They broke her, Jenny.” He whispered, with his eyes closed, banging his head on the piano slightly. “This, this is… toxic. This world, this family is toxic… you should leave.”

I sighed. “Do you want me to leave?”

My heart was shouting ‘please say no’ as it beat rapidly in my chest. I wondered if this was how he felt all the times I had tried to push him away. How did he make it? How did he wait for me all this time?

Slowly, still with his eyes closed, he shook his head to one side and the other. No.

With a sigh of relieve, I leaned in and rested my head on his back as I wrapped my arms around his bent body in the piano.

“Good.” I said. “Because I’m not going anywhere, Mr. Prince.” I felt his hand hang on to mine, shakily. “How can I help?” I asked. “What do you want?”

He shrugged. “I just wanna break something.” I thought about it, an idea forming in my head as he picked the bottle and took another big sip of whiskey. “Or flying. Flying would be cool.” He added, as I stood up and made my way to the kitchen.
I lead Vodka out of our apartment, into the security apartment, and closed the door, before turning back to the kitchen cabinets to grab a big pile of plates. I made my way back to the sitting room, where from the piano Harry gave me a weird look as I walked to the living room.

“Where are you going?”


I waited a bit on the terrace as I heard him stumbling his way up as I moved our patio furniture around to make room, until he finally dramatically opened the door and stepped out, squinting his eyes at the light of the setting sun.

“A rude reporter basically called me a slut today.” I told him, as I grabbed a plate from the pile. “I didn’t like it.”

I turned to the space I had opened in the middle of the terrace and threw the plate down with all the strength I had. It hit the floor with a loud noise and shattered in a dozen pieces.

I picked another plate and offered it to him.

“Are these our porcelain plates?” He asked, squinting at it.

“It’s just a plate, Harry. We’ll buy more.”

I didn’t need to tell him twice. He grabbed the white plate from my hand and threw it on the floor a few meters away from us, where its pieces joined mine.

He stared at it for a while before grabbing another two plates and doing the same thing.

“We need some music.” I decided, and turned to the living room where our stereo stood, quickly hitting play on Dancing Shoes, by Arctic Monkeys.

The heavy, fast beat filled our apartment and the only other sound was the shattering of our fancy dinner plates and Harry’s drunken laughter when he felt impressed that he broke a glass right at the beat of the song.

I giggled a little at him, and jumped and danced to the song trying to pretend I didn’t feel so horribly exhausted.

“Come on, Jay, it’s a hardcore dance part-ay!” he pulled me by the hand, giving me a plate and dancing around the broken porcelain as I took aim and broke it.

He drank some more whiskey until the song was over and, as another, sadder song started playing, he looked at me.

“That one’s sad!” He complained, walking shakily to the door to try and change the music. “I’m sad enough!” He stumbled on his own foot and fell to the floor, right on top of the broken porcelain. He looked drowsily at his own arm supporting himself sitting, where blood was now ripping through. “Ouch.”

“It’s okay.” I said gently, passing an arm under his to try and pull him up. “Come on, let’s go. Let’s get you a Band-Aid.”

“Sorry I ruined the dance party.” He mumbled, slowly and drowsily, supporting himself onto me as I tried to carry us both to our bathroom.
“It’s okay, love.”

“It was a good party. A bit depressive, but I liked it.”

After struggling all the way there, especially on the small stairs from the living room to the lower level dinner room, and trying not to inappropriately laugh at how random he could be while drunk, I finally managed to sit him down by the bathtub, with his cut arm in.

“God, I love this bathtub.” He let out as I got up to find a first aid kit. “I loooove this bathtub. I especially love what we do in the bathtub. Did we ever have a normal bath in this tub? Not that I want it. I like our joined baths a lot more.”

I smiled and kneeled beside him, who rested his head on the marble edge of the tub while I turned on the water to clean up his cut; his blood tainted the white marble giving me horrible flashbacks from when I had my ulcer burst moths ago.

“Come on.” I said, pulling his arms up to take off his shirt. When I did, he immediately reached for mine. “No, no,” I giggled, “I can keep mine on.”

“That’s not fair.” He complained. “I wanna see you naked too.”

“You can see me naked later, okay?” I said. “Let’s get this done first.”

He rested his head on the bathtub again and stood looking at me as I cleaned his cut, trying to judge if he would need stitches.

“You’re so pretty.” He said.

“Thank you, love.” I smiled, wrapping his arm up.

“You’re like, really pretty. How-how did- are you sure you’re my girlfriend?”

I finished bandaging his arm and looked at him. “Officially for about two years now.”

“Woah.” He said, making me giggle.

I touched his forehead with my palm, swiping off his sweat.

“Are you feeling okay? You look pale.”

“I feel pale.”

That didn’t make much sense, but he was so drunk that wasn’t surprising.

He held my hand in his and brought it down from his forehead to his lips, closing his eyes. He took in a deep breath and kissed my palm, delicately.

“Come on,” I said. “Let’s lay down for a bit, okay?”

“Okay.” He agreed, and let me pull him up again. He stopped on his foot, and closed his eyes, brows furrowed. “I don’t feel good.” He said.

I only had a couple of seconds to drag him across the bathroom to the toilets and to pull up the seat before he fell to his knees by it and threw up inside with a horrible, guttural sound.

“It’s okay.” I said, calmly, holding his forehead with my left hand and caressing his back with the
other. “You’re gonna be okay.”

After he was done, I flushed and helped him to sit down on the floor, with his back against the wall, and left the bathroom for the kitchen to get him a glass of water and some pain meds. I also boiled some water and made him chamomile tea.

“Come on, drink up, it’ll be good for you.”

He took the meds, spit the water on the toiled after gargling and then held the tea under his nose letting the vapor warm his face. I sat down beside him and watched him drink quietly for a while, wondering where his mind was going.

We sat in silence as I rested my head on his shoulders as he drank. I wondered what time was it in France. I wondered if the premiere had started. If the movie had started. If people liked it. If the torture scenes looked gruesome or as if they were trying too hard. Will they think I was trying too hard? Will they hate it? I should be there. I should be to stand by my producers and director and cast in case we were booed. I should be there to take the responsibility and the blame. I should be there.

“They broke her.” Harry said, shaking me from my thoughts. “She was young, naïve, unprepared. She was damaged and broken and sick. And they just… broke her even more. They made her so sad she tried to kill herself.”

I told myself I needed to be strong. If this felt sad to me, if I was fighting tears, Harry was worst.

“It was a different time.” I whispered. “No one could have imagined how big she would get. How much the whole world would love her. So they couldn’t prepare for it. Not to mention, you know, mental illness… if people are so bad at dealing with it today, back then it was even worst.”

He nodded, staring into his teacup, and took another sip.

“The saddest part is…” He started, leaving his cup on the floor before leaning down to rest his head on my lap. “I can barely remember her anymore. Her face. Her laugh. Her voice… now all I can hear is the sound on those tapes.”

I leaned down and hugged him, caressing his hair gently.

“Come on,” I said, pulling him up, “let’s go to bed.”

He let me drag him to the bed, where he laid down on his back and stared into the sky painted on our ceiling for a few seconds as I adjusted his pillows and let the glass of water on the nightstand in case he needed it.

He held my hand as I was just about to leave, pulling me closer so I’d sit next to him.

“You should leave me before they break you, too.” He said. “I would never forgive myself if they broke you.”

With my heart throbbing with love, I leaned down and placed a soft kiss on his lips.

“They can’t break me, Mr. Prince.” I told him. “And I’m not going anywhere.”

He smiled and cupped my face with his hands before bringing me closer again to kiss me.

“I’ll be right back.” I said, before kissing his forehead and leaving the room, closing the door
behind me.

I leaned my back against it and took a deep breath feeling too much at once. The Heathers frenzy, the press attacks, the rude reporter, all the press junkets and the premiere I couldn’t control, and the dickhead selling a letter that wasn’t his to sell.

Then Harry. Harry and his sweet smile, and adorable accent. Harry and his orange hair and beard, and broad shoulders. Harry and his patience, sense of humor and strong character. I loved him so much I was almost crying at how broken he was now.

I went back to the sitting room, where Johnnie and Eddy had left my suitcases, and found my phone where I had left it on the glass coffee table. I checked the time, quickly doing the math to know it was a few hours earlier on New York. I still had some time. I needed to do something. I needed to help. And I knew only one person who could help me.

After I was done, I searched on my phone for a picture Clara had sent me earlier that week. She created a habit of sending me pictures of every cover story I was on, so I could keep track of the rumors that were bad enough that needed denying. I made a collage of all the pictures I had, my face in all of them, one rumor worse than the other – most of them involving Harry -, and posted it to Instagram.

My caption read this:

‘Dear media,

I write this to you not in the hope that my words will change anything, because I have given up that childish and naïve idea a few years ago. I write this knowing that I will not see a difference. Knowing that I will not be left alone, because I understand that you are not about to give up an easy way of making money, even if it means hurting another human being that you don’t even know. Still, I write this to you. I write to you because I know that behind every hurtful, senseless, lying headline is a person whom I hope will read these words and take them to heart. I don’t expect you to change, I already know you will use each of my words against me, but in your heart, I sincerely hope you will keep them and know what they mean. And here it is:

You have experience taking normal people and making them into a big deal just to be able to knock them down once the money stops coming. This is what you do. You have done it to countless girls before me and sadly you will do it to countless girls after me. You have done it to girls that never asked for this, girls whose only mistake was falling for someone you thought mattered. Girls who needed help and support and who only found more knives on your words. But keep this in mind next time you are trying to come up with something unfunded and untruthful to write about me just to sell your magazine/newspaper or to get a click on your article online: You can’t break me. I am not a civilian who had the misfortune of being thrown into this mess after falling for someone. You can’t scare me away with teasing nicknames and insults. You can’t make me leave or break down. I am making my decisions based on my own happiness, which you can’t take from me. I have seen you do this to many people before me and I will not be your next victim.

I am not going anywhere. –J.’

I hit enter and watched as my phone loaded the page. I checked for misspells and found none. I had my head clear and conscious and I stood by each of my words. I needed them to know. Even if it didn’t change anything. Even if it simply gave them more material to write about me. I knew there were people sitting on editorial rooms all over the world, coming up or approving those headlines. I needed those people to know. To know I was not Diana. I was not Kate. I was not Chelsy. They would not break me.
I was here to stay, not because I couldn’t live without Harry or because I couldn’t imagine my life without him. Truth was, I could. And I would probably be fine if I needed to leave him. It would take time, but I would recover. The thing was… I wanted him. It wasn’t a matter of not being able to be without him. It was a matter of not wanting to.

I had unread emails and texts and a lot of missed calls, which I knew were all about the premiere of You Will Come Back To Me. But now I felt no urgency to read it. There was no rush. The reviews would still be there in the morning. Right now, all I needed was a shower and to cuddle my boyfriend in bed.

—

I prepped breakfast the following morning –the only meal I dared attempt in the kitchen- and went to wake up Harry with a plate of toasts with jam and Nutella, Earl Gray tea and more pain meds for what I knew would be a killer headache.

He groaned as I opened the curtains, letting light in even though it was a cloudy day in London – as usual.

“Good morning.” I smiled, handing him the pills first.

He stared at my raised hand for a long time with his brows furrowed as if I was asking him to solve a quantum physics equation. Then he slowly sat up and took the pills, downing them with the tea, and looked around for a long time still pensively.

“Here.” I said, putting the plate with toasts on his lap. “You shouldn’t take pills on an empty stomach.” I kissed his still sweaty forehead gently before rounding the bed again to sit by his side.

I drank my English breakfast tea as he stared at the plate of toasts, finally picking up the one with jam and starting to eat slowly.

I was now getting used to English breakfast tea. It even tasted almost good, instead of not horrible, but more than that, it tasted like home. It tasted like the cloudy, chilly British mornings in London. It tasted like Harry smelled after showering. It tasted like coming home to sleep on my own bed after a long trip, and the warmth of the cup on my hand filled the empty hole left behind by the lack of caffeine.

“What happened?” asked Harry with a husky voice.

“Well, you did what I told you not to and got drunk. Just goes to show you should really listen to me more often.” I teased.

“Ugh.” He let out, putting the plate on the nightstand with the teacup and laying back on the mattress. “The documentary.”

I smiled, sadly. “Yeah.”

He scratched his eyes, then running his hands through his hair, he stared at the ceiling.

He looked at me. “What happened to the premiere?”

I gulped, feeling slightly guilty, but not enough to regret coming back home.

“Well… I’m not sure.”
“What do you mean?”

“I haven’t read my emails yet, or heard my voice messages with updates. I’m stalling, to be honest.”

“It wasn’t canceled?”

“No.”

“Jen…” He shook his head, confused. “Why are you here?”

I shrugged. “I came to see you.”

He looked even more confused. “Jenifer, your premiere. The Brazilian movie. You… you said it was so important!”

“It is.”

“Then-then… how did you-why did you come here? Did they not need you anymore?”

“Oh, I’m sure it was fine.”

I wasn’t sure it was fine. I still didn’t know if we had been booed or if the reviews were bad or even if anyone had shown up at all, but I wasn’t about to tell him that.

“But, Jen… why? Why didn’t you stay there? What changed?”

I sighed, and smiled at him.

“I wanted to be with you.”

His expression was taken by understanding. “Jay…”

“I just wanted to see you. To be with you. I just… it was stupid, but it felt like you needed me.”

He laid on his side to look at me. “I did…” reaching over to hold my hand, he gulped. “Thank you.”

I smiled and, putting my own cup on my nightstand, I laid down too, on my side, to be on his eye level.

“I’m working so much this month that we won’t get to celebrate our anniversary.” I started. “But at least we get to be here today.”

We were dating officially for two years that very week, but with my hectic schedule, there was no time to celebrate.

I caressed his hair gently and he closed his eyes, sighing, for a long time.

“Why are you still here?” he whispered. “You saw that documentary, you saw what they did. What she went through…” His voice was weak and shaky. “You saw what this… world, what my world is about… why-why do you stay with me?”

Smiling, I told him what I had realized the previous night as I posted my letter to the media.

“Because I want to.”
We smiled, looking at each other lovingly for what felt like a long time before we heard Eddy’s voice through the speaker by the door.

“Jen? You have a package here from Richard. It says urgent on the box.”

Harry looked confused, but I just got up and headed towards the door.

“Keep eating.” I instructed, before meeting Eddy on the foyer.

He handed me the package he had signed in for, an urgent delivery from Richard which I already knew what was going to be.

Letting out a sigh of relieve, I took it to the bedroom with me.

I sat down on the bed beside Harry, who was finishing eating another toast, still with an expression of pain on his face.

“What’s that?” he asked, looking at the small box on my hands.

“Well…” I started. “Here’s the thing. You know how Richard is very fond of rare jewelry?” He nodded. “He likes to buy historic pieces on auctions, but he doesn’t want people to know, as to avoid possible burglars, or sometimes when he can’t make it to Manhattan, he has this guy that works for him going to these auctions and buying the stuff he wants.”

“Cool.”

“Yeah…” I added, looking at the box. “So, last night I called and asked him to get this guy to go to the auction of your mother’s letters and buy them.”

He stopped eating, and looked at the box. “What?”

“I realized that the auction was last night, that’s why you were so worked up.” I told him. “So I called Richard and had him get this guy to go and bid on the letter, as much as he had to, to make sure we had them. Then in the middle of the night here the auction was over and we won, so he called me and I transferred the money. Now no one can read them.” I gave him the box. “Here. They’re yours.”

He looked at the box for a long time before returning his toast to the plate and picking it up.

He opened the box and took out a plastic covered, yellowed envelope, staring at the handwriting on it for just a couple of seconds before returning them to the box and taking a deep breath.

The look of relieve on his face made me so happy.

“Jen…” he started. “I… I’ll pay you back.”

I smiled. “Don’t be silly.”

“Why?” He asked, looking at me as if seeing me for the first time.

“I bought them for you.” I shrugged. “I wanted to help… I felt like there was very little I could actually do.”

“Nothing about this is little.” He replied, leaving the box on the bed and standing up.

He walked around the bed to my side and held my hands, pulling me up so he could hug me.
I felt his muscles around me so tightly I wasn’t sure how I could still be breathing, but I didn’t care. I loved him. I loved him so much all that I had inside of me was peace over the fact that I had been able to help.

He cupped my face in his hands, resting his forehead on mine. “Thank you.”

I smiled. “Harry…” I started. “I need you to understand this… I know I have been the hardest person to love… but I’m here. And I’m here because I want to be here. The truth is, I would be fine without you. After a while, probably, but I would. And you would be great without me. I would still retire, because it’s what I want and you would still change the world in your own way. And we would be fine. What I love the most is not that we’re together because we can’t be apart. It’s not a matter of not being able to do differently. We’re not together because we have no other choice… It is a choice.” I smiled, standing on my tiptoes to kiss him. “And I chose you.”

Chapter End Notes

OKAY YOU DONT UNDERSTAND GUYS. NEXT CHAPTER THE ROYAL FAMILY FINDS OUT J BOUGHT THE DI’S LETTER. JEN IS INVITED TO A TALK WITH THEM AT BUCKINGHAM. SO MUCH HAPPENING. THE REAL EXCITING STUFF IS THE CHAPTER AFTER THAT, 68. STAY TUNED.

Can you tell I’m super excited? Jesus I’m excited
Acceptance

Chapter Summary

The royal family finds out what Jen did for Harry and give her a special talk.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

I had asked Harry not to tell anyone that I had been the one to buy his mother’s letters so they wouldn’t be released to the public. The night I gave them to him, he went to Kensington to meet William and together burned them. They now could remember their mother as they wanted to, by the good things.

As June rolled along, I finally heard how the premiere of my movie went on without me and no one but my management team discovered that I had missed it to see Harry.

You Will Come Back To Me premiered in Cannes with English subtitles and got an overall really good approval rate from audience and press. Though the reviews were good, there was some who claimed the movie was gruesome and trying a bit too hard, with almost explicit torture scenes. The Brazilian press that managed impartiality bathed us in compliments, with the usual right wing press claiming it was time to let ‘the old wounds from the dictatorship period rest’ – those jerks. I responded by twitting that history should never be forgotten, so that the same mistakes weren’t made again. It was the highest grossing national opening in history, and I was still doing interviews about it weeks later.

After a few weeks, the international press caught on – the movie was being exhibited in indie cinemas in America, since it was foreign – and the reviews were overall good, though it mostly covered my ‘chilling’ performance instead of the movie in a whole. Amazingly enough, my directing debut was what got the highest praise – something even after I quit would still be one of the best things to have happened to me.

As of June, I officially finished shooting Hamilton and had to say goodbye to Eliza Schuyler Hamilton. It would still be a few weeks before the movie wrapped completely; since I was a supporting character my scenes were over before the rest of them. The cast and production bought me a cake and opened champagne bottles after my last day of work, with the director yelling cut by saying ‘it’s a wrap on Jenifer Silva’s last movie’.

It was weird saying goodbye to a movie set. Everything from the big locations, the big cameras, the cables and productions assistants, the food table, makeup trailer and little carts to wheel us around, the microphones, all of it suddenly felt so… beautiful. I wanted to look at it all, touch it, take pictures, smell it. I was hugging people all day and trying not cry as I realized this was my last day working on a movie – any movie – ever.

I laid in bed that night, with Harry by my side, and seriously considered the possibility that I was making a mistake. As of that day – as of mid-June of 2017 – I didn’t think so. My heart was sure this was what I wanted. But what if I changed my mind? What if I grew bitter and angry? What if I let it ruin my relationship with Harry? What if he suddenly decided I wasn’t interesting enough without acting? What if I had nothing else to offer the world without my career? Was I being un-
feminist? Was I making a mistake?

I felt my heart racing in my chest and our big bedroom suddenly feel very small. The minutes passed and sleep never came. Was I making a mistake? What if I had children and resented them for keeping me from acting? What if I was a bad mother? I had always wanted to be have a big kitchen to cook every day and then had discovered I was terrible at it, what if the same thing happened in my personal life?

I had always wanted to be a mother, but what if I had a child and discovered I was terrible at it? What if I ruined my kids? What if I gave them all kinds of mommy issues? What if the paparazzi never let me alone and made my children’s life hell forever? What if they hated me for it?

I got up, finally realizing I simply couldn’t lie still anymore.

“Jen?” Harry called, sleepy.

“I’m just going to get a glass of water.” I lied. “Go back to sleep.”

I locked the bathroom door behind me and paced the floor frenetically. I caught my own reflection in the mirror and was surprised to see how pale I looked. How distressed. I looked as sick as I felt. I was surprised to see my own expression breaking in cry and covered my eyes with my hands.

I felt so stupid. I knew this was what I wanted; I wanted to leave. I wanted to stop being an actress. I simply felt the need to consider that I might change my mind one day. This big what if was making my heart weight so heavy that I couldn’t bear it anymore. I couldn’t breathe. The air came in, but it was still like I couldn’t breathe.

I couldn’t remember the last time I had a panic attack that horrible.

“Jen?” Harry called as I heard him trying to open the door. “Are you okay?”

“Yes.” I replied, trying to sound normal and casual. “I’m fine.”

There was silence as I prayed in my mind that he would be too sleepy to notice anything was wrong. As I hoped he would go back to sleep and never find that I was this messed up.

Not even a minute later the second bathroom door – to the kitchen – opened, and he walked in. I tried to quickly and quietly dry my tears and look okay.

“What happened? Do you need to use the bathroom?” I asked, hoping with a lot of words he wouldn’t notice something was wrong. “I was almost out. It’s late. We should go back to bed.”

He approached as I washed my hands. “What’s going on?”

“Nothing.”

“Jenifer.” He said, sounding more awake now as he got too close. “What’s wrong?”

“I said nothing.”

“Jen.”

“Harry, please!” I begged, stepping away. “I just- I just need a minute, okay? Can you give me a minute?”

“Are you-“
“I’m okay.” I said. “I’m just having a panic attack. It’ll pass. But I need…” I sighed. “I need to be alone.”

He walked closer, and I saw as his arms reached for me. “Let me help—"

“I need to be alone!” I shouted, crying. “Please. I just need space. I feel… suffocated. Okay? I just need you to give me some space. Can I have some space?! Please. I’ll be fine.”

He stepped back. “Okay.”

“It’s not you.” I justified. “I just feel very suffocated right now and you being here just makes me more nervous, I need to be alone for a bit. Please.”

“Okay.” He said. “Okay. I’ll be outside. Let me know—let me know if there’s anything I can do.”

I turned to the mirror and leaned against the sink. I heard as he closed the door behind him.

Did he hate me? Did I finally push him out too hard? Did he think my panic attacks would pass after my commitment issues were solved? I know I did. I had imagined they would be over after Dr. Arrow said I was done with therapy. Why didn’t they pass? Why did I still have to go through this?

I sat in the dried, empty bathtub, hugging my knees for what felt like hours. I knew it couldn’t have been long, but it felt like it was almost morning when I finally felt safe enough to get up. I felt my leg muscles hurt and I was so exhausted I could have slept for days.

I made my way to the kitchen, to get some water, or maybe tea. When I opened the door, something heavy fell on the floor.

It was Harry, who had been sitting in the floor with his back against the door. He was startled to see me.

“Hey. You— are you okay?” He got up, nervously.

Now that it was over, I felt embarrassed. Why did I keep pushing him out? Well, what was my other choice? Invite him into my mental illness? Because that would be such a better option?

“I’m… better.” I said, walking pass him to the kitchen isle. “I think. I’ll be fine. It’s starting to pass. I just need some water.”

“I made tea.” He said, leaning down to get a teacup from the floor. “I was going to bring you, but I didn’t know if you wanted me there.”

He gave me the still warm cup of chamomile tea. The warmth in my hands felt comfortable and I felt tears in my eyes.

“Why didn’t you go back to sleep?” I asked.

“I thought you might need me.” He replied. “I wanted to be able to hear if you needed me.”

I saw my own tears falling on the tea, and he seemed restless a couple of meters from me. As if he didn’t know if he could hug me. I didn’t know how to tell him I wanted him to, not after I pushed him away.

I dried my eyes and drank the tea.
“I guess even a good, healthy relationship and professional success doesn’t cure panic attacks.” I sighed.

“Well,” he started, “on the internet they say it’s not about curing it. It’s about… you know, dealing with it. Getting used to it and learning what works best to ease it. So… I guess you’re doing well.”


He didn’t ask if that was true, in contrast to me having thrown him out of the bathroom; he didn’t contest the information. He just stepped closer and caressed my back, gently.

I left the teacup on the kitchen isle and turned to him, wrapping my arms around his waist, feeling grateful that his wrapped around me just as fast. His smell was all I was missing to calm down.

“Well, I’m not going anywhere.” He said.

I realized, with my face buried on the creek of his neck, that I wanted to marry him.

—

Doctor Who was a new and very surreal experience. It was the first, and would be only, completely British project I was a part of. I was interpreting a new incarnation of the Doctor’s granddaughter, Susan, who was the first companion from season one. Back then, the Doctor left her behind on earth to stay with the man she loved and live a normal, human life and she was never seen again. On this Christmas special, the Doctor was summoned by a mysterious rebel leader from an alien planet who had made dangerous alliances just to get to him. Betraying her allies, she whisked the Doctor into the Tardis and took him to Earth to demand he help save her husband.

The Doctor obliges, not recognizing his granddaughter’s new face, and together they leave on a trip through different times to find out what happened to the husband who had been captured. They find he was on a Dalek ship and invade it to rescue him, only to find he had been dead for a very long time. Susan revels herself, explaining her regeneration, blaming the Doctor for expecting her to be okay after leaving her behind, defenseless, and leaves him on the Dalek ship stealing the Tardis and running away. She comes back in the middle of the final battle, saved her grandfather and they makeup.

He drops her off on present day London, after she tells him she wanted to stay this time. She explains she likes the planet; the people, and so they have an emotional goodbye as Susan bids him good luck. ‘Go be amazing.’ He tells her. And she smiles as the Tardis leaves, before turning on her heels and wondering off in London. The end.

I was excited about all of it: being Susan, one of my favorite classic characters, wearing a badass alien rebel leader uniform for my first scene, all of my sassy lines to the Doctor, and especially the big fight scene in which she rescued him. It wasn’t only a great way to end my career, it wasn’t only a great Christmas Special. It was a dream come true. The last remaining item on my professional bucket list, and after memorizing the script, I went into the BBC studios for my first table read excited and happy.

Peter Capaldi was nice, amazingly talented and funny as hell, and he and the rest of the team made me feel welcome from that very first day, expressing how honored they were that this was my last project ever. I made sure they knew that so was I.

After the panic attack was over, I had been able to revisit my feelings and understand that I truly wanted this. I wanted to leave. And I could, very well, one day regret it, but I didn’t yet. I could
one day decide I didn’t love Harry. I could one day decide I wanted to move back to Brazil. I could one day decide I wanted to be a fucking lawyer, who knows? I don’t. All I knew was what I wanted on the present, and on the present I wanted to stop being an actress, and so I went to work to make sure my last project ever would have as much of me as my first one did, and that’s how I spent my month of June.

—

On July, England grew slightly hotter as summer was at full speed. That made shooting on location for Doctor Who much easier, though if I’m being honest, I had experienced winters warmer than that in Brazil and California.

I came home for lunch one afternoon, after shooting nearby in London with Peter, and found not Harry, but Edward Lane-Fox on my kitchen. He had been interestingly absent of our apartment since I had moved in, which I was grateful for, though I knew Harry was probably keeping him away to give me space, and conducting business on Kensington instead. I knew, though, they had meetings there when I wasn’t home, which is why I assumed Harry was there when I saw Edward sitting on the couch in my sitting room.

“He’s not here.” Edward informed when I called out for Harry.

“Where is he?”

“Not here.”

“Seriously?” I asked, annoyed. “Are you waiting for him?”

“I’m here to see you, actually.”

I felt my own face twist in curiosity. “Why?”

He cleaned his throat. “His Royal Highness, Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, has requested the honor of your presence for tea next Saturday afternoon, before he and Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth make their annual trip up to Balmoral for the summer.”

There was a long silence. “Excuse me?”

He sighed. “Prince Phillip, the Queen’s husband, Harry’s grandfather.” He explained, a bit brisker, impatient now. “He wants you to have tea with him.”

“Why?”

He shrugged. “Damned if I know.”

I resented his tone, as if I wasn’t someone worth having tea with, but I had bigger concerns.

“Why-why-why would he do that? Why would he invite me? Will Harry be there?”

“No. Just you.”

“Why?”

“He already knows his grandson, he wants to meet you.”

“Why?!?”
“Jenifer, do I look like someone Prince Philip confides in?” he asked, sarcastic. “I don’t know! All I know is I was instructed to carry the invitation and bring back your answer. Can you attend?” he barely afforded me a second to think before walking fast towards me. “Now, may I remind you, this is the Queen’s husband we’re talking about. He is not only highly influential with the Queen, and the country’s leadership, but also famous for having no filter and a strong personality… and he adores Harry!”

“You’re saying I have to go?”

“I’m saying it would be on your best interest to go.” He nodded. “Prince Philip is… different. He used to be a military man, and moved to England after marrying the Queen when she was still heir apparent. He had to leave his home country and family behind, as well as his job after the Queen’s father died and she had to take the crown. He was expected to sit back and be a gentle and passive consort, but he has always taken a leading role, refusing to fit into the mold they built for him…”

“Harry once told me his grandfather said he was excited to see me ruffle some feathers on the monarchy.”

Edward grinned. “Sounds like him…”

“What do you think this is about?”

He shrugged. “All I know is it would be highly rude to say no.”

I sighed. “Okay. Set it up.” He smiled and was heading to the door when I called. “Edward?” he turned to look at me. “What should I wear?!”

—

When the day came, I was wearing nude pumps, a knee-length black pencil skirt and a lace white Dolce & Gabbana shirt with sheer, lose long sleeves and I high neck and a white Dolce & Gabbana purse with Sara Weinstock French lace white and gold earrings.

It was hard to tell who was more nervous about the meeting, Harry or me. He had spent every day that week asking if I wanted him to get me out of it or if I wanted him to come with, and as much as the answer to both these questions were yes, I had to keep it together. I knew it wasn’t very mature to bring my boyfriend to what seemed to be a very mature tea with his grandfather. I needed to face it alone, but all in me was begging to run for the hills.

Kate helped me chose an outfit, though she wasn’t as helpful with calming me down.

“I had a conversation with them as well, you know. Though it was only after William and I were already engaged… so I don’t know what they might want with you now…” she said, making the knot on my stomach get even tighter.

We rode into Buckingham Palace without problem, as my name was on a list, and a guard with red uniform and one of those big, furry hats opened the car door for me when we parked inside, out of the view for all the tourists who were gathering outside at the gates. As it was summer, the Queen and Prince Philip were about to travel to Balmoral and the Palace would be open for visitation soon.

It’s hard to describe Buckingham fucking Palace. Seeing it is truly the only way of understanding the magnitude of its huge walls, the intricate ornate ceilings, the shining glass chandeliers… all of the floors were covered in red carpet. All of the walls up to the high ceilings were covered in beautiful paintings inside of delicate frames. Every single piece of furniture seemed to belong in a
museum and I wasn’t convinced I wasn’t in one.

A gentle white haired man met me in the entrance and introduced himself as the butler; because of course, they had a butler. Calling my ‘Miss Silva’, he instructed one of my bodyguards to stay behind and allowed one of them to follow me until the sitting room, where I was expected, though he wouldn’t be able to come in. Johnnie stayed behind, Eddy followed me, and together the three of us braved the maze-like halls of Buckingham Palace.

“When you are introduced into the room, you will stop just ahead of the door and curtsy, can you curtsy?” the butler asked me. I nodded; Harry had been rehearsing it with me the whole week.

“You will wait until you are summoned by His Royal Highness, who is the one hosting you since he made the invitation, and then you are allowed to approach. When you are near, if he offers you his hand, you may shake it. If not, do not attempt to touch him. When you are near, you will curtsy again just before taking your seat. Do you understand?”

I wasn’t paying attention, as at this moment Eddy, who had been walking behind us caught up just in time to pull my sleeve and make me look at a hall on the left, where a tiny corgi could be seen playing with a ball. I had to suppress a delighted gasp.

“You will refer to Prince Philip upon your arrival as Your Royal Highness, and after then as sir. To the Queen as Your Majesty and then ma-am. Ma-am as in ham, not madam. Same with the duchess, though for her at first you will use Your Royal Highness as well. Do you need me to repeat?”

I stopped walking and waited until he did too, to look at me. “I thought I was only having tea with Prince Philip.”

“No, you are being hosted by Prince Philip.” He explained. “Because he is the one who invited you. But you will be joined by Her Majesty the Queen and Her Royal Highness, the Duchess of Cornwall.”

I felt my heart beat louder in my chest and I wondered if the room was supposed to be spinning. I would be having tea with the Queen?! On Buckingham Fucking Palace?! Worse: I would be having tea with Harry’s stepmother who hated me?!

Feeling all the blood rush from my face, I only remembered to keep up with the butler when Eddy nudged me gently on the back. I had no time to go back now. I wished I had asked Harry to come with. Screw being mature, I wanted him. I wanted him there immediately.

‘Don’t be ridiculous’, I told myself. ‘You have faced annoying, sexist movie directors and casting directors, you have won two Academy Awards. You can do this. They’re just people. You can do this.’

A few more turns in one hallway more magnificent than the last and suddenly there we were. There was a big set of white, double doors guarded by men in suits I imagined were protection officers. The butler knocked twice before opening them and taking one single step in.

“Miss Jenifer Silva.” He announced, before stepping back to allow me to come in.

I gave Eddy one last look of panic, which he responded with two thumbs up, and tried to make my face serene and confident as I stepped in.

The first thing I did was step back with one leg behind the other in a curtsy as I said the words ‘Your Royal Highness’, then, remembering that he wasn’t alone, I quickly added ‘…es, Your
Majesty.’ Was that how it went? Should I just have greeted Prince Philip? Was the Queen supposed to be first? Oh, screw this.

The butler made his way out and closed the door.

“Miss Silva.” The shaky voice came from the men in suit and tie closer to the door, standing in front of an armchair.

Harry’s grandfather was as tall as him even at his nineties. He was almost entirely bald and had clear eyes and a strong nose, but an overall frail appearance. He smiled as he raised his hand for me to shake and I took it as the invitation to walk in.

I curtsied again as I held his hand, hoping I was doing it right.

“Welcome to Buckingham. Thank you for joining us.” Prince Philip said.

“Thank you, sir.” I smiled, nervously, looking at the other two women in the room. “Hello.”

Wait. Was it ‘ma-am’? Or should I repeat Your Majesty and Your Royal Highness?

“Welcome, Miss Silva.” the Queen greeted from her seat with a nod. Sitting by her side, Camila smiled. They didn’t get up, so I assumed I didn’t have to shake their hands and instead took the seat next to Prince Philip when he gestured towards it.

“Thank you for having me.” I said, leaving my purse on the floor. “Please, call me Jenifer.”

I took a look around the big room. It had cream walls and pale, golden ruffled curtains as well as a big, white marble fireplace.

“Would you care for some tea, Jenifer?” Prince Philip asked, gesturing to the small table in front of the couches. “Though I heard you prefer coffee. We have some cappuccino here, as well.”

“Oh, that is so kind, sir. Thank you.” I said, sincere. He asked around about my choice of drink? Or was my not drinking tea a matter of discussion ever since I had refused the Queen’s tea in Scotland in 2013? “I’m afraid I am not drinking caffeine anymore. So tea will do.”

“Yes, Harry told us you had an unfortunate hospital stay last year. I hope all is well.” The Queen said.

“It is.” I nodded, trying not to picture Harry telling his grandparents about my dramatic ulcer burst in the middle of the night. “I am much better. Unfortunately for that to be the doctors told me I had to cut off caffeine and alcohol.”

“Did they tell you to cut off your will to live as well?” Prince Philip asked.

It took me a while to notice he was making a joke. His frail expression had only a very slight air of a smile on it, but his wife and daughter-in-law giggled.

“Camila tells me you are a fan of art.” He went on.

I looked at Camila, who was serving a cup of tea, and remembered the dinner in our apartment when she had criticized my art taste. “I am.”

“We have a Van Gogh, you know. In the gallery.” He told me. “Present from a German chancellor years ago. I can show you if you’d like.”
“That would be great, sir.” I smiled. “Thank you.”

“I was very impressed by your actions with the United Nations, Jenifer.” The Queen told me. “Very impressed, indeed. The U.N.’s president was here late last year and we talked about your developments. He says celebrity Goodwill Ambassadors don’t usually do as much work as you do.”

So apparently, the Queen of motherfucking England was talking to the president of the United Nations about me. Sure, why not?

“What have you been working on lately?” Camila asked, as she gave me the cup of tea. “It’s Borderless, isn’t it?”

“Yes.” I said, surprised. “Uh…” I stared at the cup, trying to digest everything that was happening at once. “Well, we have launched the Borderless website late last year, with resources for refugees all over the world to find information about jobs, asylum and shelter, either official or volunteered. We are preparing language classes as well, so that people starting a new life in other countries can adapt easier. And we will add a new feature to it still this year with an easy and anonymous way for them to speak about attacks or abuse by people or authorities.”

“Impressive.” Prince Philip said.

I suppressed a nervous giggle. “And our plan for next year is to prepare an arts week with refugee work in France, and to organize a global donation campaign for people who lost most of their belongings in their journey.”

They nodded, and I took a deep breath. I drank my tea, trying to keep calm, but I could think was, what is happening?! Is this my life?! When did it become normal for me to have tea with royalty?!

The time passed with more work talk. I updated Her Majesty on the progress of my charity in Brazil, EducaUP, and she was pleased to hear that we were already implementing the scholarship program I had talked about in 2013 in Scotland when we had met.

As I watched Prince Philip tell me about their experience working to aid flood victims on Northern Britain, it was easy to see he was Harry’s grandfather. They talked in the same laid back way, and had the same posture and jaw. They looked so alike it was weird for me to understand that my boyfriend was related to these people.

“It was very brave of you, Jenifer, to speak about your past on your book.” Queen Elizabeth said. “We had been worried that Harry refused to acknowledge those things, but it shows real strength of character to admit to your mistakes so publicly.”

I wasn’t sure how to respond to that. “…thank you.”

“You must wonder, I think, Jenifer, about the reason I wanted to meet you today.” Prince Philip said. “Firstly, of course, I was growing tired of being the only one in this family that was yet to meet the notorious Jenifer Silva.” He smiled, and I mimicked, hoping notorious was a compliment, but somehow thinking it probably wasn’t. “But mostly I wanted, and I know my wife and Camila feel the same way, which is why they wanted to join us, to thank you.”

I finished, very slowly, chewing a piece of crumpet. “…I’m sorry?”

He smiled. “You must forgive Harry. He had good intentions. He told us you were the one who bought Diana’s letters from that awful man.”
Damn it, Harry.

“Oh.” I said, returning my teacup to the table. “Right.”

“We were wondering why.” Prince Philip added. I looked up at him.

“I’m sorry?”

They exchanged unsure looks and I wondered if they even knew where they were going with this.

“You are under no obligation with this family, Jenifer.” The Queen said, very gently. “And yet you used your own funds to protect us from what had the potential to be a scandalous episode. And we were wondering if you could tell us what motivated you to do so.”

“Oh, well…” I sighed. “I guess…” I remembered Harry’s painful expression and the heartbreak in his voice when he said he was toxic. That I should leave. “Harry was hurting.” I shrugged. “I wanted to help.”

“We were hoping…” Prince Philip said, “it meant that you decided to protect this family because you could have been considering being a part of it.”

There was silence. They stared at me as I struggled to breathe, making, slowly, sense of their words. “I- I… Well…”

“It’s ok if you don’t want to.” He added.

“It’s not that.” I smiled. “I love Harry. I want to be with him.”

I hoped they took this as enough of an answer. To be honest I didn’t actually wanted to be a part of their family. But I wanted Harry. I wanted his family. And if they were it, well, then I couldn’t be too picky.

“As hard as it is, Jenifer, we are hoping you understand that we come with the package.” Prince Philip said.

I was silent again for a long time.

“Surely you understand I come with my very own package.” I told them.

They grinned. “Oh, we do.” Prince Philip said.

“We understand, however,” the Queen added, “you have been letting it behind you, haven’t you?”

I wondered if she meant my retirement announcement.

“In a way, yes.”

“As I have told you, I’m a big fan of your work with charity and the United Nations” She added. “Is that what you will be focusing on in the future?”

“One of the things, yes.” I said. “I do love the work.”

She nodded, and grinned at her husband mysteriously before taking another sip of her tea.

“I think you could do great things as a member of this family.” Prince Philip said.
This had to be a prank.

“I’m sorry, what?”

He looked at me. “What?”

Though I felt very confused about what all of this meant, they seemed to be simply having another Tuesday.

“Are you…” I started, feeling all the caution and politeness Lane-Fox and the Butler had warned me about flee from my body at once, “are you giving me your… blessing?”

“Oh, Jenifer…” Prince Philip chuckled. “If you are the kind of person who needs someone’s blessing to do anything you have already disappointed me.”

I felt my own face twist in confusion as I hoped I wasn’t being rude. All I could think was, what is happening?!

Camila, who had stayed quiet through most of this meeting, looked at me.

“We are acknowledging that we haven’t made it easy for you.” She said. “I know I haven’t. My only excuse is feeling protective over Harry, whom I have loved as my own through most of his life. But we see you making sacrifices for this family, Jenifer, and we see your commitment to it, and so we are here to tell you that moving forward, if this is what you and Harry want, we would like to help you adapt to this… world.”

“…What exactly does that mean?” I asked.

“It means I’m sorry I’ve been difficult.” She added. “It means if you love him and if you are serious about this, we won’t post a challenge anymore…” She paused. “We will welcome you.”

Inside, all I had was: ??????????????

Chapter End Notes

GUYS. GUys. Ooooh guys................. hang on. We’re getting there. Soon. Sorru about the delay in updating!
The Easiest Answer

Chapter Summary

Jen celebrates her last day of work by asking Harry a very important question that changes their entire lives.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“So, your career is almost over…”

A few years ago, that sentence would have me on a panic attack. As of August of 2017, however, it put a smile on my face.

“I know!” I told Kate, as we sat in her garden on Kensington Palace that afternoon.

Behind us, William and Harry were fighting over the proper way to use the grill. Ahead, George was pushing little Charlotte on a toy car as Vodka and Lupo, their dog, played tirelessly on a corner dangerously close to Kate’s petunias.

We had wine glasses on our hands and the fading English summer sun was setting in the sky. It had been almost a year since my ulcer burst, and I was only now feeling comfortable enough to start drinking again.

“How do you feel about it?”


“That’s good.” She smiled. “So as of next month you’ll be officially unemployed.”

“Well,” I laughed. “Just technically… I still have meetings about my company, and my charity in Brazil… and the U.N. Borderless projects.”

“So not so much unemployed.”

“Exactly.”

Kate got up, and went to her children to fix Charlotte’s hat, which was falling, so she could still be protected from the sun. As she made her way back, I tried to gather the courage to ask her about what I had been wanting to.

“So I had a meeting in Buckingham a couple of months ago.” I told her. “With the Queen, and Prince Philip and Camila.”

“I know.” She smiled. “It’s all we could speculate about on the family group text.”

I grinned. “The Royal family has a group text?”

She giggled. “Just the young ones.”
“Anyway,” I went on, “it was one of the weirdest things that ever happened to me.”

“I can imagine… I had a similar talk to them before marrying William. It was terrifying. And the worst thing I have ever done is wear a transparent dress when Will wasn’t even my boyfriend yet… so I can’t imagine how it was for you.”

“Oh, that’s right.” I smiled. “I heard about that on a documentary when you got engaged… so that’s true?”

“Oh, yes. I still have it.”

“You have the dress?!”

“Well, a replica. The designer has the original, I guess, but he gave me a replica when I got engaged.” I was staring at her in shock until she offered, “would you like to see it??!”

The answer was, of course, yes. As both a fan of pop culture and fashion, I would want to see (a replica of) the dress that made Prince William fall in love with Kate Middleton.

“Where are you guys off to in such a hurry?!” Will asked as we passed by them.

“I’m gonna show Jen the dress.” Kate told him.

We made our way upstairs and down the hallway until we were in her bedroom, where she guided me to the back of her walk-in closet where, in a big, fancy, velvet box, sat the dress.

It was a tube, short, transparent dark dress, shapeless and weird.

“This has early-thousands written all over it.” I joked, and Kate laughed, sitting at the edge of her closet. “It must be weird knowing exactly what you were wearing when your husband fell in love with you.”

“Well, I wouldn’t say he fell in love with me in that dress.” She corrected. “But first time he fell attracted to me, sure. It’s definitely interesting.”

“Can you imagine Charlotte all grown up one day wearing this?”

She laughed. “Oh, I will make her wear it. Just for the fun of it. Will is going to hate it, of course.”

I returned her dress to the box, and looked around at the closet. One side was full of overcoats of all colors and shapes. “Nice.” I marveled.

“Royal uniform.” She told me. “But what about you? Don’t you know at what point Harry first fell attracted to you? ‘Cause then you would know what you were wearing.”

“Hm.” I considered it. “Let’s go find out.”

We made our way back downstairs, to find Harry and Will leaning against the wall in the garden around the grill.

“Hey, babe?” I called, “We were talking about this and, do you remember when you first felt attracted to me?”

Harry gave me a pensive look for about one second. “First time I ever saw you.”

“Nice.” William said, approvingly.
“Weren’t you engaged when you two met?” Kate asked.

“Not nice.” William corrected.

Harry grinned. “Being in a relationship doesn’t make me blind.”

“No, but like, the first time you felt attracted to me not in a, well, she’s cute, way. In a, hey, I’d hit that, way.”

He thought about it. “February ninth, 2013.”

“That’s specific.” Kate giggled.

I gave him a side smile. “That’s the day you moved to New York.”

“Yes.” He agreed.

“We were just friends then.”

“Yes.” He repeated, making Will smile.

“Harry, come on.”

“You’re attractive and I have eyes.” He justified.

“I mean the first time you saw me and considered that I could potentially be someone you could have something with.”

“February ninth, 2013!” He repeated.

“We weren’t in a relationship for months!” I quickly realized my mistake, seeing as, as far as the world knew, we had started dating a lot sooner that the reality. “I mean, weeks!”

“It was the first time I saw you while being single, and now I could properly appreciate your looks… I ringed your doorbell, you opened up the door,” he remembered, “it was winter and it had snowed.”

“Do you remember what pajamas you were wearing?” Kate asked.

“A sweatshirt!”

“…and nothing else.” Harry marveled.

“I had panties on!” I justified.

“Exactly.” He grinned.

“Ah…” Will and Kate let out, together, as if that solved the mystery.

“And we were just friends!” I insisted.

“And your legs were out!” he laughed. “You can’t blame me!”

“I had just woken up!” I remembered. “My face was bloated and my hair was all over the place and I had no makeup on!”

He leaned closer and enunciate the words as much as he could. “Legs!” Will and Kate laughed, and
I joined. Harry leaned down and held on to one of my legs, pulling it up. “Your beautiful, tanned, fit, Victoria Secret Angel legs!”

“And in that moment you decided something would happen?!”

“Well, no. I decided if I had the chance, sure, I’d take it.”

“More interestingly,” William interrupted our little banter, “when did you first feel attracted to him?!”

“Oh, I wanna know that too.” Harry said. “Because, believe it or not, she used to say I wasn’t her type when we met.”

“Oh, I believe it.” William replied.

“Yeah, that actually makes sense.” Kate agreed, and Harry looked at them, upset, making me giggle. “No offense, though.”

“Yes, offense, though.” Harry told her.

“I don’t think I remember…” I said.

He leaned in to whisper in my ear. “Brazil? At the pier?”

“Oh, no a lot sooner.” I replied. “Oh!” and then leaned in to whisper in his ear. “My fake, surprise birthday dinner!”

“Really?” He asked, smiling.

“You were wearing the shirt that I got you.” I smiled.

“So you were attracted by the fact I was doing what you told me to do?”

“Like every woman in the world.” Kate added, making us laugh.

—

About one week later, at the end of August, I shot the last scene of my career. The summer was almost over and I was standing exactly on the same spot Harry and I had come by before, across the river Thames from London Eye. The Big Ben behind me, the Tardis in front, I took a deep breath, fighting back tears of joy, exhaustion and some melancholy, and time after time, after the director said ‘action’, I repeated my line.

“Goodbye, grandfather.” I said, softly, both because Susan was emotional and because so was I. “And don’t worry,” I added, smiling, “I’ll be fine.”

“I know you will.” Peter Capaldi replied. “You’ll be amazing.”

He closed the door of the big, blue, telephone box and a big fan behind the camera made my hair fly slightly, as if the Tardis’ departure was causing it. They yelled ‘cut’, and the production team started dismantling the Tardis for my last shot, walking away.

I stood in place, not daring to move too much or speak to anyone anything more than the necessary so I could avoid crying. I looked to my left, to find Alessa sitting in my chair beside the director, where Peter was now joining her to take his seat in his chair by her side.
I smiled as she raised her phone to take a selfie with him, who was kind enough to smile for her. Earlier that day, when she arrived to watch me on my last day of work after teaching her last class of the day, she had posted a picture with me with a caption that read ‘twelve years ago my father introduced me and this girl to a British show called Doctor Who. Now she’s a part of it and it’ll be the last thing she ever does as an actress #farewellJen #shesgonnacry’.

“Jen? You want to see it?” The director called me.

I walked to the monitor where he was watching the scene we had just shot and he gave me a headphone set. I watched my own emotional expression as I said the words ‘Don’t worry, I’ll be fine’, biting my lip to avoid crying.

“It’s bittersweet that those are the last words of your career.” The director said. “I’ll be fine.”

I nodded, giving back the headphone set, and smiled. He was right. Susan was right. I would be fine.

They yelled action again and I smiled to the sky, pretending I could see the Tardis fly away. In my body, Susan took a deep breath and smiled to the sound of birds singing nearby. I took two blind steps back and turned on my heels, to walk away in the direction of the Big Ben. I walked a while and the director finally yelled ‘cut’.

I stood in place, waiting for instructions, and as I did I enjoyed a comfortable thought: I’m free. Tonight, as soon as we’re done here, I won’t be an actress anymore. I can do whatever I want.

“Jen?” The director had walked towards me.

“Yes?”

“We’re good. The shot was great, we got it. We can do it again if you need more time before saying goodbye to this.”

I smiled at him, grateful. But I didn’t need more time.

“Don’t worry.” I told him. “I’ll be fine.”

Then he grabbed the megaphone and I heard for the last time the words that had always brought me so much joy:

“It’s a wrap on Jenifer Silva.”

It was a couple of hours later that I got home. I changed out of my character’s clothes, hugged the production team and Peter and took photos with all of them. They gave me a date for the wrap party and then Eddy, Johnnie and me gave Alli a ride home before going back to Knightsbridge.

I watched the sky from the car window, breathing what felt deeper than ever before. I had a smile on my lips as I rested my head on the cold glass, realizing that I had no time to wake up in the morning.

The promotion of Broken would only begin on October. Then on the month after that it would be Tangled, and in December we would promote Hamilton and Doctor Who’s Christmas special. Until then, a little more than a whole month, I had nothing. I mean, sure, I had a few meetings for the company, EducaUP and the U.N., but those things were sporadic and I could schedule them at my
will now that I didn’t have to fit them into an acting timetable. I could sleep in tomorrow. I could go spend next weekend in Brazil with my family. I could grab Harry and fly to anywhere in the world.

I was free.

I felt like crying again, but this time out of pure joy. I hadn’t yet realized how much I felt stuck with acting. I knew it in some level, but was only now realizing how much I wanted this. I could commit to the U.N. now, truly commit. Make plans for bigger, more audacious projects that needed more time. I could travel and research deeper on the subject of the refugee crisis. I could run another marathon, maybe the London one, or California’s one, or simply the New York Marathon again.

I ducked my head as we entered the gates, the paparazzi flashes were annoying but even them couldn’t ruin my night. I ran out of the car the minute we were inside, leaving Eddy and Johnnie behind. I was electric on the elevator, dancing alone hoping there was no one watching the security camera footage.

I sprinted out before the doors were even fully opened and basically jumped inside the apartment dramatically.

“Honey, I’m home!” I screamed, excited, and giggled at my own joke.

Vodka was nowhere to be seen, as I didn’t hear her high pitched barks or the little patter of her paws on the hardwood floors. I took off my jacket and went to the bedroom, trying to find Harry, feeling slightly annoyed that he wasn’t here already.

It was my very last day of acting work ever. I wanted to celebrate! I wanted to hug him! I wanted to turn on the music as loud as possible and dance until my feet hurt! We needed to go have dinner somewhere or at the very least order some pizza! And yet, he was off somewhere as if it was just another Tuesday…

He wasn’t in the bedroom, either, but there was a box on my side of the bed, with a note that read: ‘Dress up. I’m waiting on the terrace to celebrate!’

I laughed, immediately regretting being mad. Of course he remembered it was my last day today. I had been marking off the days in the calendar in the kitchen since I had the official last day of shooting from the Doctor Who producers.

I quickly undressed and put on the dress I found on the box, a black, one sleeve, knee-length pleated dress that I matched with purple Giuseppe Zanotti strap sandals. I liked the idea of matching purple with yellow, so I put on the yellow diamond earrings he had given me for Christmas, and the bracelet that had been my birthday gift. I brushed my hair and reapplied some lipstick from the makeup I was wearing on set and, after dabbing some more perfume on my neck, I practically ran out of the room.

In my euphoria, I struggled to keep my balance on the stiletto heels as I climbed the small stairs into the living room and, before I had even opened the terrace doors, I could see it looked different. The rails around it were covered in Christmas lights and except for a path on the floor connecting the door to the small, round table in the center of the terrace, which was covered with a linen towel and prepared for dinner with a candle on top, every piece of it was covered in flowers. They were in vases, on the floor and hanging from tables, mostly white hibiscuses, orchids, baby breath and roses. The whole place smelled amazing, and I could hear, just very slightly, a sweet, slow song
playing. Above, only the starry night sky of August. Below, the handsome smile of my boyfriend.

He smiled broadly when he saw me, just as he was lighting up the candle on the table, and opened his arms gesturing to the whole room. “Hi.”

I laughed, excitedly, and unceremoniously ran towards him – as I had been doing, consciously or not, since we met. He wrapped his arms around me as I jumped, picking me up when I hugged him with all of my strength.

“Hi.” I replied, smiling, feeling the butterflies on my stomach go wild.

“Happy last day of work.” He said, his voice muffled by the creek of my neck, where his face was hiding.

I sighed, happily, and leaned back to look at him – to stare into the sweet, small, turquoise blue eyes I had fallen in love with. He smiled, the handsome smile that could always make me weak.

I loved him so much it hurt – no, it didn’t hurt. It healed. It filled me. With peace, joy and calm. I loved him so much I felt excited about the future ahead. Loving Harry gave me hope; gave me time; gave me air; gave me strength to stand on my own.

I loved him so much I couldn’t help but nervously smile when I said my next words.

“Marry me.” I asked.

Harry’s arms around me loosen up as he leaned farther back. He looked at me, completely serious.

“Wh-what?!”

I giggled, finding his shock so absolutely funny in contrast to the calm inside of me. It felt obvious that I was asking him to marry me. Of course I was. He was there, in my future, every time I pictured it. I wanted him with me. I wanted him to be my - I forced the word to come out on my mind – husband. I did. I wanted him to be my husband. I wanted to be his wife. I wanted to have his five ginger, blue-eyed babies and I wanted to marry his sorry ass on a big, fancy church with the whole world watching.

All of this felt both terrifying and absolutely wonderful and the more I thought about it, the more I wanted it.

“Jen?” Harry called me back from my own thoughts. “What did you just say? You-you can’t just say that and stop talking!”

I laughed again, nervously.

“Harry…” I breathed, stepping back so he could see my face right, so he could know I wasn’t kidding. I held his hands tightly, never wanting to let go. “I want to marry you.” He looked even more shocked as I could see his breath was getting heavier. “I don’t have rings…” I realized, regretful, that I should have planned this through. “I should have bought wedding bands, like in the Brazilian tradition… I didn’t even prepare a speech… I should- I should have… but…” I sighed, looking at him, feeling my heart full of love. “But I have my heart.” My voice broke as I realized I would not be able to keep the tears away. “And I wanna spend the rest of my life with you, if you’ll have me. In fact, I would be honored to call you my husband, because you are the most amazing, the most wonderful, kindest man I know and I love you… Will you-will-Will you marry me?”

You could have fit the entire history of humankind in the silent pause that followed. The song was
still playing; the candle and Christmas lights were still lit; the flowers still smelled amazing and Jenifer Silva still had just had her last day of work as an actress.

But Harry wasn’t saying anything… until he did.

“No.” He said. “No, no.” he shook his head, and pulled his hands from mine. I felt like he was pulling my heart with them. “…No.”

He walked away, pass me, out the doors and out of sight, and I was left behind. Alone.

I was confused, to say the least. Did he just… left?! Did he literally just say no? After everything we’ve been through, after all of this shit I went through to let him into my heart, did he really just decided he, what? Didn’t want me anymore? Right as I ask him to fucking marry me?! Did that just happen?

There wasn’t even room for sadness inside of me – though I was sure I would make some in a while. Right then and there, all I felt was anger. In fact, I was livid. I turned on my purple, stiletto heels and marched after him, out of the painfully romantic terrace he had prepared for me.

I walked downstairs ready to tell him some truths and found him leaving the kitchen into the hallway to the dining room. He looked surprised to see me there, almost… disappointed.

Disappointed? To find me in my own house? Which we bought together? Oh, no. Fuck him.

“Listen,” I started, realizing I had no idea how to go about this. Was he seriously breaking up with me?! Or, or what? Deciding we needed to wait?! “Okay, seriously? Harry, this is ridiculous. Did-did you have to wait to do this after I pour my heart out to you?” He looked scared. Good. “I laid all my cards in the fucking table and you do what?! Say no?! I mean, I get it if you don’t want to marry me. That’s your right. God knows it’s probably a wise decision! But did you have to wait to do this now? Because you could have just broken up with me ages ago! Maybe before we bought a fucking house together! Maybe after I said I wanted to be with you forever! We didn’t have to be seen out and about together! You didn’t have to make the whole world believe we were fine just to break up with me all of a sudden!”

“Jenifer, what?!” he interrupted. “No, wait-“

“You’re unbelievable!” I shouted, pointing a finger at him as my drama queen roots begged me to. “Unbelievable!”

“Jen, shut up!”

That was all I needed before I started positively screaming.

“YOU SHUT-,” he got down on one knee, and pulled out a small, velvet box, “…up.”

I wasn’t screaming anymore. My finger was frozen on the air as I realized what the box looked like. It looked like a ring box. As in, an engagement ring box.

“You said you didn’t have rings,” he explained, “but I do. I thought we should do it right.” He showed me the box. “I came to pick it up, it was on a plate. I was gonna give it to you at dinner… but then you did… that.” He laughed. “Most interesting person I know…” he mumbled. I pulled my own arm back to my chest and held it, trying to keep myself together now as I realized what was happening.

I had a feeling we weren’t breaking up anymore.
“I bought this almost two years ago, right after you said you loved me for the first time.” He went on, and opened the little box now to reveal a big, yellow diamond engagement ring.

I couldn’t help but gasp at the sight. “It’s huge.” I whispered, unable to help myself.

He gave me a wicked grin that he reserved for his worst puns. “…that’s what she said.” He joked, looking cocky, and we broke down laughing.

“You’re not allowed to make a dick joke when you’re proposing, Harry!” I said, still giggling, through tears.

“Sorry…” he smiled, shaking his head. And then he took a deep breath. “Jenifer,” he sighed, while I dried the tears from my cheeks. He let out a small, nervous laugh. “What can I say? You’re… you’re the craziest, silliest, most resilient, headstrong person I know. You’re… you’re never on time. I don’t understand how you can be so neurotic and somehow always be late to everything.”

He smiled, and so did I, wondering if I was ever going to breathe normally again; if this was real.

“I don’t know anyone with a bigger sense of purpose, or more work ethics than you, about literally everything you do…” He added, staring at me intensely. “You… you overthink everything and every question, even the obvious ones. Nothing is ever simple or easy with you, and your ability to read too much into everything and anything and make up reasons why nothing in life is really simple is something I have learned to love about you.”

He shrugged, looking like he didn’t even know how that happened. I didn’t either.

“I love the smell of your hair. I love your voice. Your angry voice, your work voice, your boss voice. Your ‘I love you’ voice, which took me so long to hear. I love your excited squeals, I love your crying voice, I love your singing voice, which you will show me at any time, because the fact is you can burst into song at any minute of the day, or night, without any warning.”

I laughed, and he did too.

“And I honestly don’t know how I’ve come to love that, because before you, I actually hated musicals… but just like you usually do, you explained them to me and, just like it usually goes, you made it sound so beautiful and… purposeful.” He smiled. “And you make me feel like life is a musical, not just because it keeps me on edge that you can burst into song at any given point of the day, but because when you walk into a room…” he sighed. “God, I could sing an entire song about how everything else goes black and white and you’re the only color I see. You’re the only focus I see.”

I let out a cry, giving up trying to keep my cheeks dried as I was now crying too much. But I didn’t care.

“I could sing an entire song about how when you walk into any room, you’re all I care about. You make me feel like I live in a musical, because you’re such a character yourself. You’re talented, and adventurous, and a leader and you’re- you are the most interesting person I know.” He smiled, pausing. “I can’t ask you to give up your life for me, so I won’t.”

He looked at the ring, and gulped, before looking back up with newfound strength.

“But in fifteen seconds, that’s how long I’ll give you…” he smiled, “I’ll give you fifteen seconds to freak out and overthink this question in every possible way and angle that you can, because I know that’s what you do, and because this is gonna be a big question. And then, Jenny, in fifteen seconds, I will not ask you to give up your life or anything at all, I’ll just…” He thought about it.
“In fifteen seconds I’ll ask you to marry me.”

He paused, and the silence filled the room. Or it would have if I wasn’t breathing so heavily in the middle of my silent sobs.

“After that,” he added, “after fifteen seconds, after I ask you to spend the rest of your life with me, if by some miracle you say yes, we’ll… we’ll do whatever you want. We’ll retire and go live in Corsica, if you want to, it’ll be your call. Because Jen, if you let me, I’ll follow you anywhere. For the rest of our lives. Because you make me feel like life is a fucking musical and you made me believe there’s a happy ending out there that we can reach together and I want to, because if you’ll let me I’ll spend the rest of our days trying to make you feel like you make me feel… happy.” He smiled again, nervously. “So,” he cleaned his throat, “Jenifer… you-you look like you could breathe a little, do you- do you want me to pause? Do you want to go drink some water-?”

“Harry, keep talking.” I said, smiling.

“Okay.” He nodded. “Okay…”

There was silence, and he looked down at the ring nervously, clasping the box with both hands. It took me a little while to notice he was waiting for the fifteen seconds to be over.

“Ask me.” I told him.

He smiled. “It hasn’t been fifteen seconds yet.”

I smiled. “I don’t care. I don’t need fifteen seconds.”

“Are you sure? Because… because this-this question means… it means so much shit. It means-“

“I know what it means…” I interrupted, smiling, impatient. “Harry, I know what it means, just ask me. Ask me.”

He smiled. He gulped, and stood tall in his knee. He raised the box a little, holding it with both hands. I smiled broader at his nervousness. He took a deep breath, and laughed a little before calming down and looking up at me.

“Jenifer, will you marry me?”

I laughed, through my tears, trying to dry my cheeks. I took a few very trembling steps to where he was and got down on my knees. He opened his arms to let me kneel right in front of him. I placed my hands on his chest and saw the tears accumulating in his blue eyes as he stared at me intensely, not wanting to miss one move that I made.

Then, I whispered the easiest answer I have given to any question, ever.

I said yes.

Chapter End Notes

I wanna thank you. Thank you! Thank you for reading this story, thank you for sticking with it! Thank you and I am sorry for the delays, for the terrible grammar/weak structure of the early chapters. Thank you so much for reading, liking
the chapter pages and sending messages even if just to let me know you’re around! You make such a difference, you make me keep going. This is the first time I have written a story in English, which is my second language, and the first time I have written this consecutively for so long and knowing you’re reading makes me keep going, so thank you!

I cried when I wrote this chapter and I felt so absolutely joyful, so I hope you feel the same. Let me know what you think?

Next chapter: Jen and Harry start telling people! Hope you had a good week!
The Big News

Chapter Summary

Jen and Harry start to tell people about their big news.

“Is this really happening?!”

“Oh, this is happening!”

“We’re, like, engaged!”

“Yeah, we’re getting married!”

It was hard to know who sounded more excited and disbelieving at the same time, my fiancé or me. We both had the biggest smiles on our faces, inches away from one another as we were still hugging, kneeling on the floor on that late August of 2017.

I kissed him, excitedly, for a long time, with absolutely no rush to let his lips go from mine. We smiled on the kiss, and at some point, I had the words in my head: ‘I’m getting married!’, then I started laughing.

Harry broke the kiss and hugged me. He stood up, pulling me up from my knees, and hugged me again. Everything felt so new it was hard to know where to go from there. I wasn’t an actress anymore. I was engaged to Harry.

“Is this really happening?!” I asked, again.

He smiled. “It is if you want it.” he told me.

“I want it.”

“Okay, then.”

He showed me the ring again, and took it from the box to slide it in my left hand finger.

“Oh, my God.” I giggled. “This is beautiful!”

“Do you like it?” he asked.

“Are you kidding? I love it!” I looked at it, at my engagement ring.

It had a big, cushion cut, yellow diamond surrounded by smaller, clear diamonds. It was almost the width of my ring-finger and matched, perfectly, my earrings and bracelet.

“That’s why you gave me the bracelet and earrings!” I marveled, and he smiled, cocky.

“I needed to find out if you liked yellow diamonds.” He told me.

“That’s insane!” I giggled, still looking at my ring. Then, remembering what he had said, I looked back at him. “Did you say you bought this two years ago?!”
“Yep.” He wrapped his arms around my waist, bringing me closer. “Just as you said you loved me.”

“Two years ago!” I marveled. “How-how-?”

He smiled, and I kissed him, grabbing two fistfuls of his hair between my fingers as I felt his arms tighten around my waist. I kissed him, as much more excitedly than on our first kiss in Morgan Bay, much more than our first real kiss in Scotland, as we stood in our apartment’s hallway without anyone around, like it was back then.

“Jen,” he started, resting our foreheads together, “I need you to know, we don’t have to do this.”

“Excuse me?” I asked. “I’m not giving this ring back.”

He smiled. “I mean it. I need you to make sure this is what you really want. This… life. Because I meant it, what I said, we don’t have to do it. I’ll walk away.”

“I don’t want you to.” I smiled. “I want this. I want you… all of you.”

“Are you sure?”

I cupped his face with my hands. “We’re getting married, Harry. That’s happening.”

He smiled, biting his lip, and quickly wrapped his arms tightly around me again to spin me around, making me squeal in delight.

—

‘Dear future husband, here’s a few things you need to know if you wanna be my one and only, all my life…’

As the song got louder, I maximized the volume on my phone and started dancing to the beat and starting to sing at the top of my lungs.

“Take me on a date! I deserve a break!” I took two fast steps, and jumped up on the bed where Harry was still sleeping. “And don’t forget the flowers every anniversary…” though his eyes were still closed as he hugged his pillow, I saw a little smile starting to tug on his lips. “’Cause if you treat me right, I’ll be the perfect wife! Buying groceries, bu-buying what you need!”

“If you think I’m going to let you do our grocery shopping you have another thing coming.” He mumbled, his voice muffled by the pillow.

Enjoying his signal of life, I smiled and started dancing closer to where he was laying, jumping to the beat from one of his sides to another.

“You’ve got that nine to five, but baby, so do I-“

“Technically, none of us do.” He said, turning to lay on his back.

“God, you’re right.” I said. “We’re so spoiled.”

‘I never learned to cook, but I can write a hook-‘

“Okay, see? That’s a part of the song that works for you.” He teased, and I gave him a shocked expression that made him laugh.
I stepped away, keeping eye contact, and jumped to the floor blindly, landing perfectly on my feet.

“After every fight just apologize.” I sang on, “and maybe then I’ll let you try and rock my body right…” I moved my hips to the beat, giving him a teasing look. “Even if I was wrong, you know I’m never wrong…”

“Oh, really?”

I gave him an annoyed look. “Why disagree? Why-why disagree?! You’ve got to know how to treat me like a lady, even when I’m acting crazy, tell me everything is alright… dear future husband, make time for me, don’t leave me lonely, and know we’ll never see your family more than mine…” I winced, and quickly corrected. “Well, my family lives in another country, so that’s not true, but it’s fine.”

He chuckled, and sat up to watch me better as I went spinning to the small table between the armchairs in front of the bed and jumped up on it, before pointing a finger at him.

“You’ll be sleeping on the left side of the bed.” I sang, making him smile. “Open doors for me and you my get some,” I threw him a kiss, “kisses! Don’t have a dirty mind, just be a classy guy… buy me a ring, bu-buy me a ring, baby!”

“I did.” He smiled, and I raised my – now heavy left hand to the air and jumped back on the floor, running towards his side on the bed to jump on top of him.

“Yeah, you did!”

He laughed, and wrapped his arms around me.

“You know what I find interesting?” He asked, spinning us around so I was on the mattress and he was resting his head on his hand, with his elbow on the bed. “What happened to the girl who was all excited last night about being able to sleep in this morning?!”

“What did she know?” I asked. “She didn’t have this!” I raised my hand, pointing at the engagement ring making him laugh before sitting up and getting on my knees, jumping on the mattress. “I’m too excited to sleep!”

“I can see that.” He grinned, holding my left hand on his. “Do you really like it?”

“I really love it!” I said, and paused looking at the yellow stone on my finger. “We are getting married.” I marveled, making him smile broader. “I’m gonna be your wife.”

He sat up, quickly joining our lips together. “I know.” He whispered, sounding surprised as he stared intently into my eyes. “I’m gonna marry Jenifer Silva.”

I bit my own lip, smiling. “So much has changed so fast… yesterday I was just going to my last day of work. This morning I woke up engaged to Prince Harry… Oh, my God! We have to tell people! I have to call my mom! And Richard and Janine and, oh, my God! Taylor and the girls! Alessa is gonna freak out!”

His smile flickered and he looked serious for a moment. “What if…” he started, “we held off on telling people for a while? Just to make sure we… you know what you’re getting yourself into…”

I sighed, “Harry…”

“Jen, I just want you to be able to think about this. No… no bad feelings, no pressure, just really
consider if this is what you want.”

“This is what I want!” I told him. “I’m gonna need you to accept it.”

“Okay, but what if, and hear me out,” he said, “we went away… just for a couple of weeks! You’re free, right? We could go and spend a couple of weeks on a beach somewhere, just enjoying each other, making sure you know what you’re doing before we start telling people.”

“Even if I wasn’t insulted by the assumption I don’t know what I’m doing,” I started, “and even if I didn’t have a lot of meetings this week, the fact is, if I don’t tell Taylor and the girls within twenty-four hours of something like this happening, they would never talk to me again.”

“But, Jen-“

“No buts!” I said.

“I just want you to make sure-“

“If you doubt me one more time I will not hesitate to shove this ring up your ass.” I told him, dead serious. “And you should fear that threat because, well,” I grinned, “it’s a pretty big rock!”

He laughed loudly, and I pulled him so he was back lying down and sat on his lap. “Now, come on, Mr. Prince, let’s go tell people! I want everyone to know we’re engaged!”

He smiled, cupping my face between his hands. “I love you.”

Those words, the ring on my finger, his body under mine and our futures becoming one, it all made me so happy all I could reply with was leaning down to kiss him strongly.

—

“You know what’s the best part about not being an actress anymore?” I asked, a couple of hours later after showering, when we were having breakfast together in the kitchen.

He grinned. “Marrying me?”

I grabbed the pot of Nutella in front of him, and took out a spoonful of it. “I don’t have to count calories anymore.” I ate the chocolate goodness, realizing I didn’t have to do the math to know how much exercise I would have to do to burn that out so that no director told me I needed to drop five pounds. “Oh, shit. I’m gonna get fat, aren’t I?”

“Well,” he started, rounding the table to where I was, “there’s only one thing to do about it.”

I gave him a fearful look. “Break up with me?”

“No…” He smiled, pulling a stool to sit in front of me and grabbing a spoon of his own. “We’re gonna get fat together.”

“Aw… that’s the most romantic thing you ever said to me.”

He laughed. “You have the guts to tell me this after I made that speech last night?!”

“Oh, that was a great speech.” I smiled. “My favorite part was the dick joke.”

“If you tell people about that on the engagement interview, we are gonna have problems.” We laughed.
Suddenly, there was noise and we overheard voices from the sitting room.

“Burglars?” I mumbled, with the spoon still on my mouth.

“Or one of the guys,” Harry told me, “or Clara. Monica. Edward.” He gave me a funny look. “Too much people have the keys to our place.”

“Good morning.” Came Clara’s voice, as she and Monica made their way into the kitchen.

“Hi, guys.” Harry smiled.

“What are you doing?” Monica asked, disapprovingly, looking at the jar of Nutella on my hands. “Wait, never mind, that’s not my problem anymore.”

I grinned. “Damn right!”

Clara eyed the jar lustfully. “Well, if you insist, sure, I’ll take a little.” She joked, opening a drawer to find herself a spoon.

“We’re here to confirm the week’s schedule.” Monica started, turning on her iPad. “You have the company’s board meeting video conference on Friday, and Bergamo wrote an email to reschedule your meeting about the U.N. because she won’t be able to travel here until next week, so that’s only gonna be on Monday…”

“For an unemployed woman you have a lot going on, Silva.” Harry teased, just as Clara found a spoon and reached for the Nutella jar, which I handed her.

“Woah,” she let out, “what’s that rock?!”

Unconsciously, I brought my hand to my lap and hid the ring with the other, giving Harry a guilty look. He smiled, and shrugged, and I knew there wasn’t much we could do about it now. We hadn’t yet discussed how to start telling people, or who would be first, but I had a feeling our first choices weren’t supposed to be my personal assistants.

“Well,” I started, exchanging an excited smile with Harry before looking at them, “we… are… sort of… Oh, wow, it’s the first time I say this, this is weird…” I giggled. “We’re engaged!” I showed them the ring now and they froze in place for a second.

“Are you serious?!” Monica asked, her voice going an octave higher. I nodded, and she gasped loudly before walking towards us to hug me. “Oh, my God, baby, congratulations!”

“That’s awesome!” Clara smiled, hugging Harry. “When did this happen?”

“Last night.” I told them.

“I proposed right after she almost broke up with me.” Harry said, playful.

“He’s kidding.” I explained. “Kind of. And, technically, I proposed.”

“Oh, I like that. Very twenty-first century.” Monica said, approvingly, hugging Harry now as Clara came to hug me.

“Excuse me?” Harry contested. “What do you mean technically you proposed?!”

“Well, I proposed first.” I said, as Clara and Monica held my left hand to take a closer look at my ring.
“Nuh-uh.” He mumbled. “From what I remember I was on my knee for a long time-“

“Yes, but honey, I actually said the words first-“

“Yeah, but you accepted my proposal first, so technically, mine is the one that counts!”

“Can we move on?!” Monica interrupted, just as I was about to contest his opinion.

“I have so many questions!” Clara started. “When is the wedding?! Are Taylor Swift and Ophelia Callis gonna be your bridesmaids? Because that would be adorable and also, can I already call you Your Royal Highness? Because I feel like I should practice!”

“This literally just happened, like, hours ago.” I told her. “My mother doesn’t even know yet.”

Monica gave me a worried glance. “You told us before Vanessa?! Jenifer, she is going to kill you.”

“It’s not my fault you guys just barged in here!” I said, defensive, knowing she was right. “I was about to call her!”

“Oh, she knows.” Harry said, grabbing the Nutella jar back from Clara, who was now using a measuring tape she found on the kitchen cabinet to measure my ring’s size.

“What?!” I asked.

“Well, she knew I was going to do it eventually… though she didn’t know when…”

“How did she know?!” Monica asked.

“I asked their blessing.” Harry explained. “I wasn’t raised on a cave.”

I smiled. “You asked my parent’s blessing?”

“That’s adorable.” Clara said.

“When?!” I asked.

“Right before New Year’s Eve.” He told me. “We were on that restaurant, having dinner with your parents. Your brother was on the phone with someone outside and your sister-in-law was on the bathroom, and Arthur needed to pee, so you took him and I was alone with them.” He shrugged, dismissively.

“What did you say?!”

He smiled, and looked at me. “Eu amo Jenifer, e eu quero saber se eu posso ter a mão dela em casamento.”

In his thick accent, he said ‘I love Jenifer, and I want to know if I can have her hand in marriage’.

He laughed at my emotional expression. “That’s why they were so emotional when they said goodbye that day?!” he smiled.

“They made me promise I would take care of you, and then said yes, and after that your mother started crying and your dad had to tell her to stop or else she would ruin the surprise.”

“I have to call them.” I said, leaving the stool to get my computer from the room. When I came back, I quickly opened Skype and called my mother.
“Bom dia, filha!” My mother smiled, saying good morning as she picked up, still looking sleepy as I knew it was about seven in the morning in Brazil. I watched as her shaky image walked about the kitchen until my father was in sight, drinking coffee.

“Hi, parakeet!” He said. “Hi, Harry.”

“Hello.” Harry smiled at the camera by my side, trying to smooth his hair in the image.

“So…” I started, avoiding Monica and Clara’s look of excitement across the kitchen isle. “I heard Harry and you had an interesting conversation last New Year’s.”

“He told you?” My mother asked, confused.

“He did…” I said, and then raised my hand to show the camera of the laptop my ring. “…after he asked me to marry him!”

I waited for the delay to be over and then I smiled when they both shouted with excitement at the same time.

“I’m so happy!” My mother said, already crying.

“Congratulations to you both, God bless your new life together.” My father said, smiling a little more collected as my mother still dried her cheeks on the background. “And start giving us some grandkids soon, we’re still missing a granddaughter.”

We laughed – Harry blushing and me, biting my lip.

“Oh, I have to tell Gisele!” My mother said. “And I have to call Rosana!”

“Call my brothers too!” Dad told her, and Harry gave me a worried glance.

“Guys, wait!” I said, quickly. “You can’t tell anyone!”

“And why the hell not?!” My mother asked, sounding upset.

“If you start telling people, they’ll tell people, and soon enough everyone will know!” I explained. “This is sort of a big deal, we have to announce it publically and do an interview thingy, and we don’t know when yet!”

They exchanged a look, and sighed. “Well, okay.” Dad said. “Just let us know right before that happens, then, so we can start telling people. You know grandma will be upset if she hears about it in the news.”

“I will, dad.” I smiled. “Just keep it to yourselves, and Livia and Lucas for now, okay?”

“We will, honey! We’re so happy for you!” Mom said. “You take good care of my baby, Harry!”

“I will, ma-am.” He smiled.

“I’ll call you guys later, okay? Bye!” they blew the camera some kisses, and I turned the call off. “Okay, who’s next?”

Monica reached forward and closed the laptop before I could call anyone else.

“I think we should probably discuss a few things before you go telling everyone.” She said.
“Well, it’s not everyone…”

“No, she’s right.” Harry said. “There’s a lot that goes on with something like this, and there’s a lot to be decided. For starters, until we announce it officially, the less people we tell, the better.”

“Okay, then let’s announce it.”

He winced. “Don’t you still have promotion until the end of the year?”

“I do.” I admitted. “And, you know, with Hamilton, they’ll probably be nominated for at least something, so I’ll be expected to attend Award Season.”

“And if you announce it before then,” Monica said, “all people will say is Prince Harry’s fiancé was spotted promoting movie where she has steamy sex scenes with Tom Hardy.”

“And they would only ask you about it instead of focusing on your work.” Harry added. “This will be your last award season, it should be about you, not us.”

I felt my shoulders drop as disappointed flooded me. “So we have to wait?!”

Harry smiled, sadly. “I think we should… at least until you are officially done in Hollywood.”

“Which means you can’t announce it until March of 2018.” Clara said.

“That sucks.” I said. “That’s seven months from now!”

“It’ll give you time to make plans, though.” Monica said. “This way when you announce it and they ask questions, you’ll have it all figured out already.”

“Fine.” I said.

“You know what that means, right?” Clara asked. “You’ll have to leave the ring when you go out.”

I held my ring, protectively. “My precious!”

“It’s just until Award Season is over.” Harry smiled, kissing my cheek. “Then we can tell the world.”

“Oh, who can we tell for now?” I asked.

“Richard and Janine are probably a wise choice.” Monica said. “They’ll be mad if you don’t tell them.”

“And we need to tell your family, too.” I told Harry.

“We can tell them in person.” He said. “I’ll call and ask if we can come over for lunch.”

“Oh, and I’ll call management.”

“You can probably stop referring to them like that.” Monica said.

“It’s just easier to.”

That being said, we called Richard and Janine, whose reaction was basically a mixture of that of my parents – except it was Richard who cried, and not Janine – and Monica and Clara’s – with Janine asking a thousand questions per minute. They vowed not to tell anyone, including their kids,
and so Harry and I went to change to go have lunch with his family.

Clarence House was still as magnificent as the last time I had been there, except that on day light it looked almost like a regular house instead of the mansion I knew it was.

Charles opened the door for us, smiley and excited, and immediately gave me a light and awkward hug – like most British people did – saying:

“Oh, Jenifer! Congratulations! We were so happy to hear!”

I looked at Harry. “We were supposed to tell them together!”

“He guessed when I said on the phone that we had news!” He replied, defensive.

“Oh, no, don’t blame him.” Charles added. “He could never keep this a secret, he’s been talking about proposing for years.”

I couldn’t stay mad after that.

“Jenifer.” Kate greeted when we walked into the living room, walking over to me to give me a hug. “I was so excited when Charles told us, congratulations!”

“So everyone already knows, huh?” I asked, smiling, as she pat me on the back.

“Kate helped Harry pick a ring.” Will said, hugging his brother. “Nicely done.”

“You will notice,” Kate whispered, “it’s a lot bigger than the one he gave Chelsy.”

I grinned at her. “I did. Thanks.”

“Oh, you’re here. Good. Lunch will be served shortly.”

Turning to the door, I saw Camila had just walked in. She kissed Harry’s cheek gently.

“Congratulations, dear.” She said, and then looked at me.

I couldn’t help but fear this moment, it was almost like I could hear ceremonial drums playing at a distance as the world quieted down to hear if Harry’s stepmother would be approving of his choice of not.

“Jenifer,” she started, walking slowly to me, “as I said last time we spoke… welcome.”

She hugged me, and although everyone else was talking and ignoring this moment as something casual, I felt like I had been accepted into some kind of clan.

“So tell us about the proposal!” Kate asked, as we were guided into the table for lunch.

I explained my enthusiasm as I got home from my last day of work, and how Harry had prepared the terrace for us to have dinner and planned on giving me the ring a little later on if I hadn’t simply asked him to marry me first.

“So…” William started, “you asked him?”

“Yes, I did.”

“She asked first,” Harry explained, “but I asked right after-“
“After letting me think he was breaking up with me.” I interrupted.

“And then she accepted my proposal, which means mine is the one that counts.”

“That’s ridiculous.” I said. “I asked first, I deserve the credit for this.”

“Did you buy a ring?” He asked, grinning. “Did you set up the terrace?”

“I asked first!”

“Oh, God,” Kate sighed, “this is the poker chips all over again.”

—

“Hey, look, it’s the only friend we have with a realistic chance of ruling some countries one day.” Adam said as he picked up the phone when we called them on Skype after lunch. “And Harry is with her.”

I giggled, and Harry rolled his eyes. “You love that joke, don’t you?” he looked at me. “You know what’s funny? Now that joke could actually come true.”

“Shut up.” I joked. “Hey, Adam, where’s Tay?”

We saw him walking down a hallway. “In the kitchen, I’ll find her for you. She’s baking some chocolate deliciousness.”

“You know, if you two decided to come live here, we could be enjoying that baking instead of being jealous about it.”

“I’m down!” Tay shouted from somewhere we couldn’t see. “Adam loves L.A., though.”

“It just makes sense for work.” He said, and turned to let us see Taylor, wearing a pink apron as she applied some frosting on cupcakes.

“Hi, guys!” She smiled, letting down the frosting to come nearer the phone.

“Wait, I have to add Selena on.” I told them.

A few clicks of some buttons later, and I had Selena on the same call, with her hair up in a high bun on what looked like a car.

“Hi, girls.” She said.

“Hi!” Harry and Adam replied, automatically, making us laugh.

“And boys.” She added. “Say hi, babe.” She said, turning the phone to her left, where we could see Orlando driving.

“Hi, everyone.” He said.

“Oh, my God, is that Orlando Bloom?!” Adam shouted, mockingly excitedly, making Taylor laugh behind him. “Oh, my God, he is so cute. Orlando! Hi! I love you!”

Orlando showed the phone the finger. “Your love can’t make me forget you owe me money, Harris.”
“Well, you can’t blame a guy for trying.” He mumbled.

“If you don’t want to lose money, don’t play pool with me.” Orland shrugged.

“Alright, let’s focus, everyone.” I said. “You must be wondering why we’ve gathered you here today.”

“Must we?” Sel asked, turning the phone back to herself.

“Before we go on, you need to know this is a very sensitive subject and you will need to keep it a secret for the next seven months.” I said. “The only reason I am even telling you is because, well, the guys are only being told because they happen to be there as I’m calling Tay and Sel-“

“Do you want us to leave or -?” Adam asked, mocking an offended look.

“No unless you don’t think you can keep a secret.” Harry said.

“Oh, my God, I’m getting so curious!” Taylor shouted. “Just say it!”

I exchanged an excited glance to Harry before raising my left hand to the camera so they could see my ring.

“No!” Taylor screamed.

“Oh, my God!” Selena shouted.

“No way!” Taylor added.

“Nice!” Adam smiled.

“What? What is happening?” From out of view, we heard Orlando’s voice.

Selena was the one to, mid tears, tell him: “They’re engaged!”

“Congratulations!” He shouted.

Taylor was covering her mouth with both her hands, looking as shocked as she always did when she won an award.

“I’m so happy for you!” She squealed, and her voice broke.

“Aaand she’s crying.” Adam said, passing an arm over Taylor’s shoulders as she rested her head on his shoulder.

“Tell me everything!” Selena asked, drying her tears.

“Oh, my God,” Taylor marveled, “You’re gonna be a princess.”

That night, we received our friends at our place, claiming we were just going to order some pizza and wanted company to celebrate the end of my last acting contract. We waited until they were all there before telling them our news – I had left the ring on Harry’s pocket and didn’t put it on until it was time. They were all there, Jake and Zoe, Guy and Lizzy – who was now six months pregnant -, Natasha and Rupert, Thomas and Melissa, Skippy, the Princesses, Harry’s cousins, Beatrice and Eugenie and their boyfriends, George and Alessa, Ophelia and Oscar, Kit and Beezus and James
“So, before we eat,” Harry started, calling their attention after they were all there, “there’s something we wanted to share with you, but before that, we need to tell you that this isn’t going to be announced until next March, and so no one outside of this room can hear about it.”

“We are the chosen ones.” Skippy said, solemn. “We will carry the secret, oh, Henry, the great-“

“Thanks, Skippy.” Harry interrupted him, who was getting some giggles and was probably going to keep talking until they ended. “So, basically-“

“Jen is pregnant!” Guy said. “I call it.”

“What?” I asked.

“Nah, I don’t see a bump.” Thomas replied, eyeing my stomach curiously.

“She could be only a few weeks pregnant.” Natasha said, and the whole room now eyed my stomach.

“She’s Jenifer Silva, she’s so fit she wouldn’t have a bump until, like, month five.” James added, defensively

“I think I would know if my best friend was pregnant.” Alessa intervened, before giving me a serious glance. “Right? I would know, right? Are you pregnant?”

“If you’re pregnant, can I have that little black Balmain dress that you refuse to lend me?” Ophelia asked, from where she was sitting on Oscar’s lap. “You know you won’t be able to fit in it.”

“Okay, I’m calling it.” Guy said. “Ten pounds on pregnancy, who’s in?”

I quickly fished my engaged ring on Harry’s pocket and put it on. “We’re engaged!” I shouted, showing them my left hand. Harry pointed at it, staring at his friends, annoyed.

The chorus of gasps and shouting was so synchronized it sounded like we had rehearsed it. I had four people hugging me at the same time before I even noticed it was Alessa, Ophelia, Beezus and James. Craig came right afterwards, and then Zoe and Lizzy. The men were hugging and patting Harry on the back, as this happened, and soon we had both been hugged and congratulated by all of them.

“This is at least ten carats!” Ophelia marveled, looking at my ring up close as she held my hand almost to her nose.

“Eleven, definitely.” James corrected.

“Eleven point five.” I told him. “How do you know?”

“Honey, I was made to be around fancy jewelry,” he replied, “someone just forgot to warn my bank account.”

Alessa’s arms wrapped around my waist from the back and she rested her head on my shoulder. “My little girl is all grown up,” She said.

“Are you crying?!“

“Don’t judge me, Jenifer! Is it a crime to love you?!” She dramatized, making me giggle.
“Oh, my God, you’re gonna be a royal bride.” Ophelia said, looking at me wide-eyed. “Can you even imagine your dress?!!”

“All lace and tulle, off-shoulder, sheer short sleeves, mermaid cut with a huge train and cathedral veil.” I said, seeing it perfectly on my mind to their amazement. I tried to cover up the details I had given the thought. “…or something.”

“You were made to wear a tiara.” James told me, seriously.

“Tell me about the proposal!” Beezus asked, smiling broadly.

“Oh, yes, I love proposal stories!” Zoe added, and I smiled at Harry as they all looked at us, expectantly.

“Well…” I started. “I had just gotten home last night from my last day of work as an actress, and I found a box with a dress on the bed and a note from Harry that said to meet him in the terrace to celebrate! So I put it on and got all dressed up ran there, feeling euphoric and so happy that I had my future ahead, bright and free, and then I hugged him and just…” I smiled at the sight of his smile. “I asked him to marry me.”

“Wait.” Skippy said. “You asked him?!?”

“I was going to ask her,” Harry explained, “I had the ring in a plate, and I was going to give it to her in the middle of dinner-“

“Wait.” Kit interrupted. “You were planning on proposing and she beat you to it?!?”

“Yes.” I smiled.

“The most infuriating is I had been planning that for the last two years!” Harry told them. “I bought the ring two years ago and had been planning it ever since, the speech, the proposal, the terrace decoration, the whole shit and then she gets there and just asks me out of the blue!”

“But did you plan it?” Beezus asked.

“Nope.” I told her. “I just felt like it.”

“Well, at least you knew she wanted it before you asked.” Oscar said.

“Tell them what happened then.” Harry told me.

“Harry said no.” I told the group, who quickly looked at Harry with judgmental eyes.

“Wait for it.” He told them. “Jen? Go on.”

“He left, and so I rightfully assumed he was saying no to my proposal and went after him-“

“Livid!” Harry told them. “Yelling!”

“Yes, I was. Who does that? Say no after someone asks them to marry you? So, yeah, I was a little dramatic and went to tell him to go fuck himself.”

They laughed.

“I cannot believe this.” Melissa shook her head, sitting beside Thomas, who was grinning at us looking a lot friendlier than ever before.
“That’s my girl.” Ophelia said, smugly, pointing at me, and looked around as if she was challenging anyone to contest that information.

“So what happened?!” Guy asked.

“Well,” Harry sighed, “I had gone to find the ring and she found me and started yelling and I had to kneel down and pull out the ring to shut her up.”

“Best way to do it.” Thomas mumbled, making the other guys chuckle.

“When are you getting married, though?” Lizzy asked. “Tell me is not going to be before December. If you make me go to a royal wedding with a huge bump I will not forgive you, Jenifer.”

“Is this really what we should be focusing on right now?” Her husband asked her, delicately.

“We won’t announce it until March,” I told her, “So the wedding won’t be until a few months after that, we don’t know when yet. But thanks for the support, Guy.”

“Oh, I didn’t mean that selflessly.” He returned. “What I meant is we should actually be focusing on the… stag partay!” He shouted, and the boys all cheered.

I rolled my eyes, but I was smiling all through the night.

—

“Hey.” I called, when we were lying in bed late that night just as Harry was beginning to sleep.

“Hm.” He mumbled, without opening his eyes, his arms around my waist.

“We’re getting married.”

Slowly, his lips turned into a smile, and I mimicked.

“You know what that means, right?” He asked. “You better start buying some hats, Jenny, ‘cause you’ll be wearing them a lot soon.”

I giggled. “I don’t mind.”

“Really?”

“Well, I wouldn’t have asked you to marry me if I did, would I?”

He sighed. “I think we have established that I asked you to marry me.”

“Well, I think we’ll still be arguing about it in ten years.”

He smiled. “I don’t mind that.”

“Really?” I asked.

“Yeah… because then, that would mean we’ll be together in ten years.”

I smiled. “I’m sorry to break this to you, Mr. Prince, but I think we might be together for a lot longer.”
Marrying Into Royalty 101

Chapter Summary

Jen and Harry start to prepare for the future, realizing just how hard it’ll be to compromise, and Jen gets a surprising offer.

As fast as my stressful, incessant work emails stopped, the joyful, overly excited wedding messaging started. It wasn’t just Harry I was constantly texting about how would we do this and that, it was Taylor, Alessa, Ophelia and Selena. It was Zoe, Lizzy and Natasha. It was Kate – who was, obviously, the only one who knew the actual extant of the wedding we would have to plan. It was my mother, who wanted to meet Harry’s family and know when she could throw us an engagement dinner for the whole family. It was Camila – who somehow got my phone number and wanted me to know she was available to help with whatever I needed. And, by God, it was Edward.

Harry and I took two weeks off to travel to Majorca alone on a romantic break for his birthday, and to enjoy each other alone after the engagement. He turned 33 that September as we swam and made out on the wonderful Spanish waters, smiling about everything and nothing, still talking about our proposals as I marveled that he had actually bought that ring so long ago. I had left it behind, however, knowing it was too risky that someone could see me wearing it.

“I will come back for you, my precious.” I whispered to it as I placed it back in its box in my nightstand’s drawer before we left, making Harry grin, teasingly.

“You’re imagining the ring, aren’t you?” Harry would ask, again and again, as we laid tanning on the sand in the upcoming two weeks as I raised my left hand to stare at my empty ring-finger.

“I miss it.” I’d tell him, smiling.

As soon as we set foot back in England, in late September, however, we couldn’t run away from Edward anymore.

Edward Lane-Fox had never been so present at our house. He only afforded us a couple of days to get settled back home before he came by for breakfast one morning, bringing muffins and English breakfast tea.

“As you know, we have a lot to talk about.” He started, as Harry and I were still forcing ourselves awake. “And we should start as soon as possible. Do you prefer to do it here, while we eat, or should we go to your living room after breakfast?”

“I have work.” I told him.

He checked something in his smartphone. “You next meeting isn’t until tomorrow, and your promotion for Broken doesn’t start until three weeks from now.”

Harry grinned, but I gave him a shocked look. “How do you know that?!?”

“I got your schedule from Miss Williams.” He told me.
“Monica?!” I asked. “Why?!"

Edward sighed, deeply, and looked at Harry. “I thought that by now you would have explained her the basics.”

Harry shrugged. “I was hoping we could enjoy the good parts of the engagement a bit more before jumping into the ugly ones.”

Edward looked at me. “I’m the chef of Harry’s household. So as he brings you into it, until you hire a new staff for yourselves, if that is your wish, it is my responsibility to bring you up to speed on what needs to be done and organizing your future life together.”

I had barely listened to him, and instead looked at Harry.

“What are the ugly ones?!”

“Well, then, Jenifer,” Edward took a deep breath, impatient, “drink your tea and sit back as I take you on a trip down Marrying Into Royalty 101.”

“Edward, must we?” Harry asked. “We have so much time.”

“You have three weeks.” Lane-Fox corrected. “Then she goes into promoting Broken, then right after is Tangled and she’ll only have a few days off before Hamilton and Doctor Who, by when it’ll be Christmas and you’ll be off to Sandringham and Jenifer to Brazil. Then she’ll have Award Season and we won’t be able to plan anything until March, which is when you want to announce it and, obviously, it’d be appropriate to have planned this before then.”

Harry sighed, but I was feeling oddly convinced.

“Okay.” I said, sitting back on the kitchen stool, grabbing a blueberry muffin. “Bring it on.”

“We can do this later.” Harry told me.

“Stop trying to protect me.” I told him. “I’m gonna marry you. I wanna know what’s coming. And you know planning is how I keep calm about things, so let’s plan this.” I looked at Edward. “Teach me, master.”

He opened a file on his smartphone and started reading. “Okay. The first thing to understand is the minute you become engaged you’ll stop being a civilian and become semi-officially a part of the royal family. The world will be looking and you need to be able to represent that image. You must be on at all times and always remember that every word that comes out of your mouth will reflect on the Queen and country.”

I gulped, feeling strangely pressured. It was the first time since getting engaged that I realized just which family I was marrying into.

“Do we have to start by that?” Harry asked.

“You’re right, we can save that for royal training.” Edward nodded.

“She’s not going to royal training.” Harry protested.

“If you think your grandmother is letting a celebrity into this family without proper training, Harry, maybe you need to go to royal training.”

“What the hell is royal training?!” I asked.
“They teach you to walk right, and manners, and how to address politicians and dignitaries and that sort of stuff.” Harry said, dismissively.

“Also how to enter cars without letting your underwear show and how to dress following royal protocol,” Edward added, “how to curtsy and address every member of the royal family.”

“That sounds useful.” I said, and Harry sighed.

“It’s boring.” He mumbled.

“Maybe for you, who was born into this.” I said. “I’m gonna need to learn. Edward, sign me up for royal training.”

“Oh, I already did. You’ll meet an etiquette expert right here next Wednesday, at ten. She’s the one who trained Catherine.” He told me, seriously.

I discreetly grabbed my phone and typed a message to Kate. ‘Did you really do royal training? Is it useful or just ridiculous?’

“Now, the first thing we need to discuss is when you’re getting married. It’s what will give us the timeline for everything else.”

“August.” Harry told him.

We had discussed the date on Majorca, realizing there was enough time between the announcement in March and August to plan everything and avoid rumors that we might be getting married because I was pregnant.

My phone buzzed, and I had a reply from Kate: ‘I did, it’s both ridiculous and useful. Do you want me to do it with you?’. I was so glad she offered I quickly wrote back: ‘Please? Wednesday at 10, here.’

“Okay.” Edward typed away on his phone. “And the engagement announcement in March, when are we-“

“Second week.” I told him, another bit of information we had already discussed. “That’ll give us time to take engagement portraits to be released along with the announcement.”

“We think if we wait it just gives the press more story material later on.” Harry told him.

“Good thinking.” Edward nodded. “Alright. So we’ll call a photographer on the first week of March, just as Jenifer returns from Los Angeles. Mario Testino photographed William and Catherine, and your mother, as you know, Harry. We could call him.”

“Mario Testino?” I asked. “Vogue’s Mario Testino? He shot my Vogue cover. And Vanity Fair cover. And Harper’s Bazaar cover. He shot Will and Kate?!”

“He was a friend of my mother’s.” Harry told me.

“Woah.”

“Actually, Edward, I had a different idea about that.” Harry told him, before looking at me. “Remember Brandon?”

“Who?”
“The guy from Humans of New York, who shot Halo Day in Manhattan.” He explained, smiling. “And who did that picture of us on the MET.”

I beamed, remembering the secret photo stashed away on a memory card that we made Brandon Stanton promise he wouldn’t tell anyone about.

“Oh, my God, of course!”

“I’m sorry, who?!” Edward asked.

We explained to him about the day, two weeks before Harry left New York in 2013, when Brandon took a picture of our joined hands in front of the Van Gogh’s self-portrait on the Metropolitan Museum in Manhattan. We explained we allowed him to take one photo of our faces to prove those were our hands, picture he could only talk about if we got engaged one day.

“I still have the picture on his memory card.” I said. “We need to send it back to him, he can show it to people now.”

Harry smiled. “Well, what if we asked him to take our engagement portraits?”

“Is he good?” Edward asked, and Harry nodded.

“It’d be a good symbolism in contrast to the portraits he has of us on the Met.” I smiled.

“And you know how we talked about a charity fund?” Harry asked, “We could have him release a secondary picture on his page with a quote from us to divulge the fundraising website.”

“I’m sorry? Fundraising website?” Edward asked.

We told him about another thing we had discussed in Majorca. Harry had told me that upon announcing their engagement, Will and Kate had received many requests to send them engagement gifts, not only from politicians from all over the world, but also normal people who simply wanted to congratulate them. What they did was to give them a link for their charities’ webpage and ask that instead of gifts, people made donations. Harry and I had the idea of creating a website specifically designed for this, to raise funds from anyone who wanted to congratulate us, which would be then used on our charities: Harry’s Sentabale and mine EducaUP.

“After the wedding we want to go personally see those charities to see by ourselves ways in which we can apply that money.” I told Edward, who looked impressed.

“That’s a great idea.” He said, sounding almost suspicious that the idea had really come from me. “Okay, so we have settled on inviting this Mr. Stanton to photograph you on the first week of March. Now, where and what will you wear? You’ll need a different outfit for the portraits, and the photo call and interview.” He raised his hand before I could answer. “I know what you’re going to say, it’s too soon, but I really would like to at least have an idea of it for now so we don’t have to hurry about it in March.”

“Oh, I already know what I’m wearing.” I told him.

“Never underestimate Jenifer’s fashion enthusiasm.” Harry told him.

“It can’t be too short, or tight.” Edward warned me. “Or too colorful, or blue, because Catherine wore blue in their engagement and you don’t want to be compared to her too much. Also it would be good if it weren’t expensive so you appear approachable and if the designer could be British it would be even better.”
“Chelsy wore a pantsuit in our engagement, so you should probably avoid that too.” Harry said.

“Oh, yes, we must avoid comparison between this engagement and your previous one.” Edward nodded. “So we should probably think of a different place for the photo call and interview, so they don’t have a chance to compare both images.”

“Where did they do it?” I asked.

“Kensington.” Edward told me.

“We could do it in Clarence, or St. James Palace.” Harry said

“I’ll look into it.” Edward replied. “Alright, the next issue will be hiring your new security team and household staff.”

“I already have a security team.” I told him.

“The monarchy has a different protocol for security.” He said. “Especially trained agents, with military background and so on. You’ll need at least three, which will be assigned to you as soon as you get married.”

“I already have two, so I just need one more.”

“Jenifer, you can’t hire your own security team.” Edward insisted.

“Why not?! They’ve been doing a good job so far.”

“Because the security is paid by taxpayer’s money.” Harry told me. “Which means the firm choses how it is spent. If they let you do it, it’ll seem like they’re giving you a way into using it for personal benefit.”

I had long learned that ‘the firm’ was how the royal family referred to themselves; the institution.

“I just wanna keep Eddy and Johnnie on their jobs!” I justified. “I love them. I know them. Security is such a weird thing, they’re with us all the time. I can’t just have anyone doing it.”

“Not anyone.” Edward explained. “Highly trained officials.”

“Then have the firm hire Eddy and Johnnie and place them on my care, with an extra one.”

“It’s not how it works.” Edward insisted.

I paused, and looked at Harry. “Can I talk to you for a minute?”

Without waiting for his answer, I jumped out of the stool and marched across the kitchen inside the door that lead to our master bathroom. Harry closed the door after him, and gave me a concerned look.

“It’s protocol.” He started.

“I am not firing Eddy and Johnnie.”

“You don’t even know if they want to work for the palace.”

“Well, I obviously won’t force them!” I said. “But I will offer them the job.”
“You can’t, Jay.” Harry said, sounding regretful. “It’s not your choice.”

“My ass.” I whispered, angrily.

“All the security hiring is done by the head of security of the Queen.” Harry said. “If we went over his head it would be a breach of protocol and would seem like favoritism.”

“It is favoritism!” I said. “I like Eddy and Johnnie, I’ve known Eddy for years, and I am not firing them just because I will be a damn royal!”

Harry sighed, placing his hands on his hips, and stared at the floor.

“I don’t think I can do anything.” He said. “There’s some things about this life that you just have to go with.”

“Well, I happen to think friends come first.” I told him. “And I will not let mine out of a job just because I’m marrying you.”

“They won’t pay for security they can’t trust.” He said.

“Then I’ll pay for my own security.” I shrugged. “It’s what I’ve been doing anyway, why should England start paying for it now? I don’t need the taxpayer’s money.”

He smiled. “Jenny… they won’t let you hire people they don’t trust—”

“The hell they won’t!” I shouted, getting angrier at how calm he was and at the stupid smile on his lips. “It’s my money and I’ll be damned if I can’t use it how I want to!” He let out a nasalized laugh that drove me mad. “I’m sorry, what part of this is fucking funny to you?!”

He raised his shoulders, shrugging unapologetically, and smiled at me. “I’m just really happy I’m marrying you.”

That caught me off guard, and I desperately wanted to smile, but thankfully I still had some actress inside of me, and I was able to keep my cold expression as I crossed my arms under my chest.

“I’m not letting them go.”

“But if they let you hire them yourself, they would be giving people they don’t trust easy access into me and all the family as well.” He explained. “The moment you become a royal they’ll be responsible for your security, they won’t let you pay for it. Or, they might let you pay for it, but they’ll still be the ones responsible for hiring.”

“Well, that’s bullshit.” He sighed. “Think about it, Harry, you are the one who hired Eddy first! Remember? In Manhattan! He was working for you while you were in town, so how come he was good enough for the monarchy then but not anymore?!”

He considered that point, staring into the wall as he thought about it.

“And he is the one who hired and trained Johnnie, so you know he’s gotta be good, too.”

“You have a point.” He said, before turning on his feet to the door, and going back into the kitchen. “Edward, set up a meeting for Jen with Wallace O’Neal, and maybe Nathan should be there, too.”

“Harry, she can’t chose her own security.” Edward warned, eyeing me suspiciously.

“Have you met her?” He asked. “She sure can try.”
Edward sighed. “Fine.”

“Who’s Wallace?” I asked.

“Granny’s head of security.” Harry explained. “You’ll meet with him, with Nathan there. Nate is my head of security, he’s been working for Kensington for years and he can probably vouch for Eddy, who will then vouch for Johnnie. Hopefully you’ll get him to accept to train Eddy and Johnnie and give them a chance of being hired by the firm.”

“Just us?” I asked. “You won’t be there?”

Harry grinned at me. “This is your battle, love. You can fight it.”

“Okay.” I smiled. “I can fight it.”

“Okay, on to house staff, then.” Edward said.

“What’s that?”

“Remember when we were on Morgan Bay, and I explained to you that Tom was my Monica, and Edward was my Janine and my senior advisor was my Richard?” He asked, and I smiled.

“Oh, yeah. That was a fun day…”

“Well, the household staff will basically does for us what your management team does.”

Edward scorned. “That is an awfully simplistic way of putting it…”

I looked at him. “Okay, hotshot, tell me. What is it that you do?!”

He straightened up, proudly. “I deal with Harry’s image, controlling his press appearances, scheduling interviews.”

“So you’re like his publicist.” I smiled.

His polite expression flickered. “Well, that is my professional background, but-“

“Edward used to be a publicist in the private sector before we hired him.” Harry said, grinning amused, as he drank his tea watching us.

“Oh, so you’re literally his publicist?!” Edward seemed uncomfortable. “What about this senior advisor? What does he do?”

“Jamie.” Harry told me. “He’s been working with Will and me for years, now he’s only part time with me, but full time with Will and Kate.”

“He takes care of shaping the Cambridge’s and Harry’s royal career.” Edward told me, pompously. “He advised them on the best moves to make in order to be the best representatives of Her Majesty The Queen that they can be.”

“So he’s like the manager.” I nodded, amused by how put off Edward got by how easy it was for me to understand this dynamic. “And Tom Hill? Or how I prefer to call him, Mr. Williams?”

Harry smiled. “He organizes my schedule, makes phone calls, reminds me of emails I need to reply.”
“So he’s your assistant.” I smiled, victorious, and looked at Edward. “So the household staff is your management team.”

“Okay, fine!” Edward rolled his eyes. “Can we talk about hiring now?!”

“But wait,” I started, “don’t you already have a staff? Why do you have to fire them and hire new people just because we’re getting married? That doesn’t seem fair.”

“Well, single I mostly employ these three.” Harry said. “But the monarchy has this tradition that when you get married you officially need a household staff, so we’ll need an advisor for both of us, private secretaries for each of us, to help with the royal work, and personal assistants, also for each of us.”

“Do you wanna fire this Jamie person?” I asked.

“No, but he was only supposed to work for me until I got married. He can’t take care of four people, and he technically is already working with Will and Kate. So we need a new one.”

“Okay.” I started. “And how do we go about hiring senior advisors? What do people major in for this?!”

Harry smiled, but Edward sighed. “They are usually hired within the royal family’s already hired staff, by rehanging staff from other positions. I can compile a list of possible candidates.”

“Okay.” I started. “Well, I think you should keep Thomas.”

Harry nodded. “I agree, he works well.”

“And I want Monica as my private secretary.”

They looked at me. “She’s a personal assistant.” Edward said.

“She started as one,” I corrected, “but she’s been training in public relations with Janine, who’s the best publicist in Hollywood. I know I can’t keep Janine, because she lives in L.A. with her family, but Monica moved here with me and she likes it. And so I want to promote her to my private secretary, which basically means she’ll be doing my press work, right?!”

Harry nodded. “Yeah. Okay. Monica is good, I think that could work.”

“She’s barely qualified.” Edward argued.

“You can train her.” Harry told him. “You had to get used to the royal work as well when we hired you. She could do well, and she already knows how to deal with Jen.”

Edward sighed. “Fine. I’ll give Miss Williams a call.”

“And Clara.” I added. “I almost just hired her as my personal assistant, and she’s been doing great. I wanna offer to keep her on.”

Edward and Harry both nodded, and so we only had one more problem, but I thought I could fix that.

“What about you, Edward?” I asked.

“Yes, Jenifer?” He asked, without looking up from his smartphone.
“Well, you’ve been working with Harry for years. You know how the monarchy works, and you have experience in the private sector, so you could be good at advising us on how to journey from my world into Harry’s.”

Harry squinted at me, confused. “What are you saying?”

“Well, what if we hired Edward as our senior advisor?”

Harry looked at Edward. Edward looked up at me. “Me?”

“Of course!” Harry nodded. “Edward, that’s perfect!”

“Do you not want the job?” I asked.

“Oh.” He sounded shocked. “I—I… Well- I did consider applying—but-“

“What made you change your mind?” Harry asked, sounding almost offended.

“Well…” Edward sighed. “I honestly didn’t think Jenifer would feel comfortable having me working for her.”

“Really?” I grinned. “Ah, after all the times you acted as if I wasn’t good enough for Harry now you’re afraid I’m gonna fire you when I’m the Mrs.”

“You don’t have to gloat so loudly, love.” Harry mumbled, making me laugh.

I was thoroughly enjoying the look of discomfort in Edward’s face, but finally I decided he had suffered enough.

“Chin up, Edward.” I smiled. “I just said we should hire you. Doesn’t that tell you I’m not about to fire you?”

He grinned slightly. “Well, if you think it could work, than I will be happy to apply for the position.”

“Screw applying, you’re hired.” Harry smiled, before looking back at me with a serious expression. “I mean, if you’re okay with that.”

I smiled. “Welcome to the team, Edward. It would seem that you’re the boss now.”

It was only the third time ever I saw Edward smile.

“Excuse me.” I said, as my phone started ringing. I saw it was Melissa Bergamo, the U.N. administrative that I usually did most of my communications with.

I quickly hopped off the stool and up the hoverboard by the door and started sliding away into the hallway to talk to her.

“Hi, Melissa. How are you?” I smiled.

“I’m fine, Jen. I trust you are too?”

I smiled at my ring. “Oh, I’m great.”

“Good.”
“Are you back to Geneva yet? Or, sorry, are you in New York?”

“Geneva. Just got here yesterday from Paris, but I was wondering if I could set up a lunch meeting with you next week. I’ll fly to London to see you.”

“Sure.” I said, finding it a bit weird she hadn’t called Monica directly, as she usually did to set up work meetings. “Is it something with the campaign? Something happened with the website?” I stopped the hoverboard, sighing. “Did they cut our funding?!?”

“No, nothing of the sort, don’t worry.” She dismissed. “You must forgive the impersonality of doing this over the phone, but I wanted to run something by you before I flew there for the meeting, this way if you’re not interested, which I completely understand, we can keep our next meeting as scheduled, for next month.”

“What is it?”

“Well, Jenifer, we’ve been discussing your role with us a lot over the last few months.” She started. “You’ve been doing incredible work, since you started working with us years ago. Borderless has been a success and so has Women’s Spring. You have a gift and it has been truly inspiring to see it develop.”

I smiled. “Well, Melissa, you’re gonna make me blush.” I joked.

She giggled. “Well, we’ve been meaning to make you an offer for a long time now, but we always assumed you wouldn’t be interested since, as you know, most workers at the United Nations are volunteers and aren’t actually paid.”

“I know… but, I don’t understand-“

“We wanna offer you a job.”

“…a job?!”

“Yes. As Human Rights Commissioner.”

“I don’t know what that means.”

“It means you would have a fuller position working to help the United Nations on the fight against Human Rights violations as part of our Human Rights commission.” She explained. “Of course, you would remain as our Goodwill Ambassador, but as a commissioner you would have more responsibilities and so more of your time would be demanded.”

“Mmhm.” I mumbled. 

“Of course, it’s not a paid position, and so we imagined that as an actress you might find it difficult to leave such a high paid job for it, but as I have read very recently, apparently you just finished your last acting project.”

I smiled. “I did… woah, you really, you really mean this, don’t you?! You-You really have been thinking about this since before you knew I was quitting acting?”

“Yes, you have left most of us impressed with your progress with us.”

I nodded, “Okay. Uhm… I actually am still under contract until next February.” I told her. “I have promotion and stuff.”
“That’s okay, there’s no rush. Take your time to think about it. If you’re positive about the proposal, however, I would like to set up that meeting next week, to talk details and explain the position better.”

“Sure, absolutely.” I nodded, even though I knew she couldn’t see me. “Set it up with my assistant.”

“I will.” She replied, and I could tell she was smiling. “Oh, Jenifer, I’m really excited. I think we can do some real good for people who need it!”

I smiled at the sound of passion in her voice. “I look forward to talking more about it.”

“I’ll see you soon, then. Be well.”

“You too, Melissa. Bye-bye.”

When I wheeled myself back into the kitchen, I still had my heart beating excitedly in my chest about the offer I had just gotten. Working with the United Nations? Officially? And not only in a celebrity ambassador fashion – which was already a lot of work -, but as a proper commissioner. A diplomat. What the hell was that?!

“Jenifer, what do you think?” Edward asked, and I shook my head, getting out of my trance.

“I’m sorry?”

“We’re talking about your wedding party.” He explained. “Harry seems to think it’s okay for him to have five ushers.”

“Isn’t it?” I asked. “Also what are ushers?”

“Like groomsmen.” Harry said. “And Edward thinks that, because when William got married he only had me as his best man, if I have more than just him it will look as if I don’t like him as much, or as if I’m trying to prove that I’m more popular than he is.”

“Well, you are.” I shrugged, grinning, and Harry and I exchanged a loud high five.

Edward sighed. “You can’t differ too much from the heir.”

“Okay, first we can’t do things too much like them as to not be compared to them, and then we can’t do things too differently? You need to make up your mind.” I said. “Not to mention, I am having five bridesmaids too.”

“You are?!” Harry marveled. “That’s amazing, we didn’t even plan this.”

“I know!” I smiled, “who are your groomsmen? Sorry, ushers.”

“Well, I’ll ask Will to be my best man. And then I think I’ll have Jake, Skippy, Guy and Thomas as ushers.”

“Nice.” I smiled. “I’ll have Alessa as my maid of honor, and Taylor, Selena, Ophelia and Beezus as bridesmaids.”

He smiled. “Nice!”

“Yes, it is all very nice, except that is too many people!” Edward complained. “You know your brother was advised to have only family in the wedding party, and you know the high officials
won’t like the idea of the likes of Taylor Swift and Ophelia Callis in a royal wedding!”

“Excuse me?!” I asked.

He sighed. “No offense.”

“Uh, yes, offense!”

“Jenifer, it is already tricky that you are an actress who is walking into this,” Edward started, “but you are being welcomed because you are leaving this part of your life behind. But bringing your friends along will only remind people of your Hollywood background.”

“That is so offensive I don’t even know how to start to yell at you.” I said.

“I am only preparing you for what they will say.”

“Who even are they?!” I asked, angry. “Who are these people that get a say in how we do our wedding?!”

“Senior advisors.” Edward said.

“Isn’t that just you?!”

“I will be yours, yes, but these decisions need to be approved by the Queen’s advisors and the Prince of Wales’ advisors as well.”

I sighed, and gave Harry an angry look. Thankfully, unlike what happened with the security issue, this time he was quicker to take my side.

“Edward, we are not Will and Kate.” He said. “They are going to have to understand that we will do things differently, and one of these things is that Jenifer is not a civilian who just happens to be from the same circles as I am. She has her own friends and we are not going to make her leave them behind.”

“Thank you!” I shouted, full of love for the man I was going to marry.

“Everything you say, wear, and associate yourself with will be automatically connected to the whole royal family.” Edward said, warningly. “If you bring your friends into this, they will too. They won’t want to risk this.”

“Okay, so, what I’m getting from this is…” I started, smiling bitterly at him. “Not only am I too much of an embarrassment for the royal family, but so are my friends?!”

“You know that’s not what I meant.” Edward said.

“Well, then you need to express yourself a little better.”

“What even is the big deal about her friends?” Harry asked. “Taylor Swift is known for her charity work and cute cats, and Ophelia Callis for driving badass cars and wearing colorful shoes, why is that so damaging?!”

“Don’t act like your friends aren’t damaging as well, Harry.” Edward said. “They have all been involved in most of your scandals, the press will not be quick to dismiss that. They will point this out as you not only refusing to step away from bad influences, but bringing them further into your life.” He paused. “And to answer your question, what people will focus on is that Ophelia Callis is known for dating a man almost twice her age, Selena Gomez for having been involved with that
human embarrassment Justin Bieber and Taylor Swift for writing songs about her ex-boyfriends. The internet is filled with pictures of them in short, slutty dresses and this is not the best to go on here.”

I felt my own mouth drop in outrage.

“Oh, Edward…” Harry sighed. “I wish you hadn’t said that.”

I was so livid with anger I was considering not only immediately taking back the job offer we made him, but throwing him out of the house. However, somewhere inside I knew he was only preparing us for the concerns ‘the firm’ would raise. So I opened and closed my mouth a couple of times, took several deep breaths and pointed a shaky, angry finger at Edward, but looking at Harry.

“Deal. With. This.” I said, through clenched teeth, before swaging out of the kitchen in my hoverboard.

As I threw myself in bed, cuddling Vodka and exchanging texts with Taylor, Alessa, Selena, Ophelia and Beezus about the wedding ideas, I thought about them.

I thought about how I had met Selena when I was twelve, while we both tried our luck working on Disney. I thought about meeting a bullied, confident Alessa on our first freshman year English class. I thought about meeting Ophelia, when she was only thirteen, at Comic Con, and how excited and hopeful she was about the future. I thought about Taylor, whom I met on set of The Mediator when she came for a special feature in one of our episodes, still a country princess of revenge. I thought about sweet beam of sunlight Beezus, and how I had told her all my secrets in a bathroom once.

There was no way I could possibly get married without my best friends by my side. There was no way I could dive into a new life without Eddy and Johnnie protecting me.

I started to wonder about the U.N. job offer and, if the firm would have so many issues with my friends, would they have issues with that too?
Rumors

Chapter Summary

Jen goes on a promo tour, answers a hard question by Oscar and one secret gets out.

The fact I had defined my future didn’t mean a thing when the press didn’t knew about it. As a result, the end of 2017 was all about every crazy new rumor they could come up with.

On October, I packed up again and went away to promote Broken. Along with Tom Hardy, I traveled to Paris, Italy, Spain, Germany, the US, Toronto, Japan and finally back to London to the main premiere, which would be there since the movie was set there. At every country we stopped by, the press’ idea was simple: Tom and I were apparently obviously obviously dating.

At every sassy look from interviewers with the very gentle questions about our ‘great chemistry’ in the movie, and how was it to shoot the ‘steamy scenes’ I just wanted to scream at them: ‘GUESS WHAT, BITCHES? I AM ENGAGED TO PRINCE HARRY!’.

But, of course, I couldn’t. Because then the headlines wouldn’t read ‘Jenifer Silva and Tom Hardy rumored secret romance’, but ‘Prince Harry’s FIANCE on steamy sex scene in new movie’, and I had a feeling the Queen might not be too happy about that.

“You two have such great chemistry together!” Ellen DeGeneres said when we attended her show in California right before our Los Angeles premiere.

Tom and I gave her the same polite smile we had been giving people the entire time.

“Well, we are good actors.” Tom joked, making her audience laugh.

“Nah, I’m sure it was very easy, I mean, we have a picture here of the two of you shooting,” she pointed at the screen behind her, where they quickly showed a scene from the movie when Tom kissed me passionately as we laid on the floor. “I mean, that looks very easy to do.”

“It’s a tough job, but someone’s gotta do it.” I joked. “I mean, if I have to make out with Tom Hardy, I will… for the art!” they laughed. “Because I’m a professional!”

“You were shooting this in London, where you two actually live now. Do you live near each other?”

“Oh, no.” Tom told her. “Jen lives near the palace, I’m not that fancy.”

I blushed, as the audience cheered.

But not even a hook like that would have Ellen asking about Harry to let go of that damn rumor.

“So did you spend a lot of time together while you were shooting? Did you manage to have lunch together at home, and things like that?”

“I was able to have lunch with a lot of friends who were there,” I said, and looked at Tom, “but I think we only really had lunch together a couple of times.”
“Yes, with Claire that time, right?” He asked. “Right.”

Normally, Ellen would have jumped in the bandwagon to ask who Claire was, but the thing about Claire was: she walked with clutches. She had been Tom’s date to the past Oscars and, I think her disability made people so confused in a world where perfection was so upheld that the press simply chose to ignore the fact that Tom was so obviously dating her.

And so their only choice was this; pretending there’s a story here where he and I are together, because I am such a better target than she is. And as much as I wanted to call them out on it, I couldn’t. Because firstly, it wasn’t my relationship to talk about. And secondly, they managed to ask about it just humorously enough that if we got angry, we would become the irrational ones.

I was so done with this Hollywood bullshit.

“So, we’re gonna play a game!” Ellen told her audience, smiling, and took out from a table nearby two paddles that she handed us.

One side had the words ‘I have’, the other the words ‘I never’, and so we began a game of Never-Have-I-Ever. Her first question? Never have I ever slept with a co-star. Tom and I both showed her the ‘I have’ paddle, blushing. I was thinking, of course, of Tyler years ago. Tom, who knows? It’s none of my business. But the shitty thing about the internet is this: it doesn’t matter what actually happened, just what it looked like happened. That alone was enough for the cyber mob mentality to kick in and suddenly everyone was ready to believe what they were told. And what they were told was that Jenifer Silva and Tom Hardy ‘low-key’ admitted to sleeping together.

Cue in the rumors about ‘Prince Harry’s insane jealousy’, ‘Prince Harry and Jenifer Silva fighting over Tom Hardy’ and ‘Palace Officials livid at Jenifer Silva’s betrayal’. With my new status as a – secret- royal fiancé, there was something else the promotion tour brought: Edward and the ‘palace officials’ meddling.

I had not one, not two, but three Skype calls with Lane-Fox about my ‘interviewing stance’.

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?!” I asked him the first time he called. “Explain as if I’m a child.”

“It means you are being a celebrity.” He said, slowly. “And we need you to remember that you are not just a celebrity anymore.”

“I am.” I said. “I still am. Until we announce this, I am still just an actress promoting a movie.”

“Just because they don’t know about the engagement yet, doesn’t mean that it doesn’t exist.” He said. “You need to start behaving as a royal, Jenifer, you’ll be one soon enough and we can’t have the press quoting you back a few months saying that you slept with a co-star!”

As much as I hated to admit it, I knew he was right. I was taking on a new position and I had to behave appropriately. I wanted to do right by it. I loved Harry and I was taking on his family and with that, I wanted to represent them properly. So I had to leave my Hollywood interview model behind and take on a new one.

Before the London premiere of Broken, I traveled to New York to attend the United Nations’ General Assembly one more time. I wasn’t giving a speech this year, either, but was attending panels and discussion groups about a number of issues. I was meeting and making connections to people who would help us develop Borderless better, and some of the people I was taken to meet was just as royalty as I would soon be, like the Crown Princess of Denmark and the Queens of
Jordan and Netherlands. All of whom were also commoners who had married into the royalty and were now leading forces in humanitarian work.

When I was introduced to them, however, there was no mention of Harry. They didn’t want to talk about how I was also dating a prince. They wanted to talk about work – about Borderless, and my experience with the human rights fight. They wanted to talk about the situation of it in Brazil, about my opinions and how their experiences related to it. They barely even mentioned my acting career, only to very briefly compliment my work and say their kids or even themselves were fans. But they seemed to think the most interesting thing I could offer was my work with the U.N. which made me realize something.

I am good at it. I am not only a good actress, I am a good humanitarian. I am talented at my U.N. job and I probably could do a good job at the one they were offering me now. The realization that I could potentially be talented at more than just one thing was both shocking and fulfilling.

I got to sit down with Melissa Bergamo and her bosses before leaving, to talk more about the job they were offering me.

Melissa Bergamo, the director of the U.N.’s Human Rights commission had been my contact for my work with them since I had been made their Goodwill Ambassador, but now I was meeting her bosses, the big, high ups on the United Nations. They spoke to me for a good half-an-hour about the work I would be developing and how much they were looking forward to it, and reiterated that I had time to think, but that they hoped I would say yes.

I was extremely excited, but I knew there was an issue: I was getting married.

“Could I work from London?” I asked them.

“Of course.” Melissa said. “Our head-quarters are in Geneva, so you would be expected to travel there semi-often, but we have a London office. I’m sure we can work something out.”

But would they still want a royal on their payroll? I mean that metaphorically, of course, because it was a volunteer job I wouldn’t be paid for. As far as I could see, there were two ways this could go. Either they would want me even more if they knew I was marrying Harry, since they might think it meant they had influence into the monarchy, or they might not want me at all, since they would assume I couldn’t be impartial since I would be a country’s representative with direct links to the monarchy.

And that was just what the U.N. would think, there was still the other side: what would Harry’s family think? The palace officials who kept telling me to bring it down a notch, Edward… Harry. Would they let me have a job? I knew they were okay with my charity work, and the work with EducaUP, but an actual U.N. position? Would the UK politicians think it’s a bad thing? Would they make me say no? Would I say no if they told me to?

Before I knew if I would, I needed to know if I wanted the job. I needed to know if this was what I wanted, and what impact it would have on my plans, before I brought anyone else into this.

Finally, I traveled back to home to London. I put on my nice dress and drove down to the last Broken premiere, excited to close this chapter and open the new one to see if maybe now they would stop putting me and Tom Hardy together.

I posed with Tom on the red carpet, and then we went our separate ways to give interviews, answering the same questions as usual, except with the British interviewers I had more of a hard time dodging Harry questions. I kept holding on to my left hand ring finger, missing the ring I got
used to having there, wishing I could just tell everyone my big news already.

When I was ushered into the dark theatre for the movie, we sat down and heard the director make his usual pre-preview speech, and then waited as they dimmed the lights and everyone took to their seats for the movie to start. It was probably the tenth time I would see that movie, as we had to see it on every premiere, and I was getting a little bored now.

Before the lights were completely dimmed, I saw a shape take a seat next to me.

“You look beautiful tonight, Miss Silva.”

I looked to my right to find Harry, all handsome in his tux, smiling smugly at me.

“What are you doing here?!” I asked, whispery, as the movie was starting.

“I heard there was a good movie on.” He said, smiling.

“Did they see you come in?!”

“Of course.” He smiled. “It’s packed with press outside. They were yelling at me to pose and answer questions, that was horrible. How do you do that?”

“I’m quitting.” I reminded him, smiling.

“Oh, that’s right.”

“Harry, you came…” I marveled.

He shrugged, smiling. “I was getting tired of them pretending I didn’t exist.”

“What does that mean?”

“Well, now they can’t say we’re not together anymore.” He said.

“Wait,” I started, “did you just come because you were jealous of the rumors?!”

“No.” He smiled, but even in the dark I could see he was blushing. “I came to see the movie. I’m a big Tom Hardy fan.”

I smiled. “They’re gonna make a big deal out of this.”

“I’m sure they already are.” He said.

“Edward is gonna be mad.”

“Screw Edward.” He smiled. “I’m just here as a guest. Not as Prince Harry. Tonight I’m just a private citizen checking out his girlfriend’s work. And sshh, the movie is starting.”

As the movie rolled along, I was watching a different story unfold. Harry. I was watching his expressions, his laugh at every joke. His eyes on the screen. The way he flickered when Tom’s character got beat up on his fights. The way he turned to look at me, all proud, when my character had her singing debut. The way he took forever to turn to look at the movie again, and just rested his rest on the seat, looking at me like I was looking at him. There was no cameras inside, and it was dark, and so no one saw it when I leaned in and kissed my fiancé as, in the screen, my character was falling in love with someone else.
He left by the back door that night, and I met him at home later on. The press didn’t get pictures of us together, so all they had was that they knew we were both there. The Tom rumors finally died down. And I went home to the love of my life, dreading the countdown to when I would have to go on to another promotion tour.

__

My month of November was all about Disney. This time, the promotion started in London and made its way across Europe all the way down to Japan and Australia, before we flew to Brazil and Guatemala, from where we would go to California.

The Disney marketing team added premiere dates in Brazil and Guatemala to cash in on the fact their leading stars, Oscar and I, were from those places. It worked. Both premieres were insanely successful, brought in record breaking amounts of people, and moved thousands of Disney fans to chase us down incessantly like we were Beyoncé. We were giving interviews in Portuguese and Spanish the whole time, and, by the time we got to the U.S. we went back to giving interviews in English, but still kept on talking in Spanish – or Oscar’s attempt at Portuguese – to exchange jokes without the interviewers or production teams knowing.

“Esse tem cara de que vai fazer perguntas legais.” Oscar would mumble as a new interviewer would walk in, meaning: ‘this one looks like he might ask good questions’.

“Te juro que se eu tiver que falar sobre como a peruca era pesada mais uma vez eu vou explodir.” I would reply, saying ‘I swear if I have to answer about how heavy that wig was one more time I am going to explode’.

People started picking up on it, and there were a few articles online about Oscar Isaac and Jenifer Silva mocking interviewers in their original languages – somehow, people seemed to like that.

Unfortunately, there were indeed other things everyone seemed to want to know about, and not just my Rapunzel wig. First, how ironic that I was playing a princess as I dated a prince. Oh, if they only knew… and second, that I was Oscar’s girlfriend’s best friend and yet, was kissing her boyfriend on this movie.

First we started trying to be dismissive: “Listen, we don’t talk about that.” We would say. “It’s too weird. It’s like fight club, there’s things you just don’t talk about.”

Then, as it usually happened on press junket interview days, we would grow tired and start losing the energy. And so the answers somehow became: “Well, if you can’t kiss your best friend’s boyfriend, who can you kiss??”

In New York, however, we went to Jimmy Fallon, who managed to uncover the footage from my appearance on the Graham Norton Show the year before when I was promoting Heathers, in which I talked about how much I hated Oscar until not long before then.

“So, Jenifer, do you wanna-do you wanna explain to us what’s going on there?” Jimmy asked, giggly, as his audience still laughed of the me on the video talking about hating Oscar when we had met.

“Well…” I started, awkwardly.

“First of all, Oscar, were you aware of this? That this was going on when you met?” He asked.

Oscar gave me a fearful look, slightly moving away on the couch. “I don’t wanna talk about this.” The audience laughed, as he seemed to be scared of me, and he smiled. “No, no, listen… you think
that’s funny because you don’t know half of it!”

And so he told them.

“I was at the Emmys’ backstage, I had just performed, Jenifer had just won an award. And I was standing there, and she comes to talk to me,” he looked at the audience, “which in itself it’s frightening enough, you see, it’s Jenifer Silva! But she just walks to me, all smiley and polite, giving me this intense look, and someone asks to take a picture, right? In these events there’s always photographers backstage, so we pose for them, sort of side-hugging, like this,” he passed an arm over my shoulder. “Keeping a respectful distance because, you know, we just met and it’s awkward… and so I try to make small talk, and I turned to her and said, you know? I don’t mind the pictures, but the flashes are just rude, or something like that.”

“Which is already enough to annoy me.” I joked, making them laugh.

“And you need to know the background to this is,” Oscar smiling, blushing, “I had been sort of in a flirtationship with my current girlfriend back then…”

“Ophelia Callis!” Jimmy Fallon said, making the audience cheer in excitement.

“Yes.” Oscar cleaned his throat, shyly, “and uh… well, I knew she and Jen were friends, but I was unaware at the time that they’re not just friends, they are like sisters.”

“Uh-oh.” Jimmy said, playfully.

“Yeah!” Oscar laughed. “They have this almost cult-like bond and Jenifer, in case you don’t know, is very protective.”

I looked at them, smugly. “Yes, I am.” They laughed. “Listen, I think anyone who loves someone else like a sister will understand this. There’s Ophelia, who is not only gorgeous, but charismatic and kind, and smart and talented, and then in comes this,” I pointed at Oscar, dramatically, “looking all hot and handsome thinking is just like that, you can just waltz in and take her? Excuse me, buddy, but you’ll have to prove you’re worthy first!”

The audience applauded and cheered my rant, loudly.


“It is.” Oscar said. “Now I understand it, at the time, I was basically afraid for my life when I realized just how much this bond meant for them.”


“I merely did what any person with a sister would.” I smiled, innocently. “I turned to Oscar and told him, very politely and nicely, that if he ever hurt her I would turn his life a living hell.” I shrugged, innocently, and they applauded and cheered loudly again, making Oscar and Jimmy laugh.

“No, but you don’t understand!” Oscar said. “From my perspective, this is what it was like. We were standing there, smiling for the pictures, and she barely even turns to me and just whispers in my ear,” he looked at them, dramatically, “in Spanish! And says,” he smiled ahead, looking very poised, mimicking me, “if you ever treat her like she is any less of the greatest thing to bless the universe in a million years, keep in mind I have many ways to make your life a living hell.”
“Oh, wow!” Jimmy said, impressed.

“Yes!” Oscar smiled. “It was the most mafia-like experience of my life!”

“And the greatest thing is,” Jimmy said, fishing for something under his desk, “we actually have the photos from that night, look at this.” He showed us, and the, audience two pictures of Oscar and me on the backstage of the Emmys’ when we met.

I was holding my award, and Oscar was standing beside me. In the first picture, we were both smiling, and I was leaning slightly towards him to speak in his ear. In the second, I was smiling straight at the camera, but Oscar’s face had gone clearly pale and his smile was flickering as his eyes drifted off into space.

“You look so scared!” Jimmy laughed loudly, followed by his audience.

“That is the face of a man scared for his life!” Oscar said, dramatic.

Jimmy waited until the audience’s laughter dimmed before speaking again.

“So, let’s talk about Tangled.” He started. “The movie looks amazing, did you like Disney movies growing up? Fairytales and such?”

“So much!” Oscar said, enthusiastic, taking advantage of the fact Jimmy had asked it looking at me, probably imagining Oscar would say no. The audience laughed, but he looked at them, serious. “No, I mean it. I think everyone loves Disney movies. And being in one is just… incredible.”

“Jen, do you like being Rapunzel?”

“I love Rapunzel.” I told him, wide-eyed. “I really do, I think she’s my favorite! I love her passion for seeing the world and finding out what’s out there, I identify with it a lot.”

“And this is gonna be one of the last movies of your career, no?”

“This is the… movie before last of my career.” I told him.

“No regrets?” He asked.

“No regrets.” I smiled. “I mean, you know… after I reached a certain moment in my career where I felt like I had done everything I had set out to achieve and so much more, I realized I had nothing to prove anymore. And there’s something very freeing about that, it helps you analyze things better and make decisions truly based on what you want and nothing else. And I was able to know then that I had gotten what I wanted and so now is time to want something else. Like Rapunzel, kind of, in the movie, where she achieves a dream and sets after a new one. It’s the best part, and I am very excited.”

The audience applauded, supportive, and I took in a deep breath I hadn’t realized I was keeping out.

“You know, Rapunzel, she… she sort of,” Jimmy started, as the applause died. “Her new dream becomes the guy, doesn’t it? Is that… is that maybe what your new dream is gonna be?!”

I smiled, blushing. “Well… I don’t know what my new dream is yet.” I lied, thinking about the U.N. job offer. “But I’m very excited about having no rush to find out.”

“So my question now is…” Jimmy started, “when, if ever, did you actually become friends?”
“We didn’t.” I said, giving Oscar a wicked grin, and he playfully scooted over on the couch to put some distance between us. I laughed. “No, I’m kidding. A couple of months after they started dating, I think. We bonded over a karaoke performance, which is also how I make most of my friends.” They laughed.

“Must have still been weird, though, kissing your best friend’s boyfriend?” Jimmy asked.

“Well, it’s one way of bonding.” Oscar joked. “But it was tricky, you know? I quickly discovered there was no winning. Like, if you say it wasn’t a big deal, Ophelia would be like, what? So you liked kissing my best friend? And if I said no, yuck! It was horrible, she would be like, so you’re saying my best friend is a bad kisser?!?” we laughed. “I’m telling you, they have this weird, protective bond!”

“You can’t like it too much, that’s right.” Jimmy agreed.

“At the end of the day, it was like kissing a sister, because we’re friends now.” Oscar shrugged.

I winced. “That’s weird, though.”

Jimmy laughed, “Yeah, you don’t kiss your sisters!”


“That’s right, that works, because O is like your sister.”

“Yes, we did it! That works. Because then, with the kissing, it’s like…” I thought about it. “It’s not incest, but liking it would be weird.”

“Does every Disney movie interview includes talking about incest?” Jimmy joked.

“Well, that’s how we do it!” I smiled.

—

“You said something interesting tonight.” Oscar started, a few hours later, when we finally got back to our hotel.

He had proposed we ordered pizza and ate together, so we were currently in his room as he dropped the pizza boxes on the table and I tried to take off my stiletto heels.

“Why do you sound so surprise? I’m a very interesting person.” I joked, trying to bend over in my skintight skirt and failing.

“Here.” He said. Coming over and taking a seat before me, he picked up my legs and laid them in his lap, and started unstrapping my sandals.

“So gentlemanly and cordial. Thanks.” I said, surprised.

“Why so surprised? I’m a very gentlemanly and cordial person.” He said, playful. “But I meant, you know, the thing about how, because Ophelia is like your sister, I’m like your brother-in-law.”

“Oh, yeah, that was cute, huh? O is gonna like it.”

“Yeah…” He said, and I noticed he was noticeably blushing. And a little breathless. Was he nervous? “Jen… I wanted to talk to you about something.”
“Those words have never in the history of humankind ever been followed by something good.”

He laughed, nervously. “Well, hopefully you’ll change your mind after I say it.” He pulled one sandal off, and got started on the other. “You see… You know how Ophelia’s relationship with her father is estranged, right?”

I scorned, bitterly. “Yeah, the jerk. Good for her, though. She’s better off.”

“I agree.” He nodded.

Ophelia’s father had divorced her mother when she was little, and their relationship had been quite irregular until about when she won her two Academy Awards and her success went through the roof. Then he started acting like father of the year, as if he had done something to help her. As if her success was because of him, instead of in spite of him. She cut him off soon after.

“Well, you see, the thing is…” Oscar sighed, nervously now struggling against my sandals. “The thing is, as you know, Ophelia and I have been together for almost two years now, and we’ve been living together for about eight months… and Jesus Christ, why is this so hard?!”

“Oh, my God!” I said, my voice an octave higher. I covered my lips with a shaky hand, feeling a single tear drop down my cheek. “Oh, my God!”

“I am in love with Ophelia.” He said, serious, giving me an intense look. “I want nothing more in life than to have the chance to make her happy, and if that is what she wants, I will make it my mission in life for the rest of my days. So, considering your relationship, and the fact her father isn’t around and her mother is in Australia and I won’t see her for months…” He reached into his blazer’s pocket, and took out a small, velvet ring box, which he opened to reveal a shining, large oval cut ruby ring on a yellow gold band. “I would like your permission to marry her.”

“I remembered Ophelia’s adorable thirteen year-old face when we met, full of hope for a future she was yet to meet. I remembered the tears that streamed down her face when she had won her two Academy Awards, and every word she had ever said to me that had made me wonder if she was really younger than me.

Oscar wanted my permission. He wanted to marry my baby. I needed to know if this was the right thing for her. Ophelia was in her twenties; she was young, of course, but she was sure of herself,
and confident, and financially independent. Why wouldn’t she want to marry the man she had loved so much she had fought against everything for?

“I won’t give you my permission.” I told him, turning to look at him, who now wore a sad expression of defeat as he sat back in the chair. “Because as much as I have always wanted to protect her, Ophelia is her own person, and she doesn’t need it… But I will give you my blessing.”

He let out a deep sigh of relieve. “Dios mio, chica! Did you have to say it like that?!?” I giggled, and he finally smiled as he stood up. “Are you serious?”

I smiled. “Keep in mind that I’m marrying into royalty, and soon enough I’ll have diplomatic immunity, which means I can get away with many new ways of making your life a living hell.”

Oscar grinned. “I wouldn’t expect any less.”

I smiled broader. “That being said… Oh, my God!” I started jumping, giggling uncontrollably. “You’re getting married! You’re going to propose! Ophelia is getting married!”

Oscar laughed, and opened his arms just in time to catch me when I threw my arms around him in a bear-tight hug.

“You think she’ll like the ring? I was so nervous!”

“She’s gonna love it.” I said, giving him back the box. “It’s perfect, it’s classic, and it’s big!” He laughed. “Oh, my God, I’m so excited! When are you gonna propose?! I need to call Harry to tell him! I need to call the girls!”

“No girls!” He warned, serious. “No one can know or someone will ruin the surprise. Though Harry already knows.”

“What?!”

“He helped me pick the ring.” Oscar justified.

“He knew and he didn’t tell me? That little shit.” Oscar laughed. “When are you gonna do it?!?”

“Well, it was supposed to be weeks ago, but then you and Harry had us over for pizza and told us you were engaged and I didn’t want O to think I was doing it just because you did.”

“Oh, my God, I’m engaged!” I said, euphoric.

“Yes, you are.” He smiled.

“Ophelia and I are gonna be engaged at the same time!” I squealed. “We’re gonna plan a wedding together!”

“Well, hopefully Harry and I can be included in some part of it.” He joked.

“We’ll try to fit you in.” I teased, and suddenly my phone ringed.

I jumped excitedly across the room to get it in my purse, still dreaming about Ophelia and Oscar and the weddings we would soon be planning. My baby was getting married! What could ruin this much happiness?!

“Jenifer.” Edward hissed before I had even said hello.
“Hello, Edward! What can I help you with in this beautiful, gorgeous, magnificent night?!” I said, dreamily, making Oscar giggle as he started cutting our pizzas.

“Jenifer, cut the crap.” He said, angrily, and I stared at the phone, confused. “Are you leaving?”

“I’m sorry?” I asked. “I’m not leaving for another two days, the premiere is tomorrow, and then I have an important meeting the day after with-“

“No, that’s not what I fucking asked. Goddammit, Jenifer!” I was feeling more confused by the second, especially at the fact that Edward, in his peak Britishness, was never this aggressive. Passive-aggressive, yes. But this?!

“Edward, what happened?!”

“Did you get a job with the United Nations?!” he asked, briskly.

I felt a twist of anxiety in my stomach. “How do you know about that?!”

“Oh, my God. Oh, my God!” He shouted. “So it’s true?! After everything, everything that you put us through, you’re doing this now?!”

“Edward, I-“

“There’s no excuse, Jenifer! No excuse!” He shouted. “I thought I had you figured out, I honestly did. I should have trusted my initial instincts. I should have known-“

“Edward, shut up a minute! What the hell are you going on about?!” I asked. “How did you know about the U.N.? I didn’t even accept it yet!”

He was quiet. “…you didn’t? Not that it matters, because the fact that you even went applying to jobs-!”

“I didn’t apply, I was offered.” I said.

“Well-“ He sighed. “Well, Jenifer, honestly, I would have at least expected that after everything Chelsy put us through you would have had the kindness, nay! The decency of telling Harry you didn’t want to marry him as soon as it happened!”

“What?!”

“I guess is a god thing we haven’t announce it yet, because at least that embarrassment we can spare him of this time!”

“Edward!” I screamed, trying to get him to shut up. Oscar was looking at me worriedly, “What are you talking about?! Of course I wanna marry Harry!”

“Well.” He said, and I could hear his angry breathing through the speakers. “Then you have a funny way of showing it!”

“It’s just a job offer!” I said. “I haven’t even taken it. But even if I did, I would try to do it while married to him, I’m not leaving him!”

“…you’re not?!”

“No!” I shouted. “And, Jesus! Where did you even hear about it?!”
He sighed. “The United Nations’ high commissioner was on a state dinner last night with The Prince of Wales, and he couldn’t help but gush about how excited he was to be working closer with you for the next couple of years! His Royal Highness, of course, was confused, because as far as he knows you’re supposed to be marrying his son in less than a year from now!”

I gulped, feeling only the anxiety increase and the air disappear.

“Edward, does Harry know about this?!”

“Of course he knows.” He said. “How do you think I know? He was all mopey when I went to see him just now, drinking tequila and talking about how it is happening again!”

I closed my eyes, in frustration. Harry knew about the job offer. Worst part: Harry thought I had applied for the job offer and that I hadn’t told him because I was planning on leaving like Chelsy did when they got married.

“He thinks I’ll break up with him?!” I asked, trying to keep my voice steady.

Edward didn’t answer my question, but his words worried me a lot more.

“Jenifer, I think you need to come home.”
Together or Not at All

Chapter Summary

Jen and Harry have a long time coming conversation about how their relationship needs to change in order for their marriage to work. They stand up for what they want against the Palace officials and Harry threatens to abdicate.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The phone call with Edward was followed by the most agonizing fifteen hours of my life. I left Oscar’s hotel room in a hurry, grabbing my heels and a slice of pizza off of his hands and yelling over my shoulder for him to have Ophelia call me as soon as he proposed. Before I was even in my room I was already talking to the airport to order my private jet be set up to take off back to London as soon as possible - I had finally bought a private jet after realizing that when you need to rent one more than four times a year it just makes sense to buy.

I quickly threw my things in my suitcase, yelled at Eddy and Johnnie to hurry up, and we hopped on a town car for the airport where we got into the jet and, an agonizing fifteen hours later, landed back in London.

“Harry?!” I called, as I got home late that afternoon.

“Kitchen.”

It was Edward’s voice, and I found both of them sitting in the kitchen stools. Harry had his arms folded over the counter of the kitchen’s black marble isle, a glass of whiskey in front of him. At five in the afternoon.

“Hi.” I said.

“You think this is an appropriate behavior for a future duchess?!” Edward snapped, raising a newspaper with a paparazzi picture of me on it; it was as I was leaving the hotel to catch the jet back home, and I had my middle finger raised pointing it at the lens. “Can you imagine Kate doing something like this?!”

“I can imagine she would love to.” I told him.

“Jenifer, you can’t keep doing these things.” He sighed. “And since we’re at it, you shouldn’t be discussing kissing your best friend’s boyfriend either!”

“It’s my job, Edward.”

“Yes and it would help if you could cut the damage we’ll have to deal with after-“

“Edward, can you leave?” I asked. “I don’t mean to be rude, but I need to talk to Harry.”

He sighed, giving Harry a worried glance before hopping off the stool and exiting the kitchen with the newspaper and his own glass of whiskey, closing the door behind him.
Harry hadn’t raised his eyes to look at me since I had arrived, which worried me far more than if he was screaming. I remembered the proposal, when he had told me I was the only color he saw whenever I walked into a room. I wondered if he was trying not to look, in case he would not be able to anymore.

I walked around the kitchen table, standing right before him, but his eyes were still on his whiskey. I didn’t dare touch him, or kiss him, when I could see the anger in the way he was clenching his jaw.

“Hi.” I said.

Harry lowered his glass, still staring at it, and opened his mouth. He rehearsed a sentence in his mind, seeming to give up what he was going to say right before his voice came out. He bit his lip.

“I asked you to tell me as soon you wanted out.” He said, his voice deep and shaky. I knew he was trying to control the volume of it.

“I don’t want out.”

“Jenifer.” He said, teeth clenched. “Did you take a job at the U.N.?!?”

“No.” I said. “I was offered one, but I haven’t accepted it yet.” He stared at his glass in silence. “I was going to tell you.”

“When?!” he asked, standing up from the kitchen stool abruptly. “After we announced we were getting married?!”

“After I knew how I felt about it.” I said, loudly, a little annoyed now. “I wanted to make the decision alone before getting other people’s opinions on it.”

“Jenifer, we’re supposed to be spending the rest of our fucking lives together.” He whispered, bitterly. “We’re supposed to talk about these things, together.”

“And we were going to!” I said, walking around him, desperately trying to catch his eyes. “As soon as I knew how I felt about it! I still didn’t even know if I wanted it!”

“Well, I’m assuming you already do considering the high commissioner seems to be under the impression he’ll be working with you soon!”

“I don’t know why he said that, I haven’t accepted yet!” I said, angry. “I was told I have until February to decide. I was still understanding what the offer meant, what the job would be to know if I could do it after we get married!”

“Oh, so we are still getting married?!?” he asked, ironic. “Thank you for keeping me informed!”

“Why the hell would this even mean that we are not getting married?!” I shouted. “Believe it or not, Harry, it’s the twenty-first century and women are allowed to have jobs and be married!”

He gave me a look of distaste, the first time he looked at me and it was such a bitter look.

“Oh, don’t do that!” he said. “You know it’s not about that!”

“Then what is it even about?! Tell me!” I asked. “Because all I’m hearing is that I dared be offered a job without even asking for it and apparently that’s some kind of betrayal!”

He quickly took a few fast steps towards me. “Are you leaving me?” he asked.
I sighed, the toll of the fifteen hours journey and all the worrying finally making me physically tired. “Would I have flown fifteen hours and skipped my movie’s New York premiere to come here and tell you that I’m leaving you?!”

“That is not the answer I was looking for.” He mumbled, shaking his head.

“Well, Harry I don’t know what to tell you.”

“How about telling me if this is really what you want?!”

“I am so done with you doubting me!” I said. “I know what I’m doing and I wanna be with you, why won’t you just believe me?!”

“You don’t accept that we have different rules for security, you wanna hire most of your management team to our staff, you’ve been giving interviews to make yourself a clickbait article and you just accepted a job!”

“I didn’t accept it!” I shouted. “And I’m sorry if it’s a little hard for me to adapt to the new rules of interviews. Since I was twelve years-old I was instructed to make a spectacle of myself, because that’s how you get famous! It’s hard remembering I’m supposed to be all gracious now! And you told me you were on my side on the other things, on Eddy and Johnnie, and the girls-“

“I am.” He said, through clenched teeth. “But I can’t help but wonder if your reluctance to accept change means you’re not really aware of how this world works, and maybe you don’t want it all that much!”

“Oh, my God!” I shouted. “You can’t be serious!”

“Can’t I?!?”

“No, you can’t! Harry, I’m trying! I’m doing my best, why is it so hard to believe that I want to be with you?!”

“Right. Because you’ve made it so clear over the last five years!”

I had no words. Through all the anger and resentment, I knew he was right. Ever since we had met all I had in me was reluctance and fear. All I had was goodbyes and excuses. I ran away from him so much it made sense, in the saddest of ways, that he thought I would do it now too. He had always been so confident that I loved him, even when I wasn’t, that it never occurred to me that he had doubts. It never occurred to me that I should reassure him that I knew what I was doing.

I had felt my change, I knew what I wanted, but after almost five years it was clear Harry would need more convincing. I had always worried so much about my issues I forgot he had them too. With pain aching through my heart, I realized the process of gluing my broken pieces back together had left him quite broken himself. And now he thought I was doing the same thing Chelsy had.

Chelsy had accepted his proposal. Chelsy had applied to jobs she knew she couldn’t take as his wife. And Chelsy had broken up with him to accept the job because she had decided she wanted the job more than she wanted him.

I had been always unsure of our future; I had always been the one to suggest maybe we should take it slow; and then I had accepted to spend the rest of our lives together and had been made a job offer that might mean I changed my mind.

Of course he thought I was leaving him.
“Look at me.” I begged. “Please.”

He scratched his eyes, looking tired, and turned around. His eyes were disappointed and sad and I hated knowing I had made them that way. Why didn’t I just tell him? I knew what Chelsy did, why didn’t I just tell him?!

“Harry, I am not Chelsy.” I told him.

“Well, you’re acting a lot like her right now.”

“Okay, first of all,” I started, with renewed energy, “that is actually kind of offensive. I did not apply for a job behind your back and I did not break up with you to take it after telling the world I wanted to be your wife!”

“Well, give it time.” He mumbled.

“No!” I shouted, angry, taking a closer step to him, who was – I was happy to see – startled. “I am not done so you do not get to keep insulting me-“

“I’m not-“

“I said I’m not done!” I interrupted, and he was quiet. “I know I haven’t been the easiest person to love, and I hope you know how sorry I am about it, but I am trying to get better!” I shouted. “I asked you to marry me, I told all of our friends about it, and I am planning my future with you because I am in love with you and I don’t see it without you in it anymore!” I sighed, trying to keep my voice from rising too high. “And Jesus, if this is what you’ve been dealing with, with me trying to push you away all this time, I do not know how we even made it, because this sucks!”

I paused, taking in a deep breath, not even knowing where to go from there.

“I don’t wanna fire Eddie and Johnnie because they need this job, I trust them, and I want them to keep on protecting me. It makes no sense to fire two good body guards just to hire three other ones that the palace deems worthy!” I said, a little calmed, but still spitting anger. “And Monica and Clara are good at their jobs, too, and you will notice that the other half of our staff is made of your people.”

“I know.” He interrupted. “I just- I just think maybe you’re doing this because you don’t actually want your life to change, and Jen that is dangerous, because there is no way that you can avoid change if you marry me.”

“I don’t care if my life changes.” I said, calmer than ever before. “I want it to change. I’m retiring for it to change. I’m marrying you because I want change!”

“I don’t think you understand what this change is about-“

“Honestly, fuck you.” I said, and he gave me a heartbreakingly sad look. “Okay?! No, you don’t get to do this. I know I haven’t been easy, Harry, but you don’t get to just assume I don’t know what I’m doing with my life-“

“That’s not what I said-“

“Maybe that’s not what you meant, but that is exactly what you said!” I shouted. “You think I would just jump into an engagement without knowing what it would involve?! I asked you, I asked Kate, I’ve been dealing with Edward’s royal training and, and- slut shaming of my friends!”
“I do not agree with that, and you know it!”

“My point is I know what this change means!” I said. “I know I’ll never wear skintight, short
clothes in public again. I know I’ll never swear in public again. I know I’ll never be able to
badmouth a politician, even if they deserve it. I know I won’t be able to use my civic right to
democratically vote! Hell, I even know I’ll have to convert to Anglicanism!”

“I didn’t ask you to-“

“Edward did!” I stopped him. “You know why? Because he’s been making it pretty clear to me
what marrying you involves, and he knows that if everything goes wrong and, God forbid, you
become king the people will need to know I’m Anglican. And I don’t care! I know what I believe
in, I don’t care what religion has the bragging rights to my name!”

I sighed, pausing, trying to remember what else was so wrong that I needed to address.

“I know what I want.” I said, softly, trying to keep my voice steady. “I want you. And I understand
why it is so hard for you to believe it, but please stop assuming I am going to leave you, because I
won’t… that being said, Harry,” I sighed. “The United Nations offered me a position as a Human
Rights commissioner. I would partake and help in active research and action planning on the fight
against human rights violations over the globe.”

He nodded, seeming a lot calmer himself, staring at the floor with his hands in his hips.

“It would be an exciting job that I think I would be really good at. I think I could do some good. I
think I could help people. And I would love to take it.” I paused, walking slowly towards him until
he had no choice but to look at me. “Now, ideally, I would like to take the job and marry you. It’s
humanitarian work and I think it’s the sort of thing that could go well with a royal. If I need to
make compromises, like avoid being too political or something like that, I am willing to talk about
it. But this is an offer that has been making me really excited and I am sorry I didn’t talk to you
about it sooner. You were right.”

I held his hands, enlacing our fingers together.

“You are going to be my partner forever and this is the kind of decision that I should have trusted
to share with you from the start. I am sorry.” I sighed, and looked at him. “So I am doing it now.
Harry, I want this job. I really do, because I think I could help people and be good at it. So, the way
I see it, we have two options. One, we take this offer to the advisors and see if we can reach a
compromise that will allow me to be a working royal and also a U.N. Human Rights
commissioner. Two, they say no, in which case I would have to choose between marrying you and
taking the job.”

I saw his brows curl in worry, as he avoided my eyes.

“In which case my only choice would be, of course, to politely decline the job offer.”

He looked at me, and I had never thought I could feel this much sadness over someone else’s tears.

“I couldn’t let you do that.” He whispered.

“Good thing I am my own person and make my own decisions and will die before I let you let me
do anything.” I said, pointedly, and he closed his eyes, sighing with his lips curling into tiny smile.

“You said you want the job.”
“I want you more.”

He let go of one of my hands to run his index and thumb under his eyes, to dry his own tears. I had never realized how unthinkable it was for him to find someone who would tell him those words.

“But you said you wanna do it—”

“I wanna help people, yes.” I nodded. “And if I can’t do it at the U.N., then I’ll find other ways. I mean, I will be a royal, it’s what you do, isn’t it? I’ll find other ways to help the human rights fight.”

He shook his head slightly, eyeing me with disbelief.

“There’s another option.”

“Breaking up with you is not an option.”

“Good.” He smiled. “But I mean I could walk away. I told you I’d do it. If I renounce my position in line and live as a private citizen, you could do whatever job you wanted.”

“I couldn’t ask you to do that.”

“You’re not.” He said. “I am offering. I offered twice before, three times if you count the proposal, Jay. I told you I would follow you anywhere and I will. That’s—” He sighed, “That’s why I was so angry when I heard about the job. I mean, to think that I gave you an option to do whatever job you wanted, I offered to walk away, you could have just asked. And I—I thought you weren’t asking because you didn’t want me to. Because you… you just wanted the job, not me.”

Ignoring what I thought was the sound of my own heart breaking, I sighed.

“I want you.” I said. “All of you. Even the parts of you that you think are hard to want. I told you that once, remember?”

He smiled, sad, and tightened the grip of our hands together.

“Okay.” I said, resolute. “I would never ask you to walk away from your tittle and family so I could continue to be an actress, because I didn’t want to be one anymore. But I want this job. And if that is truly something you think you could do that wouldn’t damage your chance of being personally fulfilled in your professional life, then if we have no choice, if we reach no compromise about the job with the advisors…” I sighed. “Then you walk away.”

He nodded. “Okay.”

“And if at any point you change your mind, you can. And I will find other ways to help.” I said.

“Let’s call that plan B.” He said, smiling, and I couldn’t help but mimic.

“Did you notice?” I asked, letting go of his hands to wrap my arms around his waist.

“What?” he said, embracing me, resting his lips on my forehead.

“There’s no plan in which I leave you.” I said, softly, before looking up at him. “Because that’s not an option.”

He smiled, and leaned down the few centimeters left to kiss me. His lips felt so eager and at the same time soft on mine, and they felt so good after what I thought might have been the last time.
They felt so good after what felt like almost losing him.

“We do this together, Mr. Prince, or not at all.” I said.

“Together.” He chose, and so we went to battle.

—

We walked through the Buckingham Palace fancily decorated, high ceiling hallways hand-in-hand. The sound of my heels was muffled by the red carpet and I was caressing my pencil skirt with my pals to both try and dry the sweat off of them and to keep wrinkles away from the fabric.

“Don’t forget, Eddy was hired by me, which means he was already considered good in the first place.” Harry reminded me. “And don’t forget to focus on the positives, instead of the negatives, really remind them of how many people you would be helping.”

“Harry, I know the plan.” I said, impatiently.

“We’re here.”

“His Royal Highness Prince Henry of Wales.” The guard at the door announced pompously. “And Miss Jenifer Silva.”

The room had a magnificent marble fireplace at the back, and wide windows covered by ruffled curtains. Positioned on their feet in front of three couches, there were eight men – all white and old, just my kind of audience for a showdown.

But this was no Hollywood showdown; this was the monarchy, and as such, I needed to play my cards differently. So I followed Harry into the room, smiling graciously as he introduced me to room.

“Jenifer, this is Wallace O’Neal, Her Majesty’s head of security, he keeps us all safe.”

“Well, it is an honor to meet you, sir, and thank you.” I smiled.

“And these are Timothy Robinson and Alanis Webber, Her Majesty’s senior advisors. And Joshua Marlborough and Christopher Carlton, my father’s senior advisors.”

I shook their hands, smiling broadly, repeating their names so I’d remember them.

“You know my father, of course.”

Charles smiled as he kissed my cheek. “How do you do, dear?”

“Better now seeing you, sir.” I smiled, making him giggle.

“And this is Jaime Barrington, he’s Kate and Will’s advisor.”

“My pleasure, Miss Silva.” Jaime smiled. “I’ve heard so much about you.”

We sat down, Harry and I beside Edward, in front of the others.

“Firstly, let me speak for all of us,” Alanis Webber started, “as I offer you our congratulations on your engagement.”

The others nodded, smiling.
“We understand this meeting is about a few details of your nuptials.” Christopher started.

“This meeting, gentleman, is about three requests Harry and Miss Silva have.” Edward told them. “The first being about Miss Silva’s upcoming security detail.”

“We are already looking into it, ma-am.” Wallace said, and I had to contain myself not to wince at being called ‘ma-am’. “I assure you we will have highly trained professionals ready for you the moment the engagement is announced.”

“My request, Mr. O’Neal,” I started, softly and politely, “is actually that I get to keep my own security detail. One of them has already been working with me for the past four years, and I trust him with my life. He was who trained and selected the other one, who has been wonderful and talented since been hired. I do understand that I need to have three, so I am more than willing to accept another one from your own team, but I do not wish to part with the professionals I have trusted for so long.”

I ignored Edward’s side look. I knew he was finding my extremely good manners laughable when he knew I would be swearing by now and demanding to be heard if we had this my way.

“Well, surely you have been told, ma-am, there’s protocols that have to be followed. We have a good security detail because the protocols are never broken.”

“I understand your protocols, Mr. O’Neal, but I would argue that you have hired my bodyguard yourself in the past.” I smiled. “His name is Edgar and you were the one who hired him as a local protection officer for Harry when he moved to New York. I believe that if he was good enough then, he surely is even better now that he has had the experience of working with Harry, and closely to Harry since we started dating. He shares a house with your protection officers and they share information and tactics and I believe he would be a valuable member of your team.”

By the corner of my eyes, I saw Harry was smiling.

“I-“ Mr. O’Neal stuttered. “I’m not sure there’s anything that can be done, ma-am.”

“Please,” I smiled, “call me Jen.”

“Oh, I- Jen. I don’t think we can break the protocol…” he looked, uncertain at the Queen’s advisors. “I mean, we would have to make a formal request for the monarch, explaining that it would be endangering the security detail.”

“Consider this my formal request.” I smiled at the Queen’s advisors. “I very much would prefer to work with men I already know…” I said, and then prepared for the final blow I had been saving, “especially considering I don’t think the public would enjoy reading that I had to fire two capable professionals just to hire people the palace deems worthy… I mean, what would the press say?”

They exchanged surprised, concerned glances, and I tried to contain my smile. The monarchy might be a different game, but it was a game nonetheless. I just had to learn how to play. And the common rule it had with Hollywood was: everyone is always afraid of bad press.

Edward cleaned his throat, uncomfortable, before moving on. “Well, the second request is about the wedding party issue, which you have already been briefed on.”

“Now, I already know what this issue is about,” Charles started, “and let me start by assuring both of you that of course your friends are more than welcome at every festivity of the wedding.”

“Good.” Harry said. “Because considering they’re in the wedding party, it would be difficult if
they weren’t.”

“Now, Harry, what you need to understand is that this is an issue of image.” Charles said. “You know I love your friends, but the minute we accept the likes of Mr. Pelly as an usher, we’ll be in trouble.”

“Guy is one of Harry’s best friends. He’s a stand up citizen and a model businessman.” I said, not actually believing I was defending Guy Pelly. “He would bring nothing but respect to the table.”

“He makes a living out nightclubs.” Timothy argued. “We are not in any way arguing against his character, of course, but the press is more than likely to link his living to us, which would be damaging considering Harry’s, uh, past indiscretions.”

“And your party, too, Miss Silva,” said Joshua, “I mean, as much as my granddaughter love Miss Taylor Swift’s music, I’m afraid it wouldn’t be proper to associate the monarchy with the kind of message she and your other friends are known for.”

“And what would that message be, exactly?” I asked, as politely as I could.

“Well, you know…” he started, “promiscuity and such. We have pictures of them in revealing clothes, and swearing and kissing one too many different men, and so forth. It wouldn’t be proper-“

“Mr. Marlborough, you must forgive me,” Harry started, “but Taylor Swift has been elected the most charitable celebrity over the past six years in a row. And if anyone should be turned from this wedding for promiscuity, swearing and kissing too many people than we should probably start by me.”

I fought the urge to high five him, biting my lip not to smile too much.

“Harry, you know it’s not about you-“

“It is, dad.” He said. “It’s about me and Jen. We both have done those things, and we are choosing to focus on the good things we have done instead of the bad, because you know we have grown out of our mistakes. So have our friends. Should we really be excluding them for things we have done ourselves? What message are we sending, that only royalty can be redeemed?”

“A royal wedding is no place for redemption.” Said Jamie. “We have to think about how these things will affect the monarchy, Harry. The press will pick on any detail remotely related to you and the wedding to make stories, and they will talk about your wedding party as well. Just look what happened to Miss Middleton. Kate’s sister was only carrying her dress’ train and suddenly became a socialite!”

“Our friends don’t need to become socialites.” I said. “They are already famous on their own, or very comfortable in their own jobs. All we want is to have them by our side in this special day.”

“The fact they are famous on their own is precisely what concerns us the most.” Argued Christopher. “As they become a part of your celebration, they are indirectly connected to the monarchy. They’ll be written in the history of this country forever, and we are not sure they are the kind of people we want there.”

I took in and out a deep breath to calm myself. This is not Hollywood, I had to remember that. Giving them a sassy reply would not solve anything.

“Gentlemen, with all due respect,” I said, “we all know what this wedding’s biggest advantage for the monarchy is. Money.”
They blinked, and exchanged slow, surprised looks. Sure, the frankness was a bit too Hollywood, but hey, baby steps.

“You want our wedding to be a big deal so it attracts attention and the attention attracts an influx in tourism revenue.” I said, knowing by my side, Edward was probably regretting the day he didn’t quit immediately after learning Harry and I would get married. “The fact is, Harry and I are popular, and we are most popular amongst young people. Those young people, unlike the opinion shapers you are used to from your days, won’t actually be scandalized by our friends nightclubbing and, what did you call it? Promiscuity. They will that is cool, because that is their world. That is what they do, or want to do, and they will enjoy seeing themselves represented in an institution most of them have been told is irrelevant.”

They let out almost inaudible gasps at the world. Right. So I guess here, too, the world irrelevant is a big deal. I decided to use that.

“Let’s face it, young people are tomorrow’s voters and they will decide sooner or later if they need a monarchy or not-“

“Now, that is ludicrous.” Alanis interrupted. “I mean, the assumption-“

“Webber, let’s hear her out.” Timothy asked.

“Young people have no interest in an institution they can’t see themselves in. But young people like Taylor Swift. And they like Ophelia Callis and Selena Gomez. And they like clubbing and knowing that the people they will be calling Prince and Princess soon are people like them, who make mistakes and have flaws.”

“The minute we let that assumption into the monarchy, I mean… the normalcy will end everything that makes it appealing for young people, don’t you think?” Asked Timothy.

“No.” I said. “Because we are not trying to be normal. We are just trying to be ourselves. And by doing so we’ll be able to tell them it is possible to make mistakes and grow out of them. Move on. Learn. Be better. Do better, by yourself, your family, your friends and sure, your country. They will see us as the redeemed party prince and recuperated messed up celebrity and will know, in their hearts, that there is hope for anything.”

Even I was a little impressed at my own dramatic speech, and I avoided Harry and Edward’s eyes so I wouldn’t laugh. I believed in my own words, but to put that much pressure into us and our friends was a bit of a stretch.

“The young people our friends will appeal to, at the end of the day, are exactly who will make this wedding profitable for Britain.” I finished, feeling highly victorious.

Edward cleared his throat again and, probably not wanting to leave room for anyone to argue, went on.

“Finally, the last issue is what you have also been briefed about.” He said. “Miss Silva’s offer to work as a commissioner of Human Rights for the United Nations.” He looked at them, and so did Harry and me, waiting for the arguments.

“What concerns me about this,” started Charles, “is the political aspect of it. We might be in danger of severing British ties with countries we need.”

“Indeed.” The others agreed.
“Your job would be, after all, to criticize countries you find guilty of violations, and that might endanger diplomatic relations for us.” Said Barrington.

“With all due respect, Mr. Barrington,” I smiled, “if countries don’t want me to say bad things about them, perhaps they shouldn’t do bad things.”

“Could I suggest,” started Edward, loudly, trying to take their minds out of my line – even though it was actually a Taylor Swift reference, “appointing to Jenifer a, sort of, analyzer. Someone to screen every public statement made by her in her position to make sure she isn’t in danger of severing British diplomatic ties?”

“That could work, surely, Christopher? Could we look into it?” Asked Charles.

“Well, we could look into it, of course.” Christopher replied. “But it would have to involve a compromise from us and the U.N., they would have to be informed of the details of what Miss Silva wouldn’t be allowed to associate herself with.”

“But even then, this could prove to be too problematic.” Argued Alanis.

“I can’t imagine members of parliament being too happy about a member of the monarchy working with the U.N.” Agreed Timothy.

“What is more profitable for us, to avoid taking part in anything that might eventually prove problematic or to take action and prove that we care?” Asked Harry. “Prove that we are willing to work, not only in a superficial basis, but also in depth, in what really matters, even if it uncomfortable. Jen would be doing that. She would be representing us with an organization that is setting out to do good, and by doing so, she would be reminding the United Nations that Britain is a friend, and willing to work.”

There was a long silence, during which they all seemed thoughtful and I almost believed we won. But then, that feeling was gone.

“I can’t see it working, no.” Said, definitively, Alanis. The others nodded, agreeing, and I knew it was a no. A no to all we had asked.

It felt unbelievable that a group of men I had just met could set out to ruin my life so easily.

I heard Harry let out a long, sad, deep breath by my side. “Is this position final?” He asked. “Is there anything we can compromise on?”

“I don’t think there’s any way we can.” Said Timothy.

Harry nodded. He looked at me, and stood up. “Well, gentlemen, then I believe out next option is to give you, now, official notice that in the upcoming weeks I will be drawing an official renouncement of mine and my descendants’ claim to the throne and secluding to live as a private citizen.”

The way their eyes widened at the same time would have been funny if I had seen it, but I was too busing looking at Harry, completely shocked.

“Harry…” Charles chuckled. “Surely you’re not serious.”

“I’m afraid I am.”

“Harry, sit down.” His father said, so commanding I almost sat myself, but I was already sitting.
“I will not sit down, father, because I am leaving. You said there’s no way we can compromise in the requests that are so close to our hearts, and so I’m afraid there’s no more room for dialogue.”

“Harry, that is ridiculous. That is so immature.” Charles said, briskly. “This isn’t how mature men deal with things that don’t go their way, we sit down, we find ways, we don’t leave stomping our feet!”

“I’m not stomping anything.” Harry said, very calmly. “And I could say the same thing back to you. We offered you our requests, and you shot them down immediately, leaving us no room to compromise. We will not have a wedding without our best friends by our side, and we will not fire two good men for no reason, and we will not refuse an amazing job offer for fear of what it could potentially do to the country.”

I loved him so much I could have kissed him right then, in front of all the others, but I was still too busy marveling in his composure, his strength, the way he held his head high and stood up for all our friends and me.

“Come on, Jen.” He smiled at me, giving me his hand and pulling me up. “Let’s go home.”

At that moment I realized he wasn’t joking; he was playing the game. He was serious. He would walk away for me.

“Harry!” Jaime smiled. “Surely there must be something we can do about this.”

“I would have thought so.” Harry said. “Apparently not. I guess I have no choice. I am going to live as a private citizen and this way Jenifer can work with whatever she wants without it damaging the family, and we can get married with our friends there, and we can hire whomever we want to protect her.”

“I wonder what the press will have more of a problem with.” I said, pensively. “Our choice of friends or Prince Harry walking away to marry a celebrity.”

Harry grinned. “How very Edward VIII of us.”

We heard an audible gasp at the mention of the men that still had the monarchy recovering.

“I’ll be your Wallis Simpson.” I smiled at him.

“Aww.” He said. “Maybe granny will give us the dukedom of Windsor, it would be very symbolic.”

“Enough!” Charles said, loudly, and we looked at him. “Sit down.”

Feeling slightly ashamed of I wasn’t sure what, we obeyed, still holding our head high, resolute.

“Gentlemen,” Charles started, “I’m afraid I do not think my son is bluffing. So we will have to make more of an effort here to meet their… requests.”

They all seemed pensive, as they exchanged looks of worry.

“Well,” started Wallace. “I suppose if your body guards would be put through the same training and tests as every member of Her Majesty’s security team, we could find them a place.”

“They would expect nothing less.” I smiled.

“And, of course, if they fail, then there is nothing I can do!”
“All due respect, sir, but I’m sure they are going to ace your tests.”


The Queen’s advisors exchanged a look. Alanis sighed. “Well, would you think, Miss Silva—“

“Jen.” I smiled. “Call me Jen.”

He seemed uncomfortable at the thought. “Jen… do you think your friends would be accepting of attending a, sort of, royal manners seminar?”

“A seminar?”

“Like, like, uh… royal training we do for new brides.” He grimaced.

“Our friends know how to eat a seven course meal.” Harry said.

“Oh, sure, nothing like that. More on, uh… on things to avoid doing or saying while they are being linked to you.”

“Like what?”

“Like swearing, and provocative pictures online, and twitter rants and so forth.”

Let me tell you, the words ‘twitter rant’ were not made for the mouth of such an old man.

“We can’t ask our friends to do that. We have no right to censor their social behavior.” Harry argued.

“Well,” I said, “I mean, we can ask. As in, a favor. Just until the wedding is over… But we can’t do anything if they don’t want to! And we will not take them off of the wedding if they refuse to break a rule.”

Alanis sighed, as if those conditions weren’t actually what he had in mind, but giving Charles a glance, he nodded.

“And about the United Nations’ job offer?” Harry asked.

They didn’t seem to have any ideas to make that work, so I suggested one.

“What if we get my bosses, or future bosses, here for a meeting? Us and some of you, so they could properly explain what the job would be and so that we can explain to them what I wouldn’t be able to do and so we could all try to reach a compromise together?”

They considered this.

“They would have to be told about the engagement.” Edward said.

“I think we can trust a few United Nations’ officials not to go leaking stuff to the tabloids.” I told him.

“Well…” Joshua started, pensively, but never finished.

“For God’s sake, yes, we’ll do it.” Charles rolled his eyes. “I will personally attend this meeting and make sure all parts are conversing, Jenifer. As I’m sure you will too.”
I smiled. “Thank you, sir.”

Jaime nodded. “It would be good press… to have a member of the monarchy working with something like that… it wouldn’t be good politics, but it would be good press. I mean, I wanna see someone claim she isn’t working, like they did with poor Kate, when she’s a member of the U.N.”

“Yes, I’m sure we can reach some sort of agreement.” Charles said, definitive. “So?” he asked, looking at Harry. “Satisfied?”

Harry looked at me. I smiled.

“Yeah.” He said. “I think this is a good start.”

—

We were walking very poised until we reached the end of the hallway, then Harry grabbed my hand, pulled me to him, and, wrapping his arms around me, spun us around in celebration, making me giggle loudly.

“We did it!” He shouted.

“We did it! We did it!” I agreed, laughing.

“I mean, still some way to go, but we can do it! We can actually do it!”

He let me down in the floor, but didn’t take his arms from me.

“You should have told me you were going to threaten to abdicate your title!” I slapped his chest, weakly. “I almost had a heart attack.”

“I told you that was an option!” he smiled. “I knew they would never let it happen if they could help it. Good line with the press thing.”

“Good line with the Edward VIII thing!” I grinned. “And Harry, what would you do if they did? If they would rather let you abdicate then give in?!”

“Then I would happily abdicate.” He shrugged. “I keep telling you, Silva, I will follow you anywhere.”

I smiled, touched beyond words, and got on my tiptoes to glue our lips together in a long, chaste kiss. We were still smiling went I leaned away, resting our foreheads together.

“Together or not at all.” He repeated, softly.

Smiling, I tightened my hold around him, and chose: “Together.”

Chapter End Notes

Okay, this is one of my favorite chapters that I’ve ever written I think! I just love how there’s obviously still conflict after an engagement but they just gotta learn how to deal with it. Jenifer realizing that Harry has issues too, and he just has left them behind to help her with hers, and that she made them even worst… its heartbreaking. And the
fact that Harry simply doesn’t not understand that Jenifer actually wants to be with him and will chose him over everything else. I just love this chapter okay?!!! Hope you liked it too!

Fun fact: I wrote this chapter during an all-nigther when I was keeping my grandma company in the hospital after she had a fall. She’s fine, though. And it gave me time to write lol

Anyhow, hope you’re doing well! Thank you so much for reading and for your awesome messages! Knowing you like the story and are reading keep me going and it makes me so, so happy! So thank you!
One Last Time

Chapter Summary

Harry attends Jen’s last British premiere and helps her through her conflicting feelings about quitting.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“You must be wondering why I’ve gathered you here today.”

“I was hoping it was the pleasure of our company,” Alessa grinned, and I gave her a look.

“Who’s got the wine?” Taylor asked.

“Here you go.” Selena handed her the bottle, and she started serving herself another glass.

“I love England.” Ophelia sighed. “But I mostly love being allowed to drink guilt-free here. In America I’m still a year away from it.”

“America is weird.” Beezus agreed, and both Australians exchanged a knowing look.

I tried to contain a look towards Ophelia’s left hand, which was useless. I knew Oscar hadn’t proposed yet. And I knew he hadn’t because Ophelia hadn’t told us yet, and I was confident she would as soon as it happened. Until then, I had to pretend I didn’t know about it. Which could as well kill me, because I was so excited about it.

“Did anyone watch the last Kimmy Schmidt season?” Beezus asked.

“Oh, my God!” Taylor smiled, excited. “No spoilers, I’m just on episode five!”

“It’s been out for months, what’s taking you so long?!” Sel asked.

“I have work!”

“So do I, but I have priorities too.” Selena argued. “Kimmy Schmidt is a priority, Taylor!”

“I’ve been trying to watch it,” Alessa said, “but every time I start George suggests we watch Friends again, and so we end up binge watching the whole ten seasons. We’re currently on season six.”

“Oh, that’s my favorite!” Ophelia smiled. “Did you get to the episode where-?”

“Oh! I interrupted, loudly. “We can talk about that later, but I have more urgent topics.”

“Oh. I’m sorry, Your Royal Highness, please go ahead.” Alessa said, smiling sarcastically, and the girls grinned, knowingly.

“Ha-ha.” I said, unable to avoid a smile. “Don’t call me that. It’s too weird.”
“Might as well get used to it.” Selena said, before mumbling, “…Princess Jenifer.”

I sighed, grinning at the fit of giggles that followed. “Technically I’ll be Princess Henry.” I explained.

“Screw that.” Taylor smiled. “I prefer Princess Jenifer.”

“I still can’t believe you’ll be an actual princess.” Said Ophelia.

“I still can’t believe you’re getting married.” Beezus marveled.

“I still can’t believe you’re already married.” I returned.

“Oh, yeah.” She said, smiling at the ring in her left hand. “Sometimes I forget that too.”

“We have married friends who are not teen moms. That’s what’s unbelievable.” Alessa said. “We’re so old.”

“Okay, so, moving on.” I started, before that began another topic.

It was hard keeping them on track when we were all together, but as we sat on the big white couch in my living room on that Saturday night, I knew I had to, or else we would run out of time. As only Alessa, Beezus and Ophelia lived in London, I had to enjoy this first weekend of December to get them all in the same place at once. Tay and Selena had been kind enough to fly in at my request, but they had to travel back to America for Christmas, same reason Beezus and Ophelia had to fly to Australia, and Alessa up north to meet George’s family.

“Where’s Harry?” Ophelia asked.

“Football with the boys.” Alessa answered. “George is with them.”

“Men and their sports, I’d much rather lounge around and drink wine.” Selena said, getting approving nods from the group. “We could watch Kimmy Schmidt later!”

“Only if we can start from where I stopped!” Taylor asked.

“Please!” I called. “Ladies! Can I have just a minute of your time?!”

Taylor quickly stood up on the couch, mimicking trumpet sound with her mouth. “Ladies and gentlemen!” She started, pompously, with a fake British accent. “Please, do make notice, Her Royal Highness, Princess Jenifer, the Great, would like a minute of your time!”

“Shut up.” I mumbled, as the girls laughed.

“We’re only getting you used to how your life is going to be.” Selena smiled.

I laughed. “That’s not how my life is going to be!” I hoped.

“Okay, Jen, what is it?” Beezus said, trying to calm the mood.

I sighed. “Well, I had a whole adorable speech planned… but now you made me forget it.”

“Oh, poor thing.” They mocked, with baby voices. “Did we upset you?”

“I want you to be my bridesmaids!” I said, hands in my hips.
Taylor gasped, loudly.

“All of us?!” Ophelia marveled.

“Even me?!” Asked Beezus.

“Of course, you.” I smiled at her. “All of you.”

“Aw, now I wish we had let you speak sooner!” Selena said, as she got up. The others mimicked her and soon enough I had five pairs of arms around me.

“What are we wearing?” Taylor asked.

“Oh, my God, we’re gonna be on a Royal Wedding!” Selena looked at her with wide-eyes.

“Am I really gonna be the tiniest of all of you?” Beezus asked.

“I need to text George…” Alessa added, picking up her phone.

“No, seriously, will you all wear heels?” Beezus went on.

“There’s bad news, though.” They looked at me, silently. “Oh, now you stay quiet?”

“What are the bad news?” Ophelia asked.

“Well…” I started, wincing. “The thing is, with everything that Harry has going on, you know, with his family… there’s a bunch of people that we need to please and quite a few of them are worried about your… image issues.”

“You mean they’re worried we’ll embarrass them?” Taylor asked.

“No!” I said, quickly. “No, no… is more like, uh… well…” I sighed. “No, actually, that’s an accurate way to put it. Yeah, they’re worried you’ll embarrass them.”

There was a silent pause as they exchanged looks, and I started feeling a lot more understanding towards Harry if that’s what he had to deal with all the times he had to explain his family to friends.

“What a bunch of dicks.” Ophelia said.

“What does that mean, though?” Alessa asked. “What are the bad news?!”

“Well,” I started, “they would like you to attend a sort of… public image manners private seminar with a royal expert.”

“What is that?” Beezus asked.

“It’s to explain to you exactly how damaging anything that you say or post on social media could be for us.” I said, hating myself at every word. I sounded so pretentious. “They want you to be careful how you behave yourself from the moment we announce you as part of the wedding until the wedding is over, in August, to avoid any negative headlines in the press.”

Taylor raised her brows at me. “Like what?”

“Well, like wearing dresses too short, or swearing in public, or getting into twitter feuds…” I said. “Uh, guys, I’m sorry. This sounds so ridiculous.” I covered my eyes with my hands.
“It does.” Said Selena.

“Trust me, I would never ask this of you.” I explained. “You know I’m the first to admit I do these things, the dresses and swearing and twitter feuds, but they are really annoying when it comes to image… and I already had to ask to keep my security detail and the U.N. job offer I told you about… I had to compromise.”

Ophelia sighed. “Well, you are gonna be royalty…”

“It’s a little understandable it would be difficult.” Said Beezus.

“Doesn’t excuse them being dicks, but we don’t blame you.” Added Alessa.

“Seriously, though?” Started Sel, “What are we wearing?!” she smiled, and the others all launched into their own opinions one over the other.

“Sixties pleated midi skirts!” Screamed Taylor, weirdly specific.

“Red!” Ophelia suggested.

“Can I please be the only one in heels?!” Begged Beezus. “I don’t wanna look like a hobbit!”

Alessa stood up, and walked from her seat to me as the others debated our fashion options. She passed her arms around my waist and rested her head on my shoulders.

“I can’t believe you’re getting married.” She said. “I still can’t even believe you grew into your own cheeks.”

I giggled. “Alli…” I started. “Will you be my maid of honor?”

There was a pause as I felt her arms tighten around me. “Mm-hm.” She mumbled.

“Are you crying?” I asked, concerned.

“No, there’s just something in my eye.” She said, cleaning her throat, as she scratched her eye. “Like tears.”

I giggled, turning around to hug her.

“Oh, my God, Ophelia! We can’t wear short dresses! It’s a royal wedding! They have to be long!” Selena shouted.

“But how will our shoes show?!” Ophelia asked in return.

“Nobody cares!” Selena returned, and Ophelia let out a loud, dramatic gasp.

“Oh, God,” Taylor said, staring off into nothing as she usually did when she had a song idea, “I just had the most amazing idea for a bridal shower theme!”

“You can discuss it with Alli, she’s the maid of honor.” I told her, and the girls let out a ‘yay!’ followed by a quick applause, to which Alli bowed.

“The help is welcome, I suck at event planning.” Alli told Taylor, as she sat beside her.

“Stick with me, child, I’ll teach you all you need to know.” Taylor told her.
“That’s actually precisely what I had in mind.” I said. “You two will be responsible for the organizing of the events, like the bridal shower.”

“And bachelorette party!” Selena added.

“That’s apparently not a British tradition.” I smiled. “Girls don’t do bachelorette parties.”

“That’s sexist.” Beezus replied.

“I don’t care.” I admitted. “It would be too difficult not to party hard and end up getting myself in trouble with the advisors.”

“If someone can party, that’s Jen.” Alessa nodded.

“But Harry gets a bachelor party?!” Beezus wondered.

“He’s just going hunting with his friends.” I explained.

“Lame.” Selena let out, making us giggle.

“It’s the family tradition.” I told them, smiling.

“Screw tradition.” Selena argued.

“Dude, I am marrying into tradition.”

“She has a point.” Taylor said, before looking at Alli. “Which is why we need to think regal, traditional, elegant!” Alli nodded, solemn.

“You two,” I pointed at Selena and Ophelia, “will be responsible to help me with the fashion side of things. All the designers we chose, from shoes, to jewelry, to your dresses and mine, and even makeup brands, all have to be British. I need help picking them all. Ophelia, you’ll specialize in the shoes, and Selena will help with accessorizing.”

“Done!” They said, and exchanged a loud, excited high-five.

“How do you feel about red?!” Ophelia asked me.

I smiled. “Why don’t we save red for your own wedding? I was thinking maybe nude.”

She and Selena gasped, wide-eyed. “Yeeeeeesss!” They said, together, making me smile.

“What about me?!” Beezus asked, as the others all started exchanging ideas. “I can help!”

“Yes, you can.” I said, walking over to sit beside her. “You’re gonna have what is at the same time the simplest and most important of jobs…” I sighed. “Keeping me from freaking out.”

From behind Beezus, Alessa scorned. “Good luck.”

“Thank you.” I said, sarcastic.

“Listen, from what I know of Jen, she’ll be fine until about one or two weeks before the wedding.” She told Beezus, who nodded.

“Okay, but how do I stop her from losing it?”

“Lock her in a closet if you need to.” Taylor said. “We are gonna make this girl into a princess if
“Listen,” I started, to Beezus, on a low tone as the others went back to worrying about their own assignments, “I want this. I want this more than I remember ever wanting anything. But I have anxiety, Bee, and at some point every fear that I could possibly have about this will come boiling up and when it does, I won’t want to tell Harry, because I’ll fear he’s gonna think I’m having second thoughts… but I’ll need to talk to someone, or else I might lose my mind. When that happens, I need you to throw me on a cold shower if you have to.”

She nodded, serious. “You have my number. You can call me any time.”

“I know.” I smiled, and looking around, raised my voice so they could all hear. “Guys, I know this is asking too much. Being in a wedding party is already a lot, but you’ll be on a Royal wedding party. You’ll be watched and scrutinized and everything you say or do will be blown out of proportion. We’re talking about a public ceremony, which will probably be livestreamed around the world, on top of thousands of guests. Everything here will be on a gigantic scale. I completely understand if anyone would like to have just a ceremonial role here.”

“You know what we should do?” Asked Selena. “We should watch Prince William and Kate’s wedding to know what we’ll be dealing with.”

Beezus nodded. “Oh, that sounds great! And it’s on Youtube!”

“I’ll make popcorn!” Taylor jumped up.

“I’ll turn on the cinema room.” Alli followed her out.

“I’ll get more wine!” Smiled Ophelia.

Soon I was standing alone in the room, smiling at their obvious ignoring of my speech.

“Well,” I said, to no one in particular. “Let’s plan a royal wedding.”

December brought the Doctor Who Christmas Special promotion, and two unexpected things.

The Doctor Who promotion was quick and simple, a few interviews and a Q&A panel with fans before an early screening for VIP guests, I got over all of it very quickly that early December, and was happy to see the episode turned out better than I had ever dreamed of, and so that was done, and there was only one movie left of my career.

The first of the two unexpected things was the reveal of my beatboxing abilities. I’ll explain: My Hamilton character had a beatboxing scene when her nine-year-old son, played by the real life child of Lin Manuel Miranda – creator of Hamilton -, was singing a poem he wrote his father.

Harry had come to that premiere with me as well, making headlines one more time, leaving everyone perplexed. He had told me he would go this time, assuring me he wanted to be in my last premiere ever. It was not the last, only the last in London, as the true last would be in Los Angeles. But on that first few days of December, after officially inviting the girls to be my bridesmaids, he followed me into my last British movie premiere.

I had been through the whole usual ordeal, from an early day doing hair and makeup, to picking dresses and shoes options with Rachel Zoe who was already freaking out about my last Award Season dresses which she swore had to be to die for.
“They will be remembered forever!” she dramatized. “I have every designer out there practically shoving their creations onto my arms for you to wear.”

As flattering as it was, I had to focus on only a few things at a time so I could avoid losing my mind, and there was no room for it – yet.

As it always was on premiere day, Harry hid away on the cinema room as I got ready, giving my team and me space, as we needed most of it. It was pretty crowded with me, the hair and makeup artists, Clara, the Rachel Zoe intern who had come to bring me the dress and would be following me through the promotion, Monica and Janine, who had flown in from California since this was such a momentous time in my life.

“Everything you say during this promotion, and Doctor Who’s, will be remembered forever!” She said, and I sighed.

“Apparently everything I do these days will.”

Couture dress and priceless jewelry and picture perfect makeup and hair done, it was on to the premiere. Harry had dressed up in twenty minutes, and rode along, holding my hand tightly all the way there.

“You seem awfully calm.” He mentioned. “Do you need a hug?”

I smiled, leaving my tumultuous thoughts of interview answers Janine had gone over with me a few minutes ago for the red carpet interviews.

“I’m fine. I’m with you.”

The interviews all started, or contained at some moment or the other, the same sentence:

“So this is your last movie!”

The first time it got my heart racing with nerves; by the last, I was trying to suppress an annoyed sigh. I would so not miss answering the same questions repeatedly.

I talked to the cast, half of which was the original Broadway cast, the other who had to be cast exclusively so no one had to play two characters as it happened in the musical. It had always been weird greeting a cast on premieres and promotion tours, months after we spent so much time together shooting. But it was also surprising to me how easy it was getting along again.

After saying goodbye to Harry at the car, knowing he would walk in at the back, trying to avoid the photographers, which we both knew was wishful thinking, I only saw him again after posing for pictures on the red carpet and giving all my interviews. After I started walking out, escorted by Johnnie, Eddy, Janine, Monica and Clara, I saw him just a few meters away, just able to ignore the flashes the photographers from the red carpet were throwing at him, talking, smiley, to Lin, his wife and our Thomas Jefferson, Daveed Diggs.

“Oh, there she is!” Lin smiled as I approached. “You look great!”

“Thank you, but look at this lady.” I said, kissing his wife on the cheek.

“I was just telling your boyfriend how often you talked about him when we were shooting.” Lin grinned, and I avoided Harry’s eyes by giving him an annoyed look.

“I told you those things in confidence.” I said, pointedly.
I felt Harry’s hand lining up my lower back. “I had no idea you loved me so much.” He teased, and I rolled my eyes as the others giggled.

“We feel a little weird that you’re here, though,” Daveed said, “considering it’s a movie about the U.S. independence.”

“Yeah, we keep thinking the palace guards will show up at any minute to shut it all down.” Lin’s wife, Vanessa, joked, making Harry giggle.

“We’ve evolved a lot since King George’s time.” Harry said. “But don’t quote me on that, I’ll deny it.” He added, quickly, making the others laugh.

A handler approached us. “Guys, we’re ready for group photographs.”

Daveed and Lin set out for the red carpet, where I could see the rest of the cast grouping together to pose for the photographers.

“I’ll see you inside.” Harry smiled, before walking away, and I joined the others.

“Jenifer, can you ask Harry to come?” a photographer shouted. I ignored him, smiling politely with Lin’s and Daveed’s arms around me.

“Jenifer, will you pose with Harry later?” another asked.

That was so rude. This was not about us. I sighed, ignoring them, and walked away as fast as I could as we were done.

I found Harry inside the theatre, admiring a life-size poster of me, all dresses as Eliza Hamilton as she were in her first number, with a light blue nineteenth century gown and hair half-up loosely, smiling lovingly at the world like the beautiful cinnamon roll she was.

“Like what you see?” I asked, coming up from behind him, who smiled at me.

“Yeah, actually.” He said. “You look so beautiful, it’s like you were made for the nineteenth century.”

Looking around quickly, to see if there was anyone who could hear me, I whispered. “They would never have let us get married if we lived in the nineteenth century.” He grinned, and looked back at me giving me a knowing look. He reached down and held my left hand, caressing my empty ring finger. “A prince marrying a promiscuous actress?!”

“I would have told them to suck it.” I laughed. “…I was almost going to pose with you on the red carpet.”


“Yeah, but I hate the way they were yelling at you more.”

I enlaced my fingers with his, smiling. “You’re adorable.”

We walked into the theatre and sat down to watch the movie with the rest of the cast and invited guests. Lin was sitting in the seat right in front, smiling like a child as he always did about all of his creations.

It was only the second time ever Harry was on a premiere with me, the first time being the very month before, on Broken, when he had had the most hilarious reaction to my three sex scenes with
Tom Hardy. He had simply turned to look at me all three times to ask random questions like, ‘so, what do you wanna have for dinner later?’, ‘I wonder if it’s raining outside?’ and ‘do you come here often?’, making me laugh every time.

There was no sex scenes in Hamilton, and instead of the movie, knowing I would still be seeing it a dozen times in the next premieres around the globe, I was watching Harry. I was watching the glow of the screen in his eyes, and the way he reacted to every good rhyme. The first time I showed on scene, in Eliza’s nineteenth century gear singing a happy song, begging her sisters to ‘look around! Look around at how lucky we are to be alive right now!’, he was smiling so kindly it was hard not to do it too.

‘I have never been the one to try and grab the spotlight…’ I sang, as Eliza, my first solo.

“Well, that clearly isn’t you.” He whispered to me, making me smile.

‘…then you walked in and my heart went boom…’

“This is so clearly fiction.” He whispered, “Look at you. Look at Hamilton. She’s so clearly out of his league.”

From the seat in front, Lin slowly turned to look at us with a weird grin in his lips that I could see even in the dark.

“Bro…” He said, shaking his head, faking disappointment, making us laugh.

Harry squeezed his shoulders kindly. “Sorry!” He whispered. “I’d say the same about her and me!”

‘Thank you for all your service.’, Eliza tells Hamilton as they meet on the movie.

‘If it takes fighting a war for us to meet it will have been worth it.’ The soldier replies.

“Damn.” Harry let out, making me giggle. “That’s a crazy good line.”

‘In New York you can be a new man…’

“Yes, you can.” Harry smiled, as the two character got married.

I leaned in to whisper in his ear. “That will be us in about eight months.”

He smiled.

Harry loved the movie as much as I had loved the musical the first time I saw it, and my beatboxing scene got the best of reactions: he almost didn’t blink as he watched it, wide-eyed and with his mouth opened in amazement.

“When?!” He started, after the scene was over. “When did you learn how to do that?!”

“A few weeks before I shot it.” I shrugged. “I watched some YouTube tutorials.”

He looked at me, shocked. “I’ve never seen you do that! When did you practice?!”

“At work.”

“Jenifer!” He marveled. “What the hell?!”

After me movie and the after party were over and we got home, he made me beatbox for hours on
end, even seconds before I fell asleep.

“I have to record this and make it my ringtone.” He said. “Can’t believe I’m gonna marry a beatboxer. What can’t you do?!”

“Goodnight, love.” I smiled.

—

Over the next few days, I did go on to watch the movie a good dozen times in every country we visited until we were finally in California for the last – and official – premiere of Hamilton. It was, as promotion tours always were, exhausting, and through every interview, red carpet, makeup and hair hours, and screening, all I kept thinking was ‘just a little bit longer and it will be over’.

I talked to Harry every day over skype, and every day he asked me the same question.

“Do you need a hug?!”

“I wouldn’t say no to one if you were here, but I’m fine, babe.”

He didn’t seem to believe me. He seemed to be waiting for the moment I would cry that this was a horrible mistake and I didn’t want to quit, but, of course, he was waiting in vain.

Then, the last premiere happened. I went through the same process as ever: outfit plan with Rachel, hair and makeup, interview prep with Janine and Monica, riding in the limo with the body guards, walk the red carpet, take pictures ignoring the photographer’s shouting, talk to as many fans as I possibly could, and watch the movie. Except this time, something was different.

The movie felt different. I had memorized every scene and line at this point, and could sing every song by heart, but it looked brighter. It sounded better. I watched every scene with my heart tight and a gut-wrenching feeling of goodbye, and only by the second half of the movie did I realize why.

It was a number when Washington told Hamilton he was stepping down from the presidency of the United States, and wouldn’t run again. The song was called ‘One Last Time’, and the tittle alone told me all I needed to know. This was, after all, my last time. This was my last premiere. This was my goodbye.

‘Mr. President, they will say you’re weak!’, Hamilton tried to argue with Washington.

My mind couldn’t help but wonder: Would people think I was weak for walking away?! Would they think I was weak for wanting to get married?!

‘No! They will see we’re strong!’, Washington replied.

‘You’re position is so unique!’

‘So I’ll use it to move it along!’

Of course, that was truly what I wanted to do with my unique position: to use it to help people, to help in a way that movies couldn’t. The U.N. could. With them, I could. As a royal, I could.

‘I want to seat under my own vine, and fig tree… a moment alone in the shade, at home, in this nation we’ve made, one last time…’ Washington sang.

I felt the words leaving his mouth, and the sound systems, straight into my heart. Inside, all I felt
was that I just wanted to go home. I wanted to leave. I wanted to seat under my own vine and fig
tree. I just wanted to be home.

‘Though in reviewing the incidents of my administration I am unconscious of intentional error, I
am nevertheless too sensible of my defects not to think it probably that I may have committed
many errors. I shall also carry with me the hope that my country will review them with indulgence,
and that after forty-five years of my life dedicated to its service, with an upright seal, those faults
and incompatibilities will be consigned to oblivion, as I myself will soon be to the mentions of
rest.’

I cried.

I cried because Washington was leaving, but more importantly, I cried because I knew it was
probable that I may have committed many errors. I cried because I hoped, in a naïve part of my
heart, that considering I had dedicated fifteen years of my life to it, this industry and media would
consign them to oblivion. And I cried because I hoped that I would too.

I cried because Washington sang, asking someone to help him, to ‘teach him how to say goodbye’,
and I realized I would need it too. How could I say goodbye to the last fifteen years of my life?! I
cried because when the chorus sang ‘George Washington is going home’, I couldn’t help but
realize that I was too. And I couldn’t help but feel both amazed and melancholic. I cried because
Washington said history had its eyes on Hamilton, and as I left, I realized the spotlight that had
been on me would soon focus on some other girl with hopes and dreams too big for her own heart.
I cried because I hoped she would be okay. I hoped she would hear about me, and know she could
do whatever she wanted with her own life.

“Are you alright?!” Sitting by my side, Lin asked, sounding concerned.

I nodded, sniffing. “Teach me how to say goodbye.” I quoted, smiling, and he squeeze my hand,
comforting. He didn’t seem to have an answer.

“History will always have its eyes on you, kiddo.” He told me.

I didn’t know if that was supposed to make me feel better, but after the movie was over and the
cast and director were called to the front for speeches and thank-yous, Lin took to the mic to say:

“I would like to acknowledge Jenifer Silva… You have just watched the last movie of her career.
To quote from One Last Time, Jenifer is going home. Let’s give her a round of applause.” The
room erupted in applause, as the audience all stood up for me. The sight was wonderful, and I felt
the tears running down my cheeks as I took one last bow, begging someone to teach me how to say
goodbye.

—

I felt both accomplished and empty when I walked into my L.A. house late that night. My career
was officially over – just award season left. If we didn’t get nominated for anything, there would
be nothing left. As much as I knew that’s what I wanted, I also couldn’t help the melancholy in my
heart.

“Confidence comes from work.” Johnnie had told me in the car over, when I confessed this to my
bodyguards. “Maybe you just feel empty because you just finished all your work in this area. As
you get more work done in the next, you’ll start to feel confident again.”

He had a point. As soon as I started thinking of everything that there was still to be done on
Borderless, and with my upcoming position in the U.N. and with Harry, I immediately felt the sense of purpose again. I knew it was a matter of time to let the actress in me die out, but I also knew waiting for that time to pass would be a bitch.

As I held my heels in hand and turned on the lights in my bedroom, the unknown figure sitting in bed startled me and I let out a loud scream in terror.

“Damn it, Harry!” I shouted, my hands in my fast-beating heart. “What the hell?!”

“I wanted to surprise you!” he justified, looking a little scared by my scream.

We heard the loud sound of steps as both Johnnie and Eddy came running in.

“What the hell, man?!” Eddy asked. “Not even a warning?!”

“It was supposed to be a surprise!” Harry said. “Nathan and the others are outside!”

Eddy sighed, and gave Johnnie a look, so they both left again, closing the door behind them.

I took in a deep, calming breath, and giggled as I looked at him.

“Hi.” I said, walking over to him.

“Hi.” He said, looking a little embarrassed. “Sorry.”

“It’s fine.” I smiled, leaving my shoes by the bed. “What are you doing here?”

“You had your last premiere tonight.” He said, simply. I let out a long sigh, nodding.

“Yes, I did.” I said, watching the room. The room of a normal person; not an actress.

“…do you need a hug?” He asked, for what sounded like the thousandth time.

There was a pause, as I considered saying that I was fine. But as I looked at the tall, broad-shouldered, bearded ginger man standing staring lovingly into my eyes, I knew I couldn’t. Or, at least, that I shouldn’t. This man, this wonderful man that I loved, was going to be my husband. He deserved to know even the sad parts of my heart.

I nodded, taking one last step towards him, and his arms quickly wrapped around me tightly. I caressed his back, feeling his muscles keeping me together as his smell made me feel instantly at home.

“I’m not having second thoughts.” I explained, with my voice breaking. “I just feel so… weird.”

“This was the last fifteen years of your life.” He said, his muffled by my hair as he was resting his head atop of my head. “You’re allowed to feel sad.”

“It’s so strange…” I added. “I feel… I feel…”

“Like you’re losing someone you love.”

I stepped back, looking at him. “Yes.”

He smiled, as we sat on the bed.

“You did, sort of. The people you got to work with. The person you’ve been for the last fifteen
years…”

“Did you feel that way when you left the military?” I asked. He stared off ahead, and nodded. “Do you miss it?”

“I miss the friends I made on training. I miss training. I miss…” He shrugged. “The physicality of it. I even miss Afghanistan.” He looked at me. “It’s complicated, I don’t know. I don’t miss the work, it’s terrible work. We had to… see and do some terrible things. But I miss the people. And the feeling of… purpose.”

I nodded. “Do you wish you’d go back?”

“No.” He said. “Because I know I couldn’t go back to what I actually miss, you know? The beginning of it. And I found other ways of feeling that purpose. It’s just a matter of adjusting…”

He smiled. “You’ll get there.”

“I think I’m gonna miss the people.” I agreed. “And, in a weird way, even the crazy, stressful routine. I mean, it was fun work, you know? Shooting. Spending so much time with people who liked the work as much as I did. Cracking jokes and going through the rough hours together… We could always make each other laugh… I have a feeling I won’t be laughing too much dealing with Human Rights violations.” He smiled, understanding, and held my hand. “But…” I sighed. “I don’t miss the rough hours. And the stress. And the interviews… It’s so weird being both sad and happy about leaving at the same time.”

He scooched over to sit closer to me, and kissed my temple gently.

“You can always go back if you want to.” I gave him a look. “I mean it. Anytime. The offer stands. I’ll walk away and you’ll do whatever you want.”

I smiled. “You’re what I want.”

—

We flew back home on the next morning. Harry had his family’s traditional Christmas party for extended family on Buckingham Palace and I had only about two days to rest before flying to Brazil to spend my last Christmas with my family. Next year, as a married woman, I would have to follow Harry to Sandringham to spend the holydays with his family. The Buckingham Palace Christmas party was for all the relatives that couldn’t make it to Sandringham, the Queen’s distant cousins and their espouses and children. With everyone there, Harry said it was a crowded annual reunion, where he got to see cousins he never saw otherwise.

Luckily for me, as Kate had been kind enough to explain, only the blood relatives and people married to them were invited, so no fiancés, which meant I had the whole next year to get used to the idea of attending something like that.

“Will and I got engaged a few weeks before the party in 2011.” She had told me. “And even then I wasn’t invited, thank God. It’s too much to get psychologically ready for. Buckingham and the whole family, you know?”

I knew. And I was happy to stay home, calling my bridesmaids on Skype to talk about wedding plans.

I spent the flight sending Oscar text messages, asking when, by God, when he would propose! Soon enough, I was wrapping myself in warm, comfy overcoats and scarves to survive the weather from the plane home.
The second very surprising thing that December brought happened as soon as we got to the apartment. It was empty, as we had left it, but it wasn’t Vodka who came to greet us – Harry had left her under Clara’s care as he went to California to see me and she was yet to bring her back. We were greeted, then, by Edward.

“Edward, it’s eight in the morning.” Harry greeted him, without even a hello. “Can’t work wait until I sleep the jet leg off?”

“I come bringing a last minute invitation for the Royal Family’s annual Christmas Party on Buckingham Palace.” He said.

“I already got my invitation.” Harry said.

“This one is not for you.” Edward grinned, walking past Harry to hand me a white envelope. “Jenifer is invited.”

Chapter End Notes

Okay. So much to talk about: How cute is Harry tagging along to Jen’s work stuff? I haven’t forgotten a certain request for him to go with her to an award show, btw, stay tuned! And also, OMG, Christmas Party invite???? How cool is that???? Pressure is on.

Also, I particularly love the Hamilton premiere in this chapter because I’m completely OBSESSED with Hamilton and I hope there’s a movie soon so I can watch it. Yes, I can rap My Shot to perfection. And yes I am in love with Daveed Diggs. And yes I cried writing Jen’s One Last Time moment.
Buckingham Palace was as magnificent as the last time I had seen it. Granted, I had only seen it once before, but in my mind I kept on marveling at its high, fancily decorated ceilings, golden historic furniture and big paintings that took entire walls. When I walked in early that afternoon, it was hard remembering I had been there before, as everything still looked so glorious it was as if I was seeing it for the first time.

Harry walked me in, his large hand on my lower back, smiling and nodding politely at the guards that opened the car doors for us and guided us into the palace towards the Royal family’s annual Christmas lunch party, doing a great job at pretending he wasn’t worried.

Though I wished he would lighten up, I couldn’t blame him for worrying. The party was a tradition that pretty much everyone in Britain was aware of – or that’s what it felt like when we drove up to Buckingham Palace that December, about a week before actual Christmas.

There were crowds gathered by the gates, which wasn’t that surprising considering the palace was one of the most popular spots in the country, but there was also a large group of paparazzi photographing everyone that drove in, knowing that they could expect to see all of the royals because the date of the party was always announced.

I was wearing a burgundy, knee length Gucci dress with burgundy heels and a black Alexander McQueen overcoat with a fake fur collar, feeling as cold as I ever had. It was very rare that I got to spend December in England, as the year before I left for work and then to see my family in Brazil, and didn’t come back until the end of award season in March, and so I was still trying to get used to the weather.

Because my dress had a high neck with a bow tie hanging from it, I knew I could hide my engagement ring in a long necklace under it, which I did. Touching the volume of it under the fabric of my dress made me feel a little more secure, safer, knowing what it represented. Knowing it meant that next year, when this party came about again, I would be there too. As a member of the family. The problem was Harry and I were still not married, and no one but his close family and mine, and our close friends, knew about the engagement. Which begged the question: why had I been invited?

“I thought only royal family and spouses were invited.” I had told Edward and Harry on the night we arrived back in London, when Lane-Fox had personally handed me my invitation.

“And that’s true.” Edward replied.

“Then why was she invited?!” Harry asked.
“I can’t answer that.” He shrugged. “Maybe they think it is matter of time since you’ll be a spouse soon.”

“But no one knows we’re engaged yet.” Harry argued. “Only the grandparents, and they know all of the extended family will be there. They wouldn’t risk telling so many people and have it leak before Jen is officially out of her business.”

“Yes, the official order is for the engagement to remain secret.” Edward nodded.

“So what’s the excuse? How do we justify my going?”

“We don’t.” He replied. “You were invited, it is unusual, but nothing we can say about that. If anyone has questions they can direct them at Her Majesty.”

What this meant was simple: I was at a party that, by all means, I wasn’t supposed to be at, but I was there as a guest, so although it would raise many questions, no one could actually say anything about it. Of course the media wasn’t going to care – once those paparazzi saw me drive in we knew every tabloid, newspaper and website would asking themselves: why is Jenifer Silva - Prince Harry’s celebrity girlfriend - attending the royal family’s Christmas party?!

Sadly, we had no answers. And since it would be too rude to refuse they invitation, all I could do was go and brace myself for the worst.

—

Before the Christmas lunch, however, I had another important appointment. An afternoon on Ophelia’s house, when she excitedly called to ask us there ‘as soon as possible’. I knew what it was about, of course, but I decide it was best to hear it from her and not possibly ruin the surprise.

“So last night Oscar and I were sitting in bed and he was playing with his ukulele, when he turns to me and says ‘There’s something in my uke’ and then he shook it and I could hear something rattling around in there. So he hands it to me and says, ‘you’ve got tiny hands, see if you can pull whatever it is out.’ So I look in there and I can’t see anything but you can hear there is definitely something in there so I stick my hand in and I grab this box and I pull it out and I say ‘oh, it’s a little pill box.’ And he reaches over and opens it and there’s a big ruby ring inside.”

I couldn’t help the loud gasp that came out of me, as I finally realized what Ophelia’s urgentramble that afternoon was about. She ignored me, and merely smiled as she continued to talk as fast as if she didn’t need air.

“And I’m looking at him thinking, ‘this can’t mean what I think it means’ and he’s just smiling at me, waiting for me to put it together so I ask, ‘Do you mean?’ and I couldn’t even finish the sentence it was so unbelievable! And he just nods and says ‘I do.’ I was so happy that I just grabbed him and said ‘that’s my line’ before I kissed him. He pulled away and held up the ring saying, ‘you’re supposed to tell me if you want to.’ And I just laughed and grabbed the ring off him and practically yelled ‘yes’ before I put it on and, well… yeah.” She giggled, showing us her left hand where the familiar giant ruby stood atop a gold band.

What followed was one of the most girly moments of my life: there was quite a bunch of squealing and jumping excitedly up and down as we giggled uncontrollably about Ophelia’s proposal. After that, we finally calmed down enough for her to ask her childhood friend, Zoe, to be her maid of honor and her assistant and friend Evie and me to be her bridesmaids.

“Oh, my God, of course!” I squealed, still an octave higher than my voice usually was, throwing
my arms around her in a crushing hug.

“Are you sure?” She asked, concerned. “You’ll probably get married before I do, will they let you be a bridesmaid?!”

“They can try and stop me!” I said, smiling.

“I also can’t believe Oscar asked you for permission.” She said, grinning. “And I can believe even less that you said yes!”


She smiled, and hugged me again. “Thanks, Jay. It means a lot.”

I had yet to live a more British day in my life. The room – with its golden ornamented high ceilings and crystal lamps and chandeliers, was packed with people. All fancily dressed, wearing makeup and shining jewelry; mostly middle aged men and women, but also young boys and girls and children; all talking amongst themselves in their polite inside voices, and sharing jokes and gentle laughter as if their surroundings were truly not so absolutely shocking and impressive.

As if the palace wasn’t enough, there was the accents all around, which weren’t normal British accents – they were posh British accents. And not only from the royals, but from the staff too. All of them spoke as if they had spent their entire lives having dictation classes for movies, which, as someone who did, let me tell you: they weren’t easy. The men were all in suits and ties – like Harry - , their sing soft and clean-shaven, – not like Harry. The women were all in knee or tea length designer dresses, with stockings and closed toe heels, their hair made, either straightened to perfection or done up as if they had just left a beauty salon. I doubted I would spot one nail unpolished; one eyebrow unfilled; one string of hair where it wasn’t supposed to be.

The Queen was in a turquoise lace coat and skirt, with her short white hair in curls, as we were ushered to meet her. She stretched her wrinkly lips in a smile as she spotted us, and Harry quickly bowed his head before giving her a kiss on the cheek.

“Granny.” He greeted, making me fight a teasing smile.

It still felt adorable to me that my manly, proud, tall fiancé would refer to his grandmother as ‘granny’, especially considering her face was in the money in our wallets.

“Thank you for coming.” Her Majesty replied. “And you, dear, welcome back to Buckingham.”

As she acknowledged me, I smiled, passing my right leg behind my left one and bending my knees in a curtsy.

“Your Majesty.” I greeted, with a shy smile, wondering if those words would ever feel natural to me. “Thank you for having me.”

“It is our pleasure, Miss Silva.” She turned to the elderly couple standing tall and elegant by her two sides. “You haven’t met, I presume, Prince and Princess Michael of Kent.”

“Haven’t had the honor.” I smiled at them, curtsying again, knowing I would be doing the exercise countless times that afternoon – and most likely for the rest of my life. “Your Royal Highnesses.”
“Miss Jenifer Silva, Michael, Marie.” The Queen explained, as the bald man sporting a fancy white beard handed his hand to hold mine. “She is an ambassador for the United Nations working on Human Rights, is that a fair way to describe it, Miss Silva?”

“Absolutely.” I replied, wondering if, like me, the Kents were wondering if the Queen was purposely avoiding mentioning my acting work. “It’s a pleasure to meet you.”

Princess Michael of Kent smiled, looking young and energetic despite her age. “How do you do?” She asked.

Edward had spent the past day teaching me about Harry’s extended family, claiming I needed to understand who they were and their relation to the Queen so I’d know who I had to curtsy to and how I should address them. I tried to explain to him I had already learnt about them on my royal training classes, but he wouldn’t have it. So I pretended to listen as he reminded me that Prince Michael of Kent was a cousin of the Queen, being a grandson of King George V. He occasionally carries out royal duties representing the Queen at some functions in Commonwealth realms outside the United Kingdom and also manages his own consultancy business and has presented some television documentaries on the royal families of Europe.

I asked Edward why it was frowned upon that I was an actress when this guy was literally gushing about his fancy relatives for the TV, but he didn’t have a good enough answer.

His wife, however, was far more interesting. Marie, known as Princess Michael of Kent, through her mother, is descended from Henry II of France’s mistress and Catherine (de’ Medici), Queen of France, as well as from the celebrated painter Peter Paul Rubens. Edward had told me in a hushed whisper as if our house was bugged that her father was a Nazi party member serving as a Major in the SS during the Second World War.

“And you’re telling me they’re afraid I will embarrass them?!” I had asked Edward, raising an eyebrow, to which Harry, who had been replying emails nearby, simply let out a nasalized laugh.

Princess Michael was an interior designer before becoming an author; she wrote several books on European royalty (mostly her cousins), and was married before meeting Prince Michael, whom she married one month after the Pope annulled her first marriage in 1978, which I thought would be problematic, but apparently nobody cared.

“Please enjoy yourselves.” The Queen told us, before we stepped away so she could keep on greeting the rest of her family.

Which was precisely, what we also did. One person after the other, Harry escorted me through the room, his hand always on my lower back, introducing me to his family members as ‘Jenifer Silva, guest of Her Majesty’. Apparently it was ‘out of touch’ to introduce me as his girlfriend, and I had a feeling he didn’t want me to think he was also using my UN job to hide away my acting career.

I was introduced to the Duke of Kent, the 34th in the line for the throne, the oldest paternal first cousin of the Queen, who had won a prize for his excellence in foreign languages and whose father had died on a plane crash. With his wife, he had three children, all married with children of their own, some of which I was also introduced to.

Like the young and beautiful twenty-year-old Lady Amelia Windsor, with her full lips, glossy blondish mane and round brown eyes, pictures from her publicly available social media accounts showed her dancing at Notting Hill Carnival with her bronzed midriff on display, as well as posing at Glastonbury Festival and smoking in the bath. According to Edward’s lesson, she’s outspoken about her passion for Bloody Mary cocktails and Latin. And her apparent motto, as inscribed on a
photo in her Instagram account? ‘Go hard or go home.’

“So truly someone related to the party prince.” I teased, giving Harry a playful smile.

At the lunch, the twenty-year-old royal who was 36th in line to be Queen, smiled at me. “I love your movies.”

Her cousin, Lady Gabriella Windsor, 33rd in line, was the daughter of Prince Michael of Kent, and even blonder than Amelia. She had the same straight, smooth hair and flawless complexion. She worked as a freelance feature writer and had acquired her diplomas from Brown and Oxford.

We met her brother next, that Harry called Freddie, but whom Edward had previously informed me was Lord Frederick Windsor, the heir of Prince Michael of Kent. Interestingly enough, I wasn’t the first actress to marry into that family, as I was soon told his wife, Sophie Winkleman, was an actress herself, having played the old Susannah in the first Narnia movie, and Ashton Kutcher’s girlfriend in Two and a Half Men.

“It’s not the same!” Lane-Fox said, before I could even ask about it, during my royal training. “Her husband has no chance of ever being king, no one even knows them!”

Lane-Fox also told me Freddie was related to Prince Philip since he and the Duchess of Kent are first cousins (their fathers were the sons of George I of Greece). That means that Lord Frederick and Prince Philip are first cousins, twice removed. Prince Philip’s paternal grandfather is Frederick’s paternal great-great-grandfather. At the same time, Queen Victoria was the maternal great-great-grandmother of Prince Philip and the paternal great-great-great-grandmother of Lord Frederick, which makes them third cousins once removed.

“Do I have to remember this?” I had asked Edward, with my head spinning at the amount of times he had used the word ‘great’.

“Well…” He started, cautious.

“No.” Harry decided, to which I had let out a sigh of relieve.

The important thing to remember was that Freddie was 46th in the line of succession to the British Throne. Apparently, that was the important thing to remember for every one of them. The first thing Edward had told me about Harry’s family members was their names; the second was their place in line.

As I greeted, with some comfort and familiarity the people I had already met, like his cousin Peter and wife Autumn, I knew Peter was number 13 in line, and whose adorable blonde daughters Isla and Savannah were 14 and 15.

His sister Zara – number 17 - was as nice to me that day as she had been the one other time we met – during the polo match when Harry and I ‘came out’ together publicly. That is to say not very nice at all.

“I’m not sure you’ve been told, but there aren’t photographers in this party.” She told me, wryly, when Harry was busy talking to her husband Mike about their daughter Mia, who was just a little older than George.

“I’m aware.” I replied, confused at what she meant.

“Well, I’m sure someone of your status can’t afford to attend events where your image isn’t being praised.” With a jolt of anxiety and discomfort, I realized what was happening. “Though I suppose
the paparazzi on the gates will do. Good enough to associate you with the royal family, isn’t it? All a celebrity could ask for.”

I took in a deep breath, and considered seriously letting it pass. I knew she didn’t know me. I knew she didn’t know Harry and I were engaged. I knew she would regret those words when she found out. I could let it go. I could be classy and let her find her own medicine with time.

“You surely think very highly of yourself if you think your family is such good publicity.” I hoped my smile would be enough to diffuse the bitterness in my tone. “Besides, I was invited.”

“Yes, she was.” Interrupted the voice, as Zara and I exchanged death stares.

Prince Philip, still looking as wrinkly as last time I had seen him, held both of our shoulders as he approached, being taller than the us both. “Hello, Miss Silva.” He smiled a crooked, wrinkly smile.

I curtsied, knowing Zara’s judging eyes were on me. “Sir.”

“It is nice to see you made some time in your busy schedule for us. I heard you’ve been having a busy December.”

Zara scorned, but her grandfather ignored her.

“That is one way to describe it, sir.” I replied. “But it is my last award season, so I can’t complain.”

“You’re too modest.” He smiled. “Harry?” Harry and Zara’s husband broke up their conversation to join us. “Tell me, how many awards has Miss Silva been already nominated for this month alone?”

“Ten.” Harry smiled, proudly.

“Three, technically.” I corrected, automatically, trying my best not to blush.

Harry smiled at me, amused. “Only because the other five you already won!”

“Well, that is impressive.” Prince Philip said.

“And twice!” Harry added, making me roll my eyes.

“Which were they?” Prince Philip asked.

I sighed, knowing that answer could take a while.

As December rolled along, so did award season nominations. In December, the smaller awards either made their nominations public or handed out their winners – with or without a ceremony. Though most of those awards were not televised or known to the majority of the public, they were nothing short of prestigious, and as of the middle of that month, the movies I had been in had already snatched quite a few of them.

Tangled and Broken were getting some slight nods from the critics, Tangled mostly for Best Original Song, with I See the Light, and Broken for Best Ensemble and Best Actor, for Tom Hardy. Hamilton, to no one’s surprise, was sweeping every nomination and awards it reached. Lin was up for Best Director and Best Actor, Leslie Odom Jr. – our Aaron Burr – was up for Best Supporting Actor, our entire score was always up for Best Score, and the movie in a whole was always up for Best Picture.

As Eliza Hamilton, I had won the San Francisco Film Critics Award, the National Board of
Review Award, the NY Film Critics Circle Award, the Los Angeles Film Critics Award and the National Society of Film Critics Awards for Best Supporting Actress.

“Well done.” Prince Philip giggled. “Good for you!”

“And that’s only for one of the movies.” Harry told him. “She’s nominated with two.”

“Harry.” I warned, embarrassed, hoping he would understand there was no reason to be shouting that around.

“Well, well…” His grandfather said, diplomatic. “No reason to play humble, Miss Silva. Take credit where credit is due, huh? Now, come.” He handed me his arm. “I believe I promised you a Van Gogh.”

I wasn’t able to help what I was sure was an almost audible gasp. “Really?”

“Let’s go.” He smiled, grabbing my hand and placing it on his arm. “I shall show you to the gallery.” We started to make our way out, when he turned to look back at where the others were. Harry was making his way after us. “Uh, where are you going?”

He looked up, confused. “The gallery?”

“And who says you’re invited?”

I tried to suppress a smile, but it was hard. Harry looked so much like a child caught in mischief.

“Grandfather,” he started, “if I didn’t know any better I’d say you’re trying to steal my girl.”

Prince Philip smiled as he pulled me away. “That’s always a possibility.” He told his grandson, giggly, making me smile broader. “With all due respect, of course, dear, I was only joking.”

“Don’t worry, sir.” I said.

He walked us out of the ballroom - the guards at the door opened the doors for us, and I noticed two men in suits followed us nearby, though leaving enough space so they were out of earshot. I understood they were the Prince’s protection detail, and wondered if he really had to go everywhere with them, even inside his own house.

“Sir,” I started, as we were making our way up the impressive stairs to the second level of the palace. “Was it you who invited me here today?”

He smiled. “Yes, it was.”

“May I ask why? I mean, I am honored to be here, of course. But I was told the lunch was for family and spouses only.”

“Well,” he started, hanging on to the bannister of the stairs as he climbed. “I was informed you wouldn’t be back to the country until March, and I wanted to talk to you about something before then.” As we reached the second level, he turned to me. “But first, let’s see that ring!” Confused, I sustained his look until he winked at me. “Come on, I know you have it with you… Let me see if it is worthy of that pretty hand of yours.”

“Oh!” I said, realizing what he meant. I pulled the long chain from my neck, from where my engagement ring hung from, and showed it to him, standing with my back to his protection officers so they couldn’t see it. Except for them, we were alone, so I pulled the ring into my finger to show
“Hm…” Prince Philip mumbled, holding my left hand between his two frail ones and looking down at my ring. “Well done, Harry.” He smiled. “Do you like it?”

“I love it.” I said. “How did you know I had it?”

“You’re a hopeless romantic girl who just got engaged.” He shrugged. “I may be old, dear, but I still know a thing or two about girls.”

I smiled, and returned the ring, in the chain, to the inside of my dress, where the high neck would hide it from view.

“I was born in Greece, did you know that, Miss Silva?”

“Please, sir, call me Jen.”

He smiled. “Only if you call me Philip.”

I smiled, somewhat awkwardly. “I’m not sure I can.”

“Then I’m not sure I can call you Jen.”

“Okay.” I giggled. “Philip.”

“Well, Jen…” He went on, as I cross my arm in his again, and we returned to our slow pace en route to the gallery. “I was born as a Prince of Greece in the middle of the Greco-Turkish war. The war went badly for Greece, and when I was one, my uncle, King Constantine I, was forced to abdicate, and the new military government arrested my father along with others. The commander of the army and five senior politicians were executed. My father’s life was believed to be in danger, and my mother was under surveillance. A revolutionary court banished my father from Greece for life and a British naval vessel evacuated our family to France, with me carried to safety in a cot made from a fruit box. We settled in the Paris suburb of Saint-Cloud in a house lent to us by a wealthy aunt.”

As he paused, I took in a deep breath, realizing just how stuck I was at his words. I had known he was Greek, and had had an interesting story before marrying the Queen, but I had no idea this was it. It sounded a lot like the plot of Anastasia and it was mesmerizing that it was real.

“I was educated in France, then Britain,” he went on, recounting his life’s story on a tone of boredom, as if reading from an old book he was tired of by now, “my sisters all married German noblemen and moved to Germany. My mother was diagnosed with schizophrenia and was admitted to an asylum. My father moved to Monte Carlo. I went to a boarding school in Germany which I attended for a couple of terms before the rise of Nazism. Then the founder of the school, whom was Jewish, fled to Scotland and opened a new school, where I soon transferred to.”

He fled Nazism. Was this his real life’s story a movie plot?! I realized I was holding on to his arm a bit too tightly, but I just couldn’t help it. Losing his parents, his sisters, studying alone in Nazi Germany then fleeing to Scotland… I just wanted to make sure he was really there. That he was real.

“Then my sister, Cecilie, her husband Georg, their two young sons and her mother-in-law were killed in an air crash at Ostend.” He stopped walking, and I did too. I tried to avoid his eyes, but they were so full of concern it was hard to look away as he stared at the carpet underneath our feet. “I was sixteen years old when I attended the funeral in Darmstadt… My uncle and guardian then
died of cancer of the bone marrow, and the following year I joined the Royal Navy.” He looked at me, seeming to wake up from a trance, and grinned. “I graduated the Royal Naval College as the best cadet in my course!” I smiled. “I served the British forces during the Second World War as two of my brothers-in-law fought on the German side.”

“I am so sorry, sir.”

He looked at me as we walked. “Don’t be silly, dear.” He said.

Though I knew he must have been trying to be nice, I couldn’t help but add on.

“You had to fight your own family after so much had happened already. It couldn’t have been easy. I’m sorry you had to go through that.”

He stopped walking and turned to me. “Listen to me, Jen, this will be lesson number one. Never apologize for anything that isn’t your fault.”

“I…” I stuttered. “What?”

“I am telling you all of this because I know what it feels like to marry into this family while having so much going against you. And I am trying to help. So, the first lesson is this: you can’t let them see your weaknesses. So as much as I can admire your compassion, never apologize for what isn’t your fault. Is that clear?”

I didn’t know what to say, so I stayed quiet. I had a feeling even if I knew what to say, maybe I wouldn’t, because despite being appreciative of his helpfulness, I wasn’t sure I agreed with him.

“Now, back to the war.” He said, petting my arm in his and pulling me to keep walking. “I was promoted to sub-lieutenant, then lieutenant, and became first lieutenant of HMS Wallace, at 21 years old, one of the youngest first lieutenants in the Royal Navy!” He smiled at me. “I don’t want to appear too snobbish, dear, but during the invasion of Sicily, in July 1943, as second in command of HMS Wallace, I saved the ship from a night bomber attack…”

I smiled, now even more unsure of what to say.

After turning a corner, more guards in red opened a set of double doors for us and we walked into what I assumed was the gallery, a bright lit big room, as magnificently decorated as the rest of the palace, with many paintings all over its walls and statues hanging about the room. There were chairs also, and Prince Philip led me to a couple of them in front of a black and white drawing in a big frame by the windows.

The sketch depicted a village, with children playing and a cloudy sky, and the signature in the bottom left no doubt: Vincent Van Gogh.

“Woah.” I let out.

Prince Philip was quiet as I admired the frame, looking more to the signature than anything else. Finally, I turned back to sit in the chair by his side. He sighed. I wondered if he, like me, had been thinking about all he had just been telling me.

“In 1939 King George and the Queen toured the Royal Naval College and, as their third cousin through Queen Victoria, I was asked to escort the Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret.” He went on. “Elizabeth was thirteen and I was eighteen when we stared to correspond… I wasn’t in love, of course. She was too young. And love was an annoyance back then, something to get rid of when you were trying to survive. The Queen says she fell in love with me at first sight, however.”
I smiled. “You must have been handsome.”

He giggled, blushing slightly. “Well… Harry actually looks a lot like me at his age. Except for the hair, of course.”

“Then I know you were handsome.” He giggled. “If I was a few years older and you were single I might be torn between the two of you.”

He laughed. “Oh, dear, don’t weaken this old man’s heart like that…” He sighed. “I did fall in love later on. With Elizabeth, I mean. With her words, her kindness. Her strength. And when she was nineteen I asked her father for her hand in marriage.”

“What did he say?!” I asked, feeling silly. “Wait, yes, of course, you’re married.”

“No, actually.” He smiled, seeming amused by me. “He said yes under the condition that we waited until his daughter turned twenty-one.”

“That sounds reasonable.”

He giggled. “At the time it sounded like an annoyance.” I smiled. “But we waited… Now, as someone who, I hear, has been told everything about herself that makes her a bad future consort, can you guess what about me was frowned upon?”

I thought about it, remembering everything Edward and the advisors had complained about me.

“Well, you weren’t British.” I started, and he smiled. “And as a Greek man, I am assuming you weren’t Anglican either. And your brothers-in-law were Nazis.”

“Well, I can’t say they were Nazis, but they seemed enough to be.” He said, sadly. “And you are right on everything else. On the years we waited for Elizabeth to turn twenty-one, I abandoned my Greek and Danish royal titles, adopted the surname Mountbatten from my mother’s family, converted officially to Anglicanism and became a naturalized British subject.” I nodded, knowing I’d soon have to do a lot of that as well. “I had no financial standing, either. Some of the King’s advisors did not think I was good enough for Elizabeth… I was, after all, a prince without a home or kingdom. Even Elizabeth’s mother wasn’t convinced I was a good match for her daughter.”

“I think I can relate.” I told him, who smiled at me, knowingly.

“This family can be overprotective of each other.” He said. “But the intentions are the best, I’ll assure you.”

“How did you do it?” I asked. “It was a different time, a more misogynistic time when the men were supposed to be providers and all that… how did you convince them you were good enough?”

“I didn’t.” He smiled, wickedly. “Elizabeth did. She wanted to marry me and, as a future Queen, her will prevailed. We got married, she followed me on my military job for as long as we were allowed, and then her father died and she became Queen. We moved into this palace and so our new jobs began… With Elizabeth’s accession, it seemed probable that the royal house would bear my name, becoming the House of Mountbatten, in line with the custom of a wife taking her husband’s surname on marriage. Churchill, however,” he looked at me, “you know Churchill? British Prime Minister Winston Churchill?”

I nodded. “Yes, of course.”

“A big tool, if you ask me. But don’t tell anyone I said that, dear. He and Elizabeth’s grandmother,
Queen Mary, favored the retention of the House of Windsor, so we had to keep it. I was the only man in the country not allowed to give his name to his own children…” he added, bitterly. “But then in 1953 Queen Mary passed away and Churchill resigned in 1955, so we created the surname Mountbatten-Windsor in 1960… Now, Jen, why do you think that was important?”

“Oh…” I cleared my throat, thinking about it. “So you would be equals? So the family would be about the two of you, not just her. I mean, Her Majesty!”

“Precisely.” He nodded. “As a male consort of a Queen, I was expected to stand back and let her do the work. I was expected to erase myself, so she was the only one seen. I had to fight the courtiers at every turn, dear… I had to refuse to let them write my speeches and, what they thought was worse, refuse to follow their advice to say nothing.” He winked at me. “I always made sure to say what I wanted… I insisted on being heard, and to their dismay, I was.”

I smiled; in both amusement and admiration of his strength.

“Sir…” I started, and he cleared his throat, giving me a look. “Sorry,” I smiled, “Philip… I’m still not sure why you wanted me to hear all this.”

“You are not British, Jen.” He told me. “And you have to royal blood or rank. You are not Anglican. You have a very Latino name, and a past that is way too loud for anyone to be able to hush.” I nodded, understanding, finally, his point.

We were alike, him and me. Two otherwise outsiders marrying into a family that would be far better off with other people. And yet, in another strike of resemblance, we were too stubborn to give up.

“Young condition reminds me a lot of mine.” He said. “Though you don’t have, I believe, Nazi relatives, and I certainly have never won an Oscar, I have a feeling they will have the same problems with you as they did with me.”

“I understand what will be expected of me.” I told him. “I understand I’ll have to become a British citizen, convert to Anglicanism, and dress differently. I understand the importance of these things to the survival of the family’s image.”

“But do you understand your responsibility, dear?” He asked. “Not only to us, but to yourself?” he paused. “It is our job to make this monarchy business work. And as you become one of us, it will be your job as well. But you will never be able to be a part of our family if you allow them to completely dismantle you of who you are… I had to leave my country, names, titles, faith and family behind for this life, but for the life of me I never let who I was go.”

He reached out, and held my hand in his, smiling.

“This pretty finger will sport a pretty ring soon, and you must remember as you are asked to be more and more like us, that you should never stop being yourself.”

Chapter End Notes

Can you tell Prince Philip is my fave? He’s my fave. I love him. And this is an important moment for Jen to strengthen her into her new life and role. She’s Jennifer Silva and as much as she’ll have to adapt, she’ll also have to remain herself. And this
is a moment when she realizes that more than marrying into an institution, she’s marrying into a family. In this chapter Prince Philip isn’t a prince, he’s the grandfather of the man she’s going to marry. And he’s advising her as he would his granddaughters. And I think it’s pretty important.

Thank you sooooooooooo much for reading! Week after week I’m blown away by how much this means to me! You mean a lot to me and the fact I can entertain you means a lot to me! So Thank you!

Next chapter: Jen’s last award season! She loses a shoe! Lin Manuel Miranda finds it! She finds out something about Harry that sets her off! He finally answers her proposal (lol) and a tabloid gets a leak they HAVE to address! I’M SO EXCITED!
I couldn’t tell you the amount of times those words have made my heart stop beating with joy and excitement – by early 2018 there had been too many to count, and that one wasn’t different. I stood up, in my short, cream, shiny lace Marchesa dress, smiling as wide as I could to the sound of thunderous applause and quickly hugged Lin and Leslie by my side before walking to the stage to accept my People’s Choice Award as Favorite Movie Actress, for Hamilton.

“And the winner is… Jenifer Silva!”

I giggled on the microphone, holding the glass award in my hand, still so overwhelmed by the sound of loud applause and cheer coming from the audience. “This is the best way to start this award season, which will be the last of my career.”

The cheering slowly stopped, as I heard some occasional booing from the back of the packed theater.

“No, it’s okay.” I soothed. “Let’s end this on a good note. I…” I took a deep breath. “I won my first People’s Choice Award about ten years ago for The Mediator… back then I was in such absolute shock for having won something that so many of you had to vote for me to get, and I need you to know I am in just as much shock today. Thank you for choosing to spend your time and energy and internet connection to vote for me, and specially thank you for honoring Hamilton. From the bottom of my heart, and from everyone who worked so lovingly at this movie, thank you! I dedicate this to everyone who has ever had to endure bullying and prejudice because of where they’re from, I leave you with a line from Hamilton. Immigrants,” I smiled, and shrugged, “we get the job done!”

Raising my award to the air in victory, I smiled broadly and, to the sound of more deafening applause and the start of an upbeat song, I made my way backstage with the presenter.

Thus began my last award season ever. Traditionally, the People’s Choice opened the season of televised ceremonies on the first weekend of January, but by the time I had won my last People’s Choice ever, I already had won ten other awards. That year I was eligible for two movies, the first got me nominations for Best Supporting Actress by playing Eliza Schuyler on Hamilton. I won the National Board of Review Awards, New York Film Critics Circle Awards, Los Angeles Film Critics Awards, San Francisco Film Critics Awards and National Society of Film Critics Awards. All modesty aside, that wasn’t a huge surprise. And it wasn’t even just because of the amazing critics the movie got and all of the nominations buzz it generated around its time of release. Hamilton was the biggest cinematic materialization of patriotism America had seen in years, and it was praised as such. In the same awards I had won, we had also won Best Movie, Actor and Supporting Actor, and as soon as the rest of the nominations came out, for the awards that had
more categories, I knew we would win the others too, such as Screenplay and costume design. Because I knew that, as flattering and amazing as those awards felt, they were also just a little expected.

The real heart-stopping emotion came with the second movie I was eligible for: You Will Come Back To Me. After campaigning more than I had ever done before for any movie in my fifteen years long career, the Secretary of Culture of Brazil had picked us to run for the Academy nomination for Best Foreign Language Picture, which was still a few weeks away. But meanwhile, there were all those other awards already being handed out and they all – thanks for our efforts – set their sights on You Will Come Back to Me.

We had won the San Francisco Film Critics Award and National Society of Film Critics Award for Best Foreign Language Film, and the National Board of Review had given us, not only that same award, on top of my Supporting Actress one, but also three more. Each of those were more flattering than the last: Breakthrough Performance, Best Screenplay – Adapted and even Best Directorial Debut! All for You Will Come Back to Me!

I had spent years writing and planning that movie, and then producing it from scratch and doing some of my hardest acting on it – with scenes that ranged from torture to action shots and drama… it was the best and biggest thing I had done on my career and, dare I say? The most important! And it was now being recognized by critics from all over Hollywood, from the industry I respected and admired and had dedicated fifteen years of my life to. They were recognizing a movie I had written word for word.

A movie I had produced. And directed. A movie that had started existing on my mind and that had come into existence because of my efforts, talent and determination. A movie in a different language, about the history of a different country, about a topic – a military dictatorship - that even today, thirty-two years after it was over was still just as controversial as in the eighties!

Despite all of the rightist attacks our movie suffered, despite all of the corrupt politicians intent on censuring it, it came to life. It became huge. It had the record or biggest box office opening of a national movie in Brazil’s history. And it was winning Hollywood awards! It was actually being rumored as a favorite for an Academy nomination! A movie that I created! My debut as a director and it had worked!

And it wasn’t even over – in fact, it wasn’t even half the story yet. Award Season was still just on the beginning, and there was still a lot to go on what would be my final weeks as an actress, and I was loving every minute of it.

—

After the People’s Choice Awards, since I had no movies to shoot, I went back to England for a few days before the next ceremony, and Harry and I went to have dinner on William and Kate’s house with Charles and Camilla, where the subject found itself around my whereabouts those days.

“So you’ll spend all of this month in California?” Charles asked. “Isn’t that a lot?”

“I’m used to it.” I replied. “For the last five years, ever since I broke into the critically renowned level of the industry, I always have to spend January and February in California for Award Season. I don’t even know what the rest of the world looks like during that time of the year.” I joked.

“Well, you’ll find out next year.” Camilla said. “Since this is your last time.”

I smiled. “I know.”
“Are you nervous?” Kate asked.

“I’m… anxious.” I admitted. “It’s my last chance to leave a mark, to make a statement. To be… recognized. I know it sounds shallow, but I would very much like to go out knowing I did something good.”

“Well, it looks like you will. How many awards so far?” William asked.

Blushing, I answered with my mouth glued to my wine glass so my voice would be muffled. “Twelve.” They sounded impressed. Feeling a little more confident, I added: “And there’s still six to go…”

“Including what could be your third Oscar…” Kate smiled.

“Oh, no, that’s not gonna happen.” I said, matter-of-factly.

“Please,” Harry scoffed, “you always say this and you always win.”

I smiled, contradicted and embarrassed. “But it’s true this time! I won last year, for Heathers. No one has won two years in a row since Tom Hanks in 1994! And the last actress was Katherine Hepburn in 1968!”

“If Ophelia Callis can win two in one night, surely you can win two in different years…” Camilla said, and I resisted the urge to defend both myself and my friend against what wasn’t really an accusation.

“Anyway, let’s talk of good things.” Harry said, changing the subject. “Have we told you we set the date?”

They all looked at us, expectantly.

“August third.” I smiled, looking at Harry. “It’s a Friday.”

“Long weekend, people will be pleased.” Will joked, making us giggle.

“We don’t know if they’ll make it a bank holyday.” Harry said.

“Prince Harry marrying Jenifer Silva? The whole world might.” Kate said.

“We’re still gonna try to push for a private ceremony.” Harry told her.

“You know that is going to be difficult.” His father said. “With your high profiles, there will be huge public interest.”

“You’ll cause an uprising if the masses are denied access to your wedding.” William dramatized.

“Well, we’ll still try.” Harry told him. “One thing at a time, though. We still have to get through award season, then make the announcement, and answer all of the annoying questions like,” he mimicked a reporter’s voice, “Harry, how did you propose?!?”

We smiled.

“Technically, I proposed first!” I said.

“Not this again.” He rolled his eyes. “You know that’s not true, you can’t tell them that!”
“That is absolutely true, and I will tell them that.”

“Jen, your proposal does not count!”

“Says who?!”

“I spent years planning that dinner, and what I was going to say!” he laughed. “You just said the words as you felt like it and now you get the credit?!”

“Well, sorry, but it’s how the timeline goes.”

“Your proposal doesn’t count.” He repeated, as his family merely exchanged smiles at our banter. “I technically never answered it!”

“Oh, I’m sorry, does that mean you don’t want to marry me?!”

He gave me such a sassy and sarcastic look that it made his family laugh.

“Did you buy a ring?!” he asked, holding my left hand in his and raising it to show the room the engagement ring in my finger. “Because I did.”

“I was going to!” I justified. “I thought about it!”

“You were going to buy your own engagement ring?!” Camilla asked, sounding outraged.

“I was going to buy the wedding bands and propose with them.” I told her. “In the Brazilian tradition both man and woman wear the wedding bands upon the engagement on the right hand until the wedding, when they switch it to the left.”

“Key word,” Harry said, “you were going to. You didn’t.”

“Good thing too.” Said William. “Considering we don’t wear wedding rings. That would be awkward.”

“What do you mean you don’t wear wedding rings?” I asked, seeing very clearly the golden wedding bands on Camilla and Kate’s fingers.

Will raised his left hand to me, which had no rings in it, and I noticed his dad’s didn’t either.

“Dad wears one on his pinky.” Harry explained, and the Prince of Wales showed me the signet ring on his pinky was hiding a small wedding band underneath. “But it’s just not customary.”

“I don’t understand.” I admitted. “Is that a British thing?”

I was sure I had seen Guy, Jake and Thomas with wedding rings before, though now that I thought about it I wondered why I had never noticed William didn’t wear one. It just seemed like such a given.

“It’s more of a class thing.” Kate told me.

“Prior to the Second World War it was unheard of for men to wear wedding rings,” Charles explained. “It then became customary for soldiers serving overseas to wear a wedding band to remind them of home and their commitment to their wives and families. My father doesn’t wear a ring, though I and most of my brothers do.”

“That’s so weird.” I said, sounding disbelieving.
“Why?” Harry questioned. “It’s just not a big deal for us.”

“Well, but it’s just natural… you get married, you get a ring. It’s what everyone does.”

He shrugged. “Not us.”

“Wait…” I started, turning in my chair to face him. “You’re not going to wear a ring?!”

“I…” he stuttered. “I hadn’t thought about it. I don’t know. Maybe not. I never wore a ring before, I might not get used to it.”

I had my mouth dropped open in surprise, and I knew there was nothing natural and peaceful about the silence that suddenly fell around us.

“So, have you started thinking of birthday plans for Charlotte?” Camilla asked Kate and Will once I gave no signs of knowing how to answer Harry.

“Well, she’ll be three, so we want to do something a little more remarkable this year, since she might actually remember it.” William said.

“We’re thinking maybe a Disney theme up north.” Said Kate. “Maybe rent a bunch of toys, like big slides, for her and the cousins to play in, and hire some actors to play the characters or do a play.”

“Oh, that sounds lovely.” Charles nodded.

“Jen, is something bothering you?” Kate asked, and I was a little startled to have their attention back in me.

“Oh, no. Nothing.” I said, quickly. They looked away, and I took in a deep breath. “You know what? Actually, there is.” I turned to look at Harry again. “I just don’t understand why you wouldn’t want to wear a ring!”

He sighed. “It’s not a big deal.”

“Exactly.” I agreed. “Then why won’t you wear one?”

“I never said I wouldn’t, just that I hadn’t thought about it.”

“What’s there to think about?” I asked. “You get married, you wear a ring.”

“It’s a piece of metal!” He argued. “It doesn’t even mean anything!”

“It’s a symbol of a promise!” I replied. “It’s even how people know you’re married. Oh, he’s wearing a ring! He’s got a wife!”

“It’s not like people won’t know he’s married, Jenifer.” Camilla said. “Someone as known as he is…”

“It’s not about that!” I protested.

“What’s it about, then?” William asked. “What specifically about this sets you off?”

“Well,” I sighed, “I don’t know-“

“Exactly!” Harry interrupted. “No one knows! It’s not a symbol of anything, is just a tradition that no one really cares about… It’s more about the status than anything else. You wear a ring to let
people know you’re married, over the years it stopped having an actual meaning.”

“Oh, rings don’t have a meaning?” I asked, pointing at mine. “Do you want this back, then?”

“Don’t do this.” He sounded bored.

“You’re the one doing something!”

“Kids!” Charles soothed, using his dad-voice, and we both sighed, frustrated, as we looked away from each other. “Maybe this is the kind of matter to discuss privately?”

So, knowing his family had the kind of dynamic where ‘matters’ were discussed ‘privately’, we went along with the conversation topic of Charlotte’s upcoming birthday, and how no one seemed to believe George would soon be five-years-old.

When we got home, however, there was no hiding away from the issue, and as soon as we stepped into the elevator, alone, Harry let out a long sigh.

“Why are you cross?”

“I’m not cross.” I said, annoyed even at his British term, still wrapping myself tightly under my undercoat.

He sighed. “Fine. Why are you angry?”

“Honestly, Harry, it just makes me angrier that you need to ask.”

“Jen…” he turned to look at me, “it’s just a ring! A meaningless piece of metal that won’t change anything!”

“God! I hate that you can so easily dismiss something that matters to me!”

At this, the elevator doors opened and we stepped out into the foyer of our apartment, where I quickly strut ahead to the double marble doors.

“Why, though?!” He asked, now practically shouting. “Why does it matter so much?! It’s just a ring! And it’s not even yours, it’s mine!”

I stayed quiet, merely buffing as I walked angrily past Vodka who had come to happily greet us. Harry followed me to the room, V in his arms licking every bit of his neck she could reach, and I sat on the bed to pull out my caramel leather ankle boots.

“Come on, talk to me.” He asked. “I’m going to be your husband, I’m going to stand in front of everyone we know, plus a good portion of the world and vow to be loyal to you. Do you really think a ring will make a difference?”

I sighed, loudly, and picked my boots, walking to the closet. Harry followed.

“Come on, Jay.” He went on, pleadingly. “Look at Will and Kate’s wedding. He doesn’t wear a ring and they’re fine! He is faithful and they’re happy, do you really think it’s that bad if I don’t wear one?!”

I pulled my white McQueen sweater over my head and threw it in the dry cleaning basket, beginning to take off my earrings.

“Jen…” He sighed.
“I don’t know!” I said. “I just… I always had this idea in my head of what marriage looks like and, I know it’s something small and almost insignificant, but a wedding ring was always part of the picture, you know? It matters to me. It’s my normal.” I shrugged. “It’s all I’ve ever known. It’s all the notion I have of marriage. Sorry if it sounds so traditional, but… I don’t know, my parents have this thing they do…” I sighed. “Whenever they fight, they raise their left hand and show the ring to the other with a look that says, look, I’m still here. We’re fighting, but I’m still here. I’m still yours. I still love you. This marriage thing, this life thing may be hard, but I’m not going anywhere… I vowed to be here, and I will.”

I sighed, pausing, and stepped closer. Feeling guilty I ignored her before, I leaned in and kissed Vodka in his arms.

“I don’t know, it just always looked so cute to me.” I added. “With everything that happened, with the moving to America and how they almost didn’t make it, you know? I just like to think back to that as being something they did to remind themselves it was supposed to be a lifetime commitment…” I looked at him. “I don’t know, I guess I’ll just need time to adapt to the fact we come from different traditions… and if I want you to accept mine, I should be willing to accept yours… so, okay, just… just give me some time, alright? I’ll get over it.”

Shrugging, I went to take a shower, knowing it would take more than a ring to break what we had.

—

The Oscar nominations came out that week, one day before I had to fly back to Los Angeles for the Golden Globes. Thanks to the time zone difference, I didn’t have to wake up at an ungodly hour to watch like it happened every year, as they were read out at 5:30am in Los Angeles.

It happened right after lunch. I was sitting in the bedroom with Harry, the TV turned on in the right channel as I bit the insides of my lips with anxiety.

“I know it’s silly.” I told him. “We already won so much. I don’t need the Oscar nomination. The movie is good, the critics were good. The box office was good…”

“But no Brazilian movie has ever won the Best Foreign Language category…” Harry said, reading my thoughts.

“I know it’s silly.” I told him. “We already won so much. I don’t need the Oscar nomination. The movie is good, the critics were good. The box office was good…”

“But no Brazilian movie has ever won the Best Foreign Language category…” Harry said, reading my thoughts.

I sighed, as Channing Tatum started reading the nominees for Best Adapted Screenplay. “It would already be so cool to be nominated… if I could win it, too. I mean, I’m twenty-seven! I wrote and directed that movie! They wouldn’t give it to us…” I said dismissively.

Channing’s voice echoed through the room. “You Will Come Back to Me, based on the works of Renato Tapajós and Bernardo Kucinski. Adapted by Jenifer Silva.”

“Oh, my God.” I managed to let out. “Did he just say that?!” My phone started ringing, and I knew what it meant even before Harry shouted it excitedly by my side as I still felt my heart slow on my chest.

“He did! He said that! You’re nominated for Best Adapted Screenplay!”

“Oh, my God!” I screamed, standing up to jump on the bed. “Oh, my God, Harry!”

He laughed, and held my legs so I’d stop jumping and fall near him. He hugged me tightly.

“Congratulations!”
“Oh, my God! I wrote that!” I said. “I wrote that and I’m nominated for an Oscar!” My phone was still ringing, so I reached for it. “Richard, I know! I know! Oh, my God! Wait, what is he announcing now? Call me later!”

Channing had started reading the nominees for Best Production Design.

“You Will Come Back to Me, directed by Jenifer Silva and Camilo Cabello.”

I gasped loudly, and Harry’s hands went up to the air.

“Yes!” He shouted, smiling at me. I couldn’t look at him. I couldn’t do anything.

“What is happening?!” I shouted, making him laugh.

I only half notice when he grabbed his phone and started filming me.

“And the nominees for Best Supporting Actress are,” Channing read.

“Oh, my God.” I said, trying to fan myself with my hands as I kneeled on the mattress looking at the screen. “Oh, my God.”

“Jenifer Silva, Hamilton.”

“OH, MY GOD!” I laughed.

As I had predicted, Hamilton was nominated for about every category it was eligible for. As I had hoped, the Foreign Language category was announced before I passed out.

“And the nominees for Best Foreign Language Movie are,” he said. I closed me eyes and hugged my pillow, burying half of my face on it, trying not to think of every horrible torture scene I had had endured. “You Will Come Back to Me, directed by Jenifer Silva and Camilo Cabello.”

All I heard was Harry’s laughter as I jumped back so suddenly I fell from the bed to the floor, where I stood staring at our beautiful ceiling as I tried to breathe.

The best part about it was knowing they didn’t know Harry and I were engaged. The best part about it was knowing they were nominating me, and my very Brazilian movie, because they genuinely thought we were worth it, even if it was our last year in the industry.

As I laid in the floor of my bedroom, with an engagement ring on my finger and four Academy Award nominations, I knew there was very little chance that life could get any better.

---

What do the Golden Globe Awards and the Screen Actors Guild Awards have in common?
Answer: In 2018, they both handed me two awards each, for Best Foreign Language Movie, and Best Supporting Actress in a Movie! The best part about the SAG Awards, was that it was believed the winners of it were favorites to the Academy nomination – and win -, so when we left that night, we knew there was a big chance that You Will Come Back to Me would get an Academy nod!

Award Season was at full speed and everything about it was bigger than it had ever been.

“It is very ironic,” said Richard, as I got dressed in February for the Bafta Awards, “that deciding to quit has suddenly made you bigger than you have ever been before…”

“I have Dolce and Gabbana, Gucci, Zuhair Murad, Elie Saab and Dior all making offers to have
you as their face of the brand.” Janine agreed, making me smile.

“I have at least ten phone calls a day from big names of studios and directors wanting to know if you wouldn’t reconsider staying in the industry for at least another six months to be in their movie…” Richard added.

“Are you sure you don’t want to postpone this?” Janine asked, and I giggled.

“Guys!” I said, as Rachel Zoe strapped my dress. “Let it go! It’s over! I’m already moving on!”

“I’d love to know what you’re moving on to…” Rachel said. “Is it still state secret?”

I smiled, and absentmindedly touched my left ring finger without her noticing it. “I’m afraid so… but you should know soon enough.”

“And are you sure you will have no need for a designer in your new life?”

I smiled at her, as her skinny and full of rings hands expertly strapped up my sandals. They were hard sandals to put on, with three straps over my foot that were so tight she had to pull each one at a time carefully, and she did it fast and making it look easy. She was so good at her job, I wondered if I could do a good job of keeping up a royal wardrobe by myself, but knowing the public would assume I was using tax payer money to afford an expensive stylist, knew I couldn’t keep her.

“Sadly, I think I’ll have to get by on my own. Luckily, though, I learnt from the best.”

She sighed. “I’m gonna miss dressing you.”

“God, enough!” Janine got up from the bed. “This is starting to sound like goodbye! Happy times, people! Jen is winning everything again! It’s her second year in a row! We’re going for record-breaking numbers here! Leave the sad part for after award season!”

She was right, so I took a deep breath and looked at myself in the mirror: I was wearing a fuchsia, A-line, ruffled Marchesa gown made of tulle and lace, matched with a yellow diamond necklace, bracelet and earrings, with my hair up on a braided low bun that left strings of my hair framing my face.

“My last Bafta Awards.” I told myself in the mirror, wondering if, as a British royal, they would ever let me attend the ceremony, even if just to watch.

That sentiment was over within half an hour of the show. As the award season was now nearly over, I could remember more easily why I was leaving: turns out all of the ceremonies are basically the same. I did on the Bafta the same as I had on the People’s Choice, Golden Globe, SAG and Independent Spirit Awards: I posed for the screaming photographers on the red carpet, tried to talk to as many fans as possible, gave previously scheduled interviews about the movies and nominations – always answering the same questions. This years’ theme was: ‘So, this is your last award season!’ One after the other, interviewers would utter this line as if I had forgotten it and I was expected to act surprise and dramatically nervous about it every time.

At some point, I just wish I could tell the truth: that it felt like this last award season was dragging along forever and would never end. That I just wanted it to be over already so I could go home and eat pizza with my fiancé and my dog. That I was hoping I would never have to wear spanks again.

The Bafta ceremony rolled along… I talked to my friends on the breaks, laughed with the others at the host’s jokes, trying to enjoy this night as I knew I could one day miss it, and clapped politely when You Will Come Back To Me lost Best Foreign Language Movie. Finally, by the time they
were announcing the Supporting Actress category, I had even taken my shoes off. I was so bored I had my mind flying in every direction but the stage.

My eyes were on it as Eddie Redmayne read out his scripted monologue on the teleprompter, and then called in the video with the nominee’s clips, but my mind was on my foot. My beautiful, golden, Giuseppe Zanotti sandals seemed to have a crooked strap that was hurting me, so I had taken it off to fix it and my foot felt so good as I freed it from its designer cage that I just left it out.

“And the BAFTA goes to…” Eddie uttered as he opened the envelope. “Jenifer Silva, Hamilton.”

If you were watching from home, my wide-eyed expression of panic might have looked like surprise over winning a Bafta award – only the second of my career. In truth, the first thing on my mind was: there is not a chance in hell I can strap my shoe back in time.

It went as it usually did: the image cut to a close up of my shocked face, everyone around me – our cast and crew - stood up to applaud and the sound quickly filled the room, as an elegant melody from the orchestra served as soundtrack for me to walk to the stage.

“What do I do?!” I asked Lin-Manuel, not only Hamilton himself, but the creator of the story and music, who was standing by my side and smiling broadly at me as he clapped.

“What do you mean, what do you do?!” He asked, amused. “You go up there and grab that award, it’s what you do best!”

“You don’t understand!” I said, as he pulled me up in a tight hug.

I hugged him back, the feeling of joy of having won another Bafta finally catching up to me, and tried to walk to the stage with one of my feet just half into its sandal. I managed two slow steps, limping, and knew I wasn’t a good enough actress to pretend everything was fine, so I stopped right in front of Lin and held his shoulder for balance.

‘Ah, screw this.’ I thought. ‘It’s my last award season, if people will think I’m white trash, screw them. I’m never coming back here anyway…’

I grabbed a fistful of my dress and pulled it up, then grabbed my opened sandal and pulled it out of my foot. There was a loud sound of laughter around as I my image splattered on the screens on the top of the theatre showed everyone what I was doing. I knew that laughter was being echoed all over the world as the images of this scene streamed away.

“Jen, what-?” Lin asked, as I thrust my shoe on his chest, that he held, looking down with confusion on his face.

“Here, put this in my seat?!” I told him, before I turned to the stage and started walking determinedly ahead.

The difference of one feet on the ground and the other twelve inches high on stilettos made for a quicker – and weirder – walk, but I knew what I would have to deal with if I limped all the way to the stage: Lane-Fox telling me I needed to stop making such a spectacle of myself. So I sighed, knowing it would be faster if I was barefoot, and stopped. I leaned down, pulled my dress up and took off my other sandal. I considered walking back to give it to Lin but it would take too much time, so I just held it as I walked with my shoulders back up the stage, trying to look as elegant as I could.

Being barefoot made walking a lot easier, and I quickly reached Eddie, who was also laughing, looking confused at me when he handed me my Bafta – with the hand I had free as the other was
still holding my shoe.

“Did your shoes break?” He asked, as I quickly hugged him.

“Long story!” I said, and he laughed some more, as I walked to the podium in front of the microphone.

I let out a deep breath, resting the award on the podium, trying to hide my shoe behind my back. The sound of laughter was still dimming down and I knew it was pointless, so I just put the shoe beside the award.

“Listen,” I started, on the microphone, “I have a perfectly reasonable explanation for this shoe thing.” They laughed, and I couldn’t help but smile too.

Trust me to have a shoe malfunction on the Bafta awards! I knew I would be hearing about this for the rest of my life. I also knew, because the clock on the teleprompter told me, that my speech time was almost over, and they would be cutting me off soon.

“But I’m not about to waste my speech time on it, so just, I don’t know…” I made a dismissive hand gesture to the air, “just check my Twitter later. Anyway…” they laughed some more, and I tried to remain serious to remember what I was supposed to say. “Anyway, this is obviously so incredible! Thank you so much! I… I wanna thank the British Academy of Film for this honor. I can promise you we did not think this would happen, mostly because Hamilton is literally a movie about the American Independence from this amazing country of yours… So thank you for overlooking that!” The audience laughed some more. “I have lived here in London for a little more than a year now, and one thing that I know is that so many of the people I have met are so incredibly polite and kind, you would make Eliza Schuyler proud! Thank you so much!” they applauded some more, and I prepared to wrap, as the teleprompter told me I had to. “So, thank you, and uh, you’re welcome to the Giuseppe Zanotti people for all this accidental promotion.”

I gestured to the shoe as I held it up, making them laugh, and grabbed my Bafta, turning on my feet to walk out.

—

“Oh, my God! This is my favorite, by far!”

“Harry, you’ve said that of the last three memes!”

He laughed, and handed me his phone so I’d see the new image he had found. There were two pictures side-by-side: one was of me on the press room after the Bafta, where I was answering questions about my recent win – which became more about the shoe thing than anything else. I remember the moment when I was walking in, holding both the shoe and the award, and started talking about how amazed I was by my win, when I raised the award to gesture it to the reporters, only then realizing I was raising the wrong hand, and showing them my shoe. They laughed, and the pictures showed me looking confused at my shoe before I laughed too. The picture beside on the meme was of Ophelia when she had won her two Oscars, looking confused at them trying to remember which one was the more recent to talk about in her speech. The caption read: me vs. you, with the ‘me’ part being Ophelia, and the ‘you’ being my shoe picture.

“I can’t believe you were still holding your shoe on the press room!” Harry laughed.

“Well, I’m sorry!” I said, returning his phone to grab another slice of pizza from the box in the coffee table. “I left the other one with Lin, I didn’t get it back until I was back in the theatre!”
“How did you even do that?!?” He asked.

I sighed, raising my feet up to rest my legs on his lap from where I stood across from him on the living room couch.

“It’s a very difficult shoe to put on!” I justified. “Oh, God, I’ll never hear the end of this, will I?”

“No if I have anything to say about it.” He grinned, and I shook my head.

There was silence as we ate, with smiles on our faces. I still had my Marchesa dress on, and the makeup and hair like they had been on the ceremony, though I had taken out my expensive jewelry. My new Bafta award was hanging out on the table right beside the pizza box.

I had already tweeted my explanations about my shoe-mishap, and ditched the after-party, a bonus of not being an actress anymore: I didn’t have to be seen in those things, so I could go home to my fiancé, my dog, and my pizza.

I reached to the floor and grabbed one of my sandals, putting it on the table by the award and grabbed my phone to take a photo for Instagram. I captioned it: ‘Designer heels, a Bafta award, and pizza. Just my kind of Sunday night!’

After I pressed send, I returned my phone to the table and took another bite of my pizza. As I chewed, I noticed Harry staring at me from his end of the couch. One of his arms was resting on my legs, the other was holding his beer, and he was smiling.

“What?!” I asked, with a mouthful of food.

He smiled bigger. “You look adorable.”

“Shut up.”

He chuckled, before returning his beer to the table. He had a weird glow on his eyes, so I kept watching as he placed my legs behind him and scooched over to sit closer to me on the couch, reaching for something on his pocket.

“I got you something.”

“A congratulations-on-humiliating-yourself-on-TV-gift?!”

He laughed. “No. It’s actually… Well, let’s call it a late-Christmas gift.”

“It’s February.”

“Let’s call it a really late Christmas gift.”

“We said no Christmas gifts!” I reminded him, as I left my pizza on the box and grabbed some napkins to clean my hands. “With the wedding coming up, we’ll have to spend a lot of money!”

“Well, call me selfish, but this is for both of us.” He handed me a little, square velvet box.

“Is it another engagement ring?” I joked, making him smile as I opened it. “Harry-“

Inside, I saw a pair of the thinnest yellow gold wedding rings I had ever seen. I looked up.

“Ask me again.” He said.
“What?”

“You said you were going to buy them to propose to me.” He explained. “I never answered the first time, so I thought, you know… we should do it again. Now that you have the rings, I mean. Ask me again.”

“Harry,” I started, “I don’t want you to do this just for me…”

“I’m not.” He said. “I’m doing it because of what you said.”

“What did I say?”

“The story about your parents.” He smiled. “I don’t have one like that… with mine, I mean. I know we’ve said we won’t make our parents’ mistakes, but I think we should have an example, and mine don’t have exactly a story to look up to… so, if yours have even just one, we should hold on to it.”

“You mean the story of how they show the ring to each other when they’re fighting?”

“Yes.” He reached over and held the smallest of the wedding rings. “We’re going to do that, too. And so it won’t just be a piece of metal, and it won’t just be something for people to know we’re married… it’ll be our symbol. Of our story, of our choices… see?”

He raised the ring closer to my eyes, and I noticed something engraved inside: ‘together or not at all’, it read.

I smiled. “Are you really going to wear it? And I mean every day!”

“Yes.” He replied, shrugging. “Give me time, I’ll get used to it… Now, come on, Silva, ask me to marry you!”

I giggled and pulled my legs down from the couch, adjusting my big gown to knee down. I cleaned my throat and smiled, showing him the rings.

“Harry,” I started, solemn, “will you marry me?”

He smiled at me during a long pause. Then he took in a long, slow, excruciating breath before he spoke.

“Meh.” He said, shrugging, making me laugh.

“You bastard!” I joked, and he pulled me up back to the couch as I fake slapped him. “I’m pouring my heart out to you and all you can say is ‘meh’?!?”

“Pouring your heart out?!” He asked. “You didn’t even have a speech! I planned mine for months in advance!”

“Oh, whatever!” I joked.

“You know this still doesn’t mean you proposed first, right?” He asked, while I got the rings out of the box.

“Excuse me?!”

“Well, I answered it, but it’s been months! Mine is still the official one!”

“That’s bull!” I said, as I slid his wedding ring on the finger of his right hand.
“I’m sorry, it’s just how it goes.” He said, grabbing my ring and doing the same.

We sat straight on the couch, side-by-side, and stopped our bantering as we stared at our right hands. I rested my head on his shoulder, and smiled.

“You know what I just realized?” I asked.

“That we’ll probably still be arguing about this ten years from now?!”

I giggled. “That in just two weeks, a week after the Oscars are over, we’ll be announcing to the world that we are engaged.”

We smiled in silence, still staring at our hands. I felt his turn his head to kiss the top of my head.

“I can’t wait to spend the rest of my life with you.”

___

The schedule was this: after the Bafta Awards, the last one was the Oscars, a week later. I had that entire week home, in London, resting and enjoying the town, meeting up with Alessa, Beezus and Ophelia to talk wedding plans. Harry and I had two meetings with our staff – Edward, Monica, Thomas and Clara, the later three who had by then been offered the jobs and accepted them. We reached out to Brandon Stanton from Humans of New York and, without telling him why, invited him to England, for what would be our engagement portraits that same week, when we would also give him back his memory card and instruct him on when he could make the pictures from the MET public. Then, on Friday, I would fly to California to do my last fitting for the Academy Awards on Saturday and attend the ceremony on Sunday. I would be back to England on Monday, we would make final plans during that week – such as deciding on who would do out engagement interview and where it as well as the engagement photo call would take place. After a week had passed from the Oscars, there would be nothing left to do but announce our engagement.

The reality didn’t play out like we wanted.

We got through most of that week before the Oscars: I met with three of my five bridesmaids, Harry and I made decisions with the staff and everything was ready for our shoot with Brandon the following day – a Wednesday. On Tuesday night, however, after the meeting with the staff, Harry and I were having dinner when our phones both started ringing at the same time.

Harry was talking to Edward, and I was talking to Monica. They both told us they were coming back immediately because ‘something had happened’. That is not the kind of thing you like to hear right before bed.

They got there, bringing Thomas and Clara with them, flustered and anxious, and we quickly understood why.

“The Telegraph is running a story tomorrow claiming that the two of you are engaged.” Edward told us.

After a brief silence, when both Harry and I had to be reminded that there was no way they could know, we came into our own.

“Well, it’s just a rumor, right?!” I asked. “There’s always a rumor like that.”

“It’s not about the veracity of the rumor!” Edward said. “It’s about the timing!”
“We’re about two weeks away from the official announcement.” Monica told us. “If they run the story now, even if we lie to the public and deny it, they’ll know in two weeks that we did.”

“So?” I asked. “We’ll just lie.”

“We can’t lie to the public.” Harry told me.

“Why not?”

“It raises distrust to the monarchy.” Thomas explained, and I rolled my eyes.

“Well, we don’t have another choice!” I claimed.

“What if we told them they got engaged after the rumor?” Asked Monica.

“They’ll say it was a rushed decision, and it would raise even more questions.” Edward said. “Is she pregnant? Is she just marrying him because she just retired from acting and doesn’t know what to do next?!”

“We could spin it as she was waiting to be done with Hollywood, it could work.” Monica argued.

“Why don’t we just announce it now?” Clara asked.

They all looked at her.

“We can.” Edward allowed. “But then she can’t go to the Oscars.”

I looked at him. “My movie is nominated. You Will Come Back to Me! I have to go!”

“Why can’t she go after the engagement?” Asked Clara.

“Because then it’s Prince Harry’s fiancé attends Academy Awards.” Monica said. “Prince Harry’s fiancé promotes movie about military dictatorship! Or, you know, the American independence! It’s too political, too controversial…”

There was a long, painful silence.

“We need to give them an answer.” Edward said. “The Telegraph is waiting for comment, or else they’ll run the story in the morning…”

“What are our choices?!” I asked.

“Option one,” Monica said, “We do nothing and let the rumor play out, then announce the engagement as scheduled in two weeks. Pros: everything goes according to plan. Cons: The Telegraph will forever have bragging rights about leaking the engagement weeks before everyone else knew.”

“No.” Harry uttered, and I had to agree.

We hated the tabloids. Letting one of them have this sort of control over us felt too terrible to even consider.

“Option two,” said Thomas, “We announce it earlier and Jenifer stays here from the Oscars.”

There was another silence, as I knew what they were waiting for: for me to decide. I would be the one the most affected, and it had to be my choice.
“Option three,” said Harry, “we announce it earlier, and stop a tabloid from getting to claim they knew about it. Jenifer attends the Oscars as her last engagement as an actress. She wins some awards, as we all know she will, and makes us proud instead of ashamed.”

I looked at him. “But… but the movie. The torture scenes, the kissing scenes with Lin, and Caio… the political theme— you’ll- you’ll be linked to all of it!”

“So?” He asked. “It’s your last Oscars, you should go. And I don’t care about any of that, I am proud of you. I don’t care if they connect me to you, I want it. I’m marrying you, remember?”

I smiled. “Harry…” I sighed.

He raised his right hand, closed in a fist, and showed me the yellow gold ring on his finger, making me smile.

“Together or not at all.” He said.

I smiled again, and raised my own fist to bump his. “Together.” I chose.

We looked at our staff, wondering if we would have to convince them to let us do this our way.

“I’ll prepare the statement.” Thomas said, reaching for his notebook to start typing.

“I’ll start cleaning out your social media accounts.” Clara agreed, grabbing her own computer.

“Delete everything with cuss words, slang, or revealing pictures.” Monica reminded her. “And feuds! I’ll help you. You do Instagram and I’ll get started on Twitter.”

“I’ll call Her Majesty’s and you father’s advisors and let them know.” Edward said.

“Won’t the press find it weird the announcement and photo call are too distant from each other?” Thomas asked.

“We can claim we’re not doing it on the same day because we wanted to do a night announcement.” Edward said. “Because of the time zone difference to Brazil and America, both countries that Jenifer has strong connections to. It’ll be believable enough. And we’ll rush and do it tomorrow, they’ll just assume we called the press last minute to keep the secrecy.”

“We can still shoot the portraits tomorrow with Mr. Stanton and release them on the following day, after the photo call and interview.” Thomas said. “It won’t be as fast as you wanted, but it’ll still be on a timely enough way that it will seem premeditated.”

I looked at Harry, smiling. “Ready to be engaged to me, Mr. Prince?”

“One last chance to give up.” He said.

Though his voice was laid back and fun, I knew he meant it.

I stood up and ran to the kitchen, grabbing champagne flutes and a bottle, and kissed him as our staff worked.

It was almost one hour later that they felt comfortable doing it. My social media accounts weren’t completely clear, but they were good enough – at least enough to hold on until it was time to delete them, after the Oscars. After all, a royal couldn’t be sharing selfies online. We called the guys in from their apartment to share in the moment – Nathan, Clark, Eddy, Louis and Johnnie.
Monica, Thomas, and Clara looked at Edward, awaiting instructions.

“Okay,” he said, “we’re ready.”

Then, they looked at us. I exchanged a look with Harry, who had his hands ready on the bottle of champagne, ready to pop it open.

“Do it.” I smiled.

Edward and Monica both dramatically raised their fingers and clicked enter on their computers.

It was 10:32pm of a Tuesday of February in 2018 when Monica sent a press release to the British press, which was summarized on a tweet sent out to the Kensington Palace twitter account, which Edward had drafted. It read:

‘It is with great joy that the Prince of Wales announces the engagement of Prince Harry to Miss Jenifer Silva – www.princeofwales.gov.uk’

At the same time, Clara was ready to retweet it to my account and hit enter on a tweet I had drafted myself, which read:

‘Tell the world that we finally got it all right – I chose you.’ It followed a picture of my engagement ring, with Harry’s hand holding mine.

Harry popped open the bottle of champagne and we all cheered, laughing with nervousness and excitement.

“We’re engaged!” I shouted, jumping in the couch.

Harry hugged me just as I jumped to him, holding me up by my waist.

“I still can’t believe it.” He sighed, smiling. “I’m going to marry Jenifer Silva.”

Chapter End Notes

THE NEWS ARE OUT! HOW EXCITED ARE YOU???? I AM!
The Engagement of Mr. and Mrs. Smith

Chapter Summary

Jen and Harry announce their big news and the world has a lot of feelings about it.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When a couple gets engaged, you expect family and friends to make a big deal out of it. You even expect yourself to be a bit too caught up on wedding talk. But I had no word to describe what happened when Harry and I got engaged.

The world was taken by storm that February of 2018. Celebrities, personalities, every magazine and tabloid, newspapers, televised news… everyone only had one thing to talk about: the engagement of Prince Harry and Jenifer Silva.

On the center of the storm, were the two of us: we almost didn’t sleep on that first night after the engagement announcement. We celebrated with our staff and protection team, we made plans for the havoc that would start on the next morning, and then we turned on the television.

Even though it was late at night, every news channel (Fox News, BBC and CNN, and Brazilian ones as well) had multiple people on set talking about us, looking like they weren’t about to go home and sleep any time soon. They called themselves ‘royal specialists’ and were gushing about everything from my ‘humble beginnings’ as an immigrant in America (they wrongly claimed I had started as an illegal one, probably because it sounds more dramatic) to Harry’s ‘failed’ first engagement to Chelsy and our ‘rocky’ relationship.

One royal editor for the Daily Mail was interviewed, and said:

“We are all so happy at our offices over these news, none of us actually thought this would happen. You see, she’s an actress and has had quite an intriguing life and career and it simply doesn’t look like someone the royal family would be okay with entering their world. Yet here we are, and it’s an even bigger fairytale than Will and Kate’s, I dare say.”

“What a hypocrite!” I said, shaking my head. “Just last week this bitch ran a story claiming I was breaking up with you because you wouldn’t commit!”

Harry sighed. “Get used to it. Now they know this is officially happening, they’ll pretend they’ve always known it.”

We had somewhat expected this, but the more that we watched, the weirder it felt. These channels cut to scenes from every movie I had done, including Disney Channel. They seemed to show every paparazzi picture that had ever been snapped of us. They flashbacked to every moment of our relationship, and talked about us as if it had been written on the stars; as if this was the only possible outcome for our story. As if it hadn’t been so difficult to get here and, even worst, as if they had something to do with it. Like they were trying to take the credit for us having made it.

“I believe she’ll be a brilliant princess!” Said another ‘royal expert’ on the BBC morning news.
I scoffed as we watched it, as Harry had breakfast and I had my hair done for our engagement photo call. “Damn right I will.” Harry smiled.

“No one knows the exact timeline, but they’re believed to be dating for six years. The Queen has privately said before she wanted her grandchildren to date for five before getting married so their partners could understand what they’re taking on, not to repeat the Prince of Wales’ mistake, of course.” The man went on, and though Harry didn’t express a reaction to it, I was shaking my head with revolt. Did they have to bring his mother into it? “And not only the time they’ve been dating, but she, as a public person herself, I’m sure, is ready to deal with what’s coming.”

“Jerks.” I mumbled.

“We have to address that issue.” Edward mentioned. “The timeline thing. We have to make clear you didn’t start dating until months after Harry and Chelsy had broken up.”

Harry and I nodded, adding that to the list of things we needed to remember for the photo call and interview, and I opened my phone to check on things.

That morning, my parents woke up with a group of about fifty paparazzi on their house gates, the same with my brother and sister-in-law, who even had kept Arthur home from school from fear of driving through the press to take him. Thankfully, I had been able to call them before we released the announcement to let them know what to expect, and even called a private security company to send them some bodyguards while the storm didn’t calm down.

With the news out, my friends didn’t have to pretend not to know anymore. So Tay, Alli, Selena, Beezus and Ophelia all shared their excitement on social media. Tay wrote:

‘From sharing wine induced heartbreak tears in award show bathrooms to screaming about proposals on skype, here’s to @JJenSilva and Harry!’

Beezus wrote: ‘I haven’t always believed in fairytales, but I always believed Jen and Harry were meant to be! Congratulations!’

Alli had kept it simple, but hit my heart just the same: ‘@Jjensilva I love you. I love you. I love you. You deserve this and always has. I love you!’

Selena had twitted: ‘@JJenSilva I have always known you were a princess, this will just make it official. I love you! #RoyalWedding2k18 #PrincessJen’

Her hashtags caught on, especially because soon after Ophelia was twitting them, adding: ‘I met her when I was 13 and now we’re going to be each other’s bridesmaids! Here’s to a brilliant future ahead! #RoyalWedding2k18 #PrincessJen’

The hashtags were trending worldwide in no time, along with ‘Jen and Harry’, ‘Jenifer Silva’, ‘Prince Harry’ and ‘Princess Jenifer’. Every tweet on my timeline – not even just my mentions – were about the engagement. The words ‘wedding of the century’ were being thrown around a lot, making me more and more feel an increasing feeling of anxiety on my stomach.

My throat ached for a dose of vodka to calm my nerves, and so after my hair was done, I made my way to the kitchen and found a wine bottle – it was the most alcoholic beverage Harry allowed in since my ulcer burst, and even so it was just a couple of bottles in the house at a time.

He reached me just as I was looking for a bottle opener.

“Really?”
I looked at him. “I just want a sip, it’s no big deal.”

He sighed. “Jen... Hey, look at me.” He held my arms, and turned me to him. “I know it’s a lot. It’s okay to think this is a lot.”

“I’m fine, Harry.” I hated the to think he might believe I was having second thoughts.

“I know you are.” He said. “And I’m right here for when you’re not. But don’t drink, okay? Don’t open that door.”

“Harry...”

“If you make this the way you deal with this, there’s no way you’re ever going to stop, Jay. It will not get easier.”

We looked at each other, and I took a deep breath. He had a point. And I didn’t want to wake up vomiting blood again, so I took the bottle back to the cabinet, and he smiled at me.

Brandon arrived just a little after that. He had flown in from New York the previous night so we could take engagement portraits to be released with the announcement on the scheduled time in two weeks, but since we had moved it, we needed the pictures now to be released as soon as possible. Though we hadn’t seen him in forever, he was as friendly as we remembered, and hugged us excitedly when we greeted him.

“I was hoping we would see you again.” Harry confessed, greeting him.

“I always knew we would be doing this one day.” He said, when we gave him his memory card back.

He quickly posted the secret picture he had taken of us in 2013 on the MET, the one that showed our faces and proved we were the ones in the picture of our hands in front of Van Gogh’s self-portrait. We were laughing in it, and I couldn’t help but smile as Brandon typed away an explanation for his followers. It read:

‘Four and a half years ago I was photographing in the MET on a Sunday when I saw a young couple holding hands in front of this Van Gogh painting. I took a picture of their hands, and when I introduced myself and started to explain about the blog, they quickly seemed unsure of allowing me to tell anyone they were there. Though that’s a reaction I am used to as most people don’t enjoy the words ‘can I take your picture for the internet?’, I quickly realized there was more to them than I had initially seen. The girl took off her hoodie to allow me to recognize her as Jenifer Silva, and her boyfriend’s ginger hair quickly showed me he was Prince Harry. They had no security with them; they were merely enjoying a Sunday date on a museum like the most normal of couples I know. They even told me they had made a deal to leave their phones at home, because according to Prince Harry, ‘someone would be working nonstop if that wasn’t the case’. They wanted to continue to enjoy their privacy, so they asked me not to tell anyone I had seen them. Instead, we took a second picture, the one I post now, that they told me I could post someday ‘if they ever got engaged’. I handed them the memory card with the picture so they would have a guarantee I wouldn’t post it, and they have just returned it to me. I leave you with Prince Harry’s words, which do a good job of exemplifying how I feel today: ‘I was hoping we would see you again’.”

We posed for Brandon in front of the floor to ceiling windows in our bedroom. With the curtains wide opened, the background of our engagement photos was the treetops of Hide Park and the blue sky above. We side hugged, and smiled, both wearing white shirts and pants.
“This feels so weird.” Harry laughed.

“Why?” Asked Brandon.

“We usually run away from cameras.” He explained, making me smile. I hugged him tighter, remembering each time I had to put space between us so the media wouldn’t get a story out of us; grateful I now could hug him in front of whomever I wanted.

The photos we selected had Harry and me laughing as we had joked taking really tacky engagement pictures. Another one had been snapped just as he kissed my cheek strongly, making me giggle with my eyes closed. In the last one, we were hugging as I had my arms around his neck, with the left hand resting on his chest so my ring was visible. Brandon told us he could have the photos edited in a few hours, and we decided we would release them that night.

Our house was serving as the headquarters for the engagement mayhem. On the kitchen, our security guys were stocking every delivery that arrived, from flower bouquets of every shape, type and color to breakfast baskets. They came from friends, family, coworkers, directors I had worked with, designers I had posed for, everyone. These were just the congratulatory gifts from people who actually had our address.

After the engagement announcement, Kensington Palace had sent a bigger security team to take turns on our building, and they were all handling the deliveries as well – they let in the ones from people we actually knew, and the others were sent to Harry’s office in Kensington.

Edward, Monica, Thomas and Clara had set up their computers on our dining room table and were spending their time either typing away frenetically or answering phone calls. They had reporters calling in or emailing asking everything from details about the engagement to if we had picked a wedding cake bakery yet.

“That’s an exaggeration, right?” I asked, hopeful.

Monica smile. “No. A guy from Vogue just called wanting to know if you had a wedding dress designer picked out. When I said no, he wanted to know if it was going to be a British one.”

“Jesus.” I breathed. “I have to think about that.”

“They wanna know which church you’re getting married in, if it’s going to be a televised service, the date, if you’re getting married in England or Brazil…” she listed. “You have to decide which information you’re willing to tell them now.”

“We talked about this.” Harry told her, with a look of confirmation to me. “You can tell them the date, third of August, and that we’ll get married in England. Maybe we can hold off on the wedding party information until we release the portraits.”

“Yes!” Edward pitched in. “If we release that now they’ll ask about it on the photo call, better avoid that.”

“TMZ wants to know if it’ll be morning dress and if you’ll be inviting any actors.” Clara said.

“Jesus, they want a guest list and dress code?!” I rolled my eyes. “We’ve barely had time to pick a date!”

“It’s a state occasion.” Thomas said. “It’ll probably be a national holyday. It might be your day, but the whole world will be sharing in on it.”
Suddenly, a pragmatic and robotic voice caught my attention, and I realized Eddy and the others had the TV of the living room on. I climbed the steps to watch it with them. It was NBC, and they were running a story on – surprise! – us.

The reporter was talking live from right in front of our building.

“Is that downstairs?!” I asked, astonished.

“It’s a circus outside.” Louis said.

The reporter was saying: “On marrying a woman who is not a private citizen, who is used to the spotlight and the media pressure, Prince Harry is avoiding the mistakes made in the past by both his father and himself. We know his engagement to Chelsy Davy, now Chelsy Stuart, was doomed because of this very reason. She is rumored to not have wanted this very public life he leads. But Jenifer is not only used to it, but as an actress, she chose it herself. Though Jenifer is much younger than he is, I think she is very mature and prepared for what this role will bring.”

From a studio, a woman in a power suit cut in to ask a question. “Now, James, we know that as a royal, though they won’t be king and queen as William and Kate, Prince Harry and Jenifer will still have to do royal engagements such as representing the queen and working with charities, do you have any insight as to how she’ll be at that?!”

“Oh, yes,” said James, “we know she’s been working with charities from an early age, we know she started her own organization in Brazil. She has written essays about politics and human rights, so she’s not afraid to speak her mind and go to work. And she is of course, an UN ambassador, so I think she’ll be brilliant at it, despite her origins.”

“Her origins?!” Eddy mocked. “They make it sound like she’s white trash. The girl is literally the most followed person on Instagram.”

“They mean she’s a commoner.” Nathan explained.

Oh, yes. That was a big theme of the engagement coverage. I was a mere commoner. I was Brazilian. My father was an electrician. My mother was a teacher. Neither had a college degree. They made it sound like I was a poor Cinderella being rescued by the almighty prince.

Johnnie changed the channel to Sky News, but the topic here was the same. In a studio, a group of people were talking about us on a split screen as the other half showed pictures of Harry and me and scenes from my career – movies and award acceptance speeches. In big red letters at the bottom of the screen were the words: BREAKING NEWS.

“We know Kate has suffered over the years with the comparisons to the late Diana, Princess of Wales. Do you think Jen will too? Because they seem so different.” A newswoman was saying. “I mean, Diana was of royal blood, she was as British as they get, and in Jenifer we have a Latina girl who has made a living as an actress and model.”

“Oh, I don’t think they’re so different.” Argued some guy. “Diana wanted to be a dancer, it’s worth remembering. And Jenifer, I think, is much more than just an actress, you know. She’s an icon. She’s the most followed person on social media, an opinion maker, a style setter. She has two Oscars and a number of other awards. I think there’s lots of parallels we could trace here. Hm… The camera loved Diana, and Jenifer is just as beautiful. Diana loved fashion and had such a strong fashion sense, and so does Jenifer. She’s been in the best dressed lists of every award show she’s ever been to, I think, she’s even designed before.”
“And they’ve both had to deal with a tough deal of media harassment.” The first lady agreed.

“Oh, yes.” Said the guy. “And I think Jenifer will be much better at dealing with it, too.”

“I just don’t see her as a royal, you know?” The lady asked. “We’re talking about a girl who just months ago was exchanging insults with Justin Bieber over Twitter. Not exactly classy, is it?”

“Ugh.” I rolled my eyes, making my security team laugh and change the channel again.

Now we were at CNN, where a group of American reporters, that sounded Californian, were excitedly talking about… you guessed it, us.

“I am so excited about this, Mark! I just can’t even!” A blonde women was squealing making her colleagues laugh. “This is Jenifer Silva we’re talking about! The girl who dropped her Oscar, who called out her ex-boyfriends on her acceptance speeches, the girl who dresses better than anyone in Hollywood, and she’ll be a real life princess, it just feels too good to be true!”

“Trust the Americans to put a more optimistic spin on it.” I said, making my way out.

The British media had, of course, their reservations. I was Brazilian, young, an actress. I was outspoken and impulsive and not exactly royal material. But even they could admit at this point there was very little they could do about it.

The world’s media had less to complain about. In fact, they seemed to think those were my strong suits. They paraded every mic-dropping award speech, every flawless red carpet look, every sassy response to annoying paparazzi questions as the reason I would be such a good fit in the monarchy. They claimed because the British monarchy was so ‘boring’, it was good that someone was coming along to shake things up.

After lunch, Harry and I changed and made our way to Kensington Palace, with our staff tagging along. Our street had never been so crowded with paparazzi and it took us fifteen minutes to simply make an U turn around our building, which wasn’t so big. Scotland Yard had even come to try and keep the paparazzi and bystanders off the streets so they wouldn’t cause traffic, but it was useless. That was a day of chaos.

They were all in a good mood, at least. As they snapped their pictures of us in the car, they were all smiling and shouting congratulations. The cars we drove by were honking. People on the street were waving.

It was one of the weirdest experiences of my life.

“Remember to walk with your shoulders back and head high.” Edward was telling me from the backseat.

“Edward,” Harry interrupted, from the driver’s seat, “she’s modeled before, I think she knows how to walk.”

Edward ignored him. “And, by God, do not overshare! It’s not a red carpet! Which reminds me, don’t pose, just stand like a normal person. Also smile like one, instead of those weird grins celebrities give-“

“Are you gonna be like this until the wedding?” I asked, and he sighed. “I’m okay with it if you are, I just need to mentally prepare.”

The press had been called to the State Rooms of Kensington Palace, and had gathered and set their
equipment on a big room with lots of windows on one side for good lighting. Harry’s first engagement photo call had been in the same place as Will and Kate’s, a room with red walls and carpet in St. James Palace. To avoid having the pictures of him and Chelsy and him and me compared too much, we decided on a different setting.

This room had cream wallpaper with golden drawings and a white marble fireplace with gold corners, with a gray carpet. There was about sixty press members in there, amidst them photographers and reporters, positioned a few meters ahead to give us space. In the back, they had set up cameras linked to their channels, which would be streaming live all over the world.

We stared at the closed doors as the time approached to walk in, feeling jumpy and nervous, something that wasn’t helped by our staff’s over-willingness to help.

“Remember, we have confirmed the wedding date, country, and explained the wedding rings in your hands. Because they would think you are already married if they didn’t know…” Monica listed, “So other than that, don’t tell them anything you don’t want them to know. Make sure to explain very calmly the retirement and the engagement are two separate decisions!”

“No cuss words, no dark humor.” Edward told us, though he was staring at me. “Don’t speak too loud. If you feel your hand shaking, leave it at your side, or hold Harry’s arm. And don’t keep touching your hair, it makes you look nervous.”

“Leave.” Harry told him, in a calm and polite – though very demanding – tone.

I breathed deeply once Edward and Monica were gone, enjoying the sudden silence I knew would be broken soon. Harry reached out with his right hand and held my left one, intertwining our fingers together.

“Still time to back out.” He whispered.

I smiled, and looked at him. He had trimmed his beard; his ginger hair contrasted well against the navy blue suit he was wearing. Underneath, just a white button up shirt, no tie. He looked so handsome I could burst of excitement at the thought this man was going to be my husband.

“Deal.” I asked. He looked at me. I didn’t need to explain anymore – he remembered now the deal we had made, that he would always tell me what he was thinking, and I would always tell him if I was freaking out.

“I’m really hoping you won’t back out.” He confessed, making me smile. “Deal.” He asked.

I had my answer ready. “I’m nervous.” I admitted. “And also really fucking proud to let the world know we’re engaged.”

He smiled.

We heard a cough from behind us, and looked back.

“It’s time.” Edward said.

We exchanged another look; Harry raised his brows at me and I knew what he was asking. ‘Are you sure?’

I sighed, and raised my right hand in a fist to show him the wedding ring on my finger. He smiled looking at it and, in silence, let go of my hand to raised his own and fist bump me, our rings touching. Our promise still as strong as ever.
“Let’s do it.” He told them, and Monica and Edward walked forward and opened the double doors to us.

The moment the doors opened, the familiar sound of incessant clicking filled the room as the photographers started snapping their pictures. The cream and gold walls of the State Rooms were illuminated so brightly they now looked snow white – there was no spotlight on them, just the flashes. As most British people were, these reporters were polite enough to be extremely quiet as we walked in. The sound of cameras going off was the only one in the room. I knew if these were American photographers, they would be shouting questions already.

Harry came to a halt in front of the fireplace and turned to them and I stopped by his side, folding my arm over his in front of his chest, I let my ring show as the flashes bathed us more ruthlessly now. We smiled, the butterflies still going crazy in our stomachs.

I had done my fair share of staring into photographers’ cameras in the past, but this was different. This was my future I was staring into. I knew the drill: these images were being streamed live all over the world to every channel, in every language, where the news were interrupting whatever program was on with the breaking press conference of Prince Harry and Jenifer Silva about the Royal Wedding of the year.

People were googling everything I was wearing and probably trying to interpret all of it: from my yellow, short sleeved, knee-length Oscar de la Renta dress, to my nude Dorothy Perkins pumps and square yellow diamond earrings, matching the bracelet Harry had given me on my birthday and my engagement ring.

When the knot of anxiety in my stomach became too painful, I took a deep breath and looked at Harry. I don’t know what I was hoping to see, but it worked. I think I just needed to remember he was real. I was really engaged to him. I smiled automatically as I looked, watching the way the flashes illuminated his smiley face, loving that I was the reason he was so happy. Noticing me staring, he looked at me and smiled broader as I quickly widened my eyes to explain why I was looking at him. ‘I’m nervous’, my eyes were saying.

He held my hand with his other one, comforting, and we stared into the photographers again. It felt so weird to be in the same room as Harry and them after so many years of hiding our relationship. After hiding how we felt for each other, now we could stand here and be ourselves. They actually wanted us to. We actually wanted to. I started laughing nervously as this crossed my mind, and looked down to try and stay calm, but Harry was already chuckling with me.

“We’ll take questions.” Edward informed the press. The flashes started to dim down. “Please hold your flash photography, they will be posing a little more afterwards. Let’s start with Jody Wilson, BBC.”

A lady with a bob cut stood up from her chair and smiled at us. “Prince Harry, Jenifer, from all of us at BBC, congratulations!” We smiled at her. “I was wondering, Jenifer, can we know how Harry proposed? Was it romantic?”

Harry gave me a warning look, and we both knew what I was going to say. He couldn’t stop me though, because the question had been directed at me. So I smiled smugly, and looked at the reporter.

“Actually, I proposed to him.”

Harry let out an audible sigh and let his head fall as the press – and me – laughed. “I knew you were going to say that.”
“Well, it’s the truth.” I said, noticing as I spoke the flashes gradually started to go wild again, blinding me. “We got engaged last August. I had just finished my last day of work, and Harry had prepared a dinner to celebrate and I was just so happy that I asked him to marry me. Little did I know he was planning to propose on that very dinner.”

They laughed appreciatively, and Harry shook his head in disbelief. “I planned that for two years and she just blurts out a proposal and gets the credit. Unbelievable.” They laughed more. “Technically, I still proposed first, though, because after she asked I got the ring and asked her, and she answered mine but I didn’t answer hers, so mine’s the one that counts.”

I was ready to contest that information, but Edward – probably knowing that – immediately called another reporter, William Wagsby, from Sky News.

“Congratulations to you both,” he started, “wonderful news! Jenifer, as you know, you won’t just be a wife after you marry. I was wondering, you’ve been in the public eye for a long time, do you feel prepared for your role in the monarchy?”

I considered the question for a couple of seconds, and took in a deep breath. “I think the most daunting prospects of this new role do look easier because of the career I have had. I don’t have to worry so much about, for instance, you.” I gestured to all of them, who laughed. “I’ve done my fair share of interviews and I’ve dealt with the press for a really long time, so I know what to expect and what to do. Public speaking doesn’t scare me as much as it would most people… I think after you have to make a couple of Oscar acceptance speeches that fear goes out the window…” they laughed, and I smiled, nervously. “And I have done humanitarian work in the past, so I’m hoping that will help me in the future. And, you know, I understand there’s a lot that will be different and for that I am counting on learning fast and being as helpful as I can be.”

Edward looked at the room. “Sara, CNN.”

“Right here, Harry and Jenifer.” She called, so we knew where to look, though it was very hard to see anything ahead with all the flashes.

“We can’t actually see you, but we trust you’re there.” Harry joked.

“Harry, you’ve had quite a long relationship,” she started, “With your past experience and Jenifer’s career, I was wondering if that played a role in the timing of this engagement and what exactly about each other made you decide this was the person you wanted to marry?”

“Everything about Jenifer made me decide I wanted to marry her.” Harry said, in a heartbeat, making me smile broadly. I felt the change in the speed of the flashing again. “I’ve known this from very early on and truthfully it was a matter of waiting for the right time.”

“That’s his gentle way of saying I had commitment issues he needed to work around.” I explained, making them laugh. “Seriously, though, everything from going from friends to something more, to our first kiss, and being comfortable referring to us as an ‘us’ and calling him my boyfriend, saying ‘I love you’ for the first time, moving in together. Absolutely every step of this relationship took a very long time, and Harry was so patient through all of it I kept surprising myself every day that he still hadn’t left. Which is exactly what made me know I wanted to marry him, actually. His absolute patience through every rough bit of our life together, the distance, the tabloid rumors, the panic attacks… he stayed. And I loved that.”

“Tim, NBC.” Edward called.

“Jenifer, what relation did your retirement decision has to your engagement decision?”
I smiled. I had known the questions was coming.

“None.” I told him, honest. “No relation whatsoever. In fact I am confident if Harry and I weren’t getting married I would still be quitting my acting career. It’s a decision I made years ago, and I only knew I wanted to marry Harry last year. Having nothing to prove is a very freeing thing, and when that happened to me I realized what I truly wanted and started doing precisely that and that’s why we’re here today. I recommend it.” I smiled.

Edward looked into the crowd. “Jonathan, Telegraph.”

“Harry, can you tell us a bit about the ring? Also the wedding rings you are both wearing? Does that mean you’ll wear one after the wedding?”

“I will.” Harry smiled. “And, uh,” he looked at my hand, where the yellow diamond was shining under the flashes, “this is a commissioned Garrard ring, it was my mother’s favorite designer. It was my attempt at having a part of her being a part of this… I asked for a colorful rock, because Jen always… always looked very colorful to me. She has that kind of personality, she just… shines that way. And uh, I think she can explain the wedding rings better, probably.”

I had been watching him with a smile on my face, and shook my head slightly to answer. “Right. Well, I’m from Brazil and our tradition is to exchange the wedding rings upon the engagement and wear them on the right hand until the wedding, and then switch to the left one. There’s not much mystery there, it’s really just a nice way to make me feel at home.”

“Albert, Daily Mail, it’ll be the last one.” Edward called. “And photographers, please, I’ll ask again, hold your flashes for the questions, there’ll be another chance for photos.”

“Harry, Jen, congratulations.” The Daily Mail reporter started. “Can you tell us about the beginning of your relationship? You mentioned you were friends before anything else, so what made you start seeing each other differently? What made you fall in love with each other?”

“Well,” Harry started. Maybe because of the nature of the question, the flashes got even more unbearable now.

“I’m sorry, can-?” I stuttered, raising my hand to them, “can you not? With the- the flashes?! It’s just that… he,” I pointed at Edward, “literally just asked you. So…” they laughed at me, loudly. “Sorry, it’s just really hard to focus when you’re being blinded.” They laughed some more, and I blushed, smiling.

There was silence as Harry bit his lips, thinking about his answer. He pointed at me with his free hand, and looked at the reporter that had asked the last question. “This. This is what made me fall in love with her.”

The room erupted in delightful laughter, myself included as I blushed more furiously now.

The room erupted in delightful laughter, myself included as I blushed more furiously now.

“Jenifer is… unstoppable. She’s strong and outspoken, not in an impulsive way, in a smart and capable way. In the kind of way where she fearlessly makes herself heard, and that is just so absolutely astonishing, like a… a hurricane or some force of nature that you can’t help but watch. That’s what caught my eye, I think.” He paused. “Not at first, of course. At first her face did all the work.”

We laughed again.

“Uhm…” I thought about it. “His cooking, definitely.” They laughed. “He grabbed me by the stomach, especially because I can’t cook for,” I almost said shit, “the life of me!” I paused as Harry
and the photographers laughed. “In all seriousness, though, I think for me it’s how absolutely kind he is. Harry is generous and helpful and he is always willing to be there for everyone, for his family and friends and people he doesn’t even know that well. I’m sure you know this, as you have watched his work over the years. It reflects on it, on his work, how absolutely gentle he is with everyone. That is absolutely wonderful for me to watch.”

We smiled at each other as the flashes started again, stronger than before.

“Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.” Edward said. “Harry and Jenifer will pose a little more.” He pointed at a place a big closer to the photographers and we stepped up, so they could photograph us better.

We weren’t there for one minute, before Edward signaled we could go. We waved at the media slightly, saying our thank yous, and walked away back into Kensington.

I sat down on the first chair I found. “Well, that was… interesting.”

Harry smiled at me. “You okay?”

I smiled back. “I’m gonna be your wife, Mr. Prince.” I told him. “I’m perfect.”

Chapter End Notes

!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! I’M SO HAPPY ABOUT ALL OF THIS! TELL ME WHAT YOU THINK!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! DO YOU LIKE IT? LET ME KNOW
My mother and father were sat in the couch in their house, on the living room, the one I knew all too well – the one Harry had slept in once when he was there for New Year’s Eve. They were dressed up, my mother had makeup on, and they were talking to a Brazilian reporter.

“We are so happy they are getting married.” My mother said, smiley. “Harry is such a good boy, they have been so in love from day one.”

With amusement, I noticed she didn’t seem to be lying. I wondered if she remembered how dubious they were of our relationship at first. The interview cut to my father’s face, and he told the reporter: “We used to worry about her a lot, you know? Living so far from us. But that stopped the moment we met him. You could just see he cared for her and wanted to protect her. Jenny had always been a little too impulsive, so it’s good she has someone to hold her back.” He laughed.

The voice over took over as the image showed pictures of me holding my nephew on the previous Christmas, saying: “To no family meeting the in-laws it’s easy task, but to Mr. and Mrs. Ferreira, it carries a whole new set of issues.”

“No, we’ve never met them, no.” My mother smiled. “But we’re looking forward to it. If they raised a boy like Harry we know they must be wonderful people.”

“They make me sound like such a child.” Harry complained, sitting by my side, making me smile.

On the phone, my mother’s voice reached me. “So, Jenny, what do you think? Was it too much?”

“No, mom, that was fine.” I assured her. “That’s the only interview you gave, right?”

“Yes, just as you said. We only talked to them, and released a statement, but nothing else. I think your brother posted something online, though.”

“Yeah, I saw that.” I rolled my eyes. “It’s fine. I’ll call you later. Stay safe, okay?”

“You too, baby. We love you!”

It was still the Wednesday of our engagement press conference, which Harry and I had wrapped not even twenty minutes before. Just as the world saw us leave the State Rooms, a Brazilian channel exhibited an interview they had taped with my parents a few hours before, the only contact we thought they should have with the media, as we knew they wouldn’t leave them alone until they made a statement.

My brother had made a statement of his own by posting a picture of when we were kids to his twitter, which quickly went viral: it showed me at about age four after I had been burnt by a
jellyfish on the beach. Lucas was carrying me back to the sand from the water when my parents snapped the picture and I was crying so dramatically my face was actually hilarious. He had captioned it in Portuguese: ‘Congratulations to my little sister and Harry who will be getting married this year. Ps: I don’t care if she wears a tiara and has people curtsying to her soon, to me she’ll always be the annoying brat that ended my single-child reign.’

Harry and I had found it humorous – Edward pointed out that things like that were precisely why he wanted my family to also do royal training.

“Did your mother mention if the press left their house?” Harry asked, turning off the TV, which was now showing a clip of his life from when he was a kid to now.

“Some did.” I told him. “A bunch are still there.”

“It’ll get easier with time.”

I stood up, walking from the small lounge in the library room, where we were waiting, to the tables and chests by the wall, which were covered with flowers, baskets and cards. This is where they were keeping everything people had sent us to congratulate us. A lot of them had gone to our apartment, mostly from actually close friends and family, but also from people who simply knew our address after googling it. Everything else was coming here.

I picked a card from an arrangement of multicolored roses, which read in fancy handwriting: ‘Congratulations on your happy news, may your life together be filled with joy! Love, Elton.’

“Who’s Elton?” I asked Harry, who seemed thoughtful as he joined me.

He looked at the card over my shoulder. “Oh, I remember that writing, it’s Elton!”

I gave him a sarcastic look. “That doesn’t help much.”

He smiled. “Elton John?”

I turned to look at him. “Excuse me?”

He smiled broader at my shock and moved to grab another card. “He was a friend of my mother’s. Kept in touch all these years, we still speak sometimes.”

“Elton motherfucking John sent us a card for our engagement?!” I asked. “The Elton John?!”

He showed me the card he’d been reading. “Did you see this? It’s from your president.”

“The Brazilian president?!” I asked, my voice going an octave higher. I grabbed the card from his hand to see it had two paragraphs in Portuguese about love and national pride or whatever. “This is insane.”

“There’s one from the Obamas, too.” Clara told us, walking in and grabbing a card from a bouquet of daisies.

“As in ex-president Barack Obama?!” I asked.

“Yes, and his wife. And there’s one from President Clinton, too. And the French president, and the Swedish, Danish and Dutch royal families, and the Canadian Prime Minister.”

“Justin Trudeau?!” I squealed.
“Oh, look, Paul McCartney sent us a Belgian chocolate basket.” Harry said casually.

“Oh, my God.” I mumbled. “Oh, my God. I want to post this to Instagram so bad.”

Monica was walking in at this, with Edward following close behind. “What if you did?” She asked.

“Wouldn’t make much sense, she’s deleting her social media accounts after the Oscars.” Edward said.

“Well…” She took in a deep breath, exchanging a nervous look to her boyfriend, Thomas, who was sitting nearby. “I was thinking… what if she didn’t?”

“She has to.” Edward said.

“But what if she didn’t?”

“She has to.” Edward repeated, and I rolled my eyes.

“Explain what you mean, Mon.” I said.

“Well, the Duke of York, the Queen of Jordan, the crown princess of Norway, they all have personal twitter accounts to promote their work.” She shrugged. “Why couldn’t Jen have one? Not to post selfies or live tweet her favorite shows, but to promote her work. And Harry’s, too. And support her charities in an accessible way to the public.”

I nodded. “That sounds great… it’d be more personal, which is the reason so many people don’t like the Clarence House and Kensington Royal accounts.” I looked at Edward, almost daringly. “I would watch my language and not post any personal photos that didn’t serve a professional goal. It’d make us feel more accessible to the public, less uptight. And if the Duke of York can do it, why couldn’t I?”

He nodded. “I agree.”

I felt my own face twist in confusion. “Excuse me?”

“Well, don’t sound so surprised, Jenifer.” Edward replied. “When Harry hired me I was working in public relations in the private sector, I know all about the benefits of good media exposure.”

I looked at Harry, and back at him. “Then why don’t these dorks have twitter and Instagram accounts?” I asked, pointing at him.

“Because we don’t want to.” Harry said. “Will and I have always suffered with too much exposure to the public, and when Kate started dating him she learned quickly that it does more damage than good, so she never wanted one either.”

“You’re such an old man.” I complained. “This could be good. This could be awesome.”

He frowned. “I just wouldn’t be too comfortable with it.”

“Well, then good thing I’m not asking you to do one for yourself.” I smiled. “I’m talking about me and my account to promote my work.”

He smiled, shrugging, and sighed. “Alright… you do you.”

So I pulled out my phone and took a picture, trying to put as many of the flowers in the frame as I could, and posted it to Instagram with the caption: ‘So touched by the outpouring of
congratulations and support. Our happiness is multiplied by being able to share it with you. @KensingtonRoyal.”

An aide walked in at that moment. “They’re ready for you.”

I handed Monica my phone, and Harry and I led the way into the hallway.

“Okay…” he said, nervously, cracking his knuckles. “So, we need to establish we only started dating after I moved to New York so no one think you broke up my engagement. And also that your retirement has nothing to do with us. And also that we are aware and supportive of your past.”

“I’ll be fine, Harry.” I said.

“I know.” He assured. “I’m reminding myself.”

I looked at him, shaky and nervous, smoothing the fabric of his shirt over his chest. I smiled at his nerves.

“You’ll be fine, too. Calm down.”

He stopped walking and looked at me. “Should I be the one soothing you?”

Tom Bradbury was the same reporter who did William and Kate’s engagement interview, and he was his team were set up in one of the common staff rooms in Kensington Palace, waiting for us sitting on an armchair in front a two seats couch in front of an old painting of Queen Victoria.

“Hey, Tom. How you doing?” Harry smiled as he greeted him. I noticed how he so easily pretended he wasn’t nervous out of his mind.

“Very well, Your Royal Highness. Thank you for having us, and congratulations!”

“Thanks. This is Jenifer.”

I shook Tom’s hand when Harry gestured at me.

“Congratulations, Miss Silva.”

“Call me Jenifer.” I asked.

Two production assistants approached us, excusing themselves to add the microphones to our clothes.

“If you’ll just put your hair back,” mine told me, “so it doesn’t brush against it, or else it’ll damage the sound.”

“I know.” I assured her.

“And please be careful not to touch it.”

“Don’t worry,” I smiled, “I’ve done my fair share of interviews in the past.”

Our team gathered behind the cameras to watch us, where Tom’s producers also stood. He had notes with him, and after Harry and I sat side by side on the couch, he smiled at us.

“Well, I won’t even try to dance around this. Everyone watching will be too impatient!” We smiled. “Congratulations, of course, and… uh, well, Jenifer, you mentioned on your press
conference you got engaged last August. That’s a long time! How did you manage to keep it a secret for so long and uhm, well, after all, who proposed first?!”

Harry and I laughed slightly, and looked at each other trying to quietly decide who would answer.

“Well, I think by now we can say we’re pretty good at keeping secrets.” He said, grinning, and I was sure we were both thinking about the same thing: our fake relationship. “We, uhm… we didn’t really tell anyone, actually. Only very close friends and family.”

Tom smiled. “Did you ask Jenifer’s father for her hand?”

“Oh, yes.” Harry nodded. “In Portuguese, mind you.”

“Did you really?” the reporter asked, excitedly.

“I did.” He looked at me, as if for confirmation.

“My parents were very impressed.” I told Tom. “Portuguese is very difficult. Harry started having lessons a couple of years ago.”

“What did you say?”

“I had memorized exactly what I was going to say, because I knew I wouldn’t have much time to do it. We had dinner with them in December of 2016. And as soon as I was alone with them I looked at them and said,” he blushed, smiling, “I love your daughter and I want to know if I could have your blessing to marry her.”

“What did they say?”

“Well, I’ll promise you this, we wouldn’t be here if they said no.” Harry joked, making us laugh.

“And Jenifer, when did you found out about this?”

I smiled. “The morning after we got engaged… I was so surprised, but thinking back on it, it actually makes sense, because I remember coming back after this happened and my mother was so emotional!” They laughed. “I thought she was just sad because I had to leave back to America soon, but she was thinking about this.”

“And walk me through this proposal issue,” Tom started, “who did it first, after all?”

“There’s no issue, Tom.” Harry said. “Jen is just trying to be a control freak, as usual.”

“That’s not true!” I said, looking at him. “I proposed first. That’s a fact!”

“But I didn’t answer. And then I proposed and you answered, so technically that’s the one that counts.”

“In which world?!” I laughed. “Chronologically-“

“A proposal isn’t just the question, Jen-“

“I did it first, so mine is the one that counts-“

“It’s the-it’s the whole thing, the ring, the question and the answer-“

“That’s not a real rule-“
“Yes, it is. If you thought yours was the one valid, then why did you answer mine?”

“I was emotional!” I complained.

Harry looked at Tom. “As you can see the jury is still out on this. We’ll need time to argue more.”

“Well,” Tom leaned in, looking at the camera and pretending to talk to the audience that wouldn’t see the interview until later on the night news, “if you’re team Jen or Harry, vote on Twitter!” We laughed.

“Hashtag team Jen!” I asked.

“I refuse to say that.” Harry shook his head, laughing. “I’m too old for this.”

“You said you were planning your proposal for two years,” Tom went on, “can you elaborate on that? When, when exactly did that start?”

“I actually bought the ring three years ago, and uh, when she agreed to move in with me is when I truly started planning ways to do this. I knew I had to wait until she was ready, though, so I just kept this in the back of my mind for a long time until I knew the moment was right, which I decided was after she had filmed her last scene as an actress.”

“Did you think that was the right time, Jenifer? Were you planning your proposal, too?”

“No.” I smiled. “I had been thinking about it for a few months, we had discussed some possibilities, but I had so many commitment issues it was hard to talk about it without things getting too complicated, so I just started actually considering it a possibility after I announced I was leaving acting. When I got home that night, the night he, well, the night we proposed to each other-“ Harry rolled his eyes, and I tried to suppress a laugh, “I just… I just knew this is what I wanted to do with the rest of my life, and I,” I shrugged, “I asked him to marry me.”

“And when did this start?” Tom asked. “We know you started dating again in 2015, but when did it start the first time? How did this happen? You’re both very public people, so… did you know each other before? Did you have a crush on each other before?”

We laughed. “No, we met briefly in 2012 and kept in touch just barely, for professional reasons, but we didn’t really talk again until 2013.”

“Yes. I, uhm… I moved to New York in 2013.” Harry started. “All my friends from New York were out of town, so I called Jenifer and asked if she knew of vacant apartments, and that’s how we got in touch again.”

“Next thing I know this ginger dude is ringing my doorbell one morning.” I joked. “And we just started hanging out and became friends… we bonded over vodka and heartbreak.”

They laughed, but I could see Edward’s exasperated look from where he stood.

“Were you friends for long before you started seeing each other? Was that something you were afraid would be in the way of starting something?”

We grinned, trying to think of a gentle enough way to lie. “You could say that.” I said.

“I was thinking about- we all know, and I’m sorry to ask, but people are bound to wonder. As we all know, Harry, you were engaged before, before you moved to America. Now, how- what lessons did you take from that time of your life to, sort of, do better this time around?”
Harry took in a deep breath. “I’d be lying, really, if I said it didn’t very much guide the way I looked at Jenifer and understood the way she dealt with things. I guess I- at least I hope I was able to give her, you know, time to come up with decisions on her own and to make sure of what she wanted before we made any type of commitment. More than ever, I understood how truly important that was, the… the time and giving her space to know what she wanted.”

“Jenifer, I must ask this, in your autobiography, the one you released a while back, you describe some negative experiences in the past, specially romantic ones,” I smiled, encouragingly, recognizing in his eyes how uncomfortable he was with the question. That was my kind of reporter. “Including some problems with abuse, so I was wondering how did that affect you and how you went into this relationship, to make sure you didn’t make the same mistakes again?”

I felt a painful knot of anxiety in my stomach, and did my best to appear calm.

“The hardest part was… I think… accepting that this was possible.” I told him, who looked confused. “Not just marrying Harry, but finding anyone, any type of relationship that wouldn’t end badly. Anyone who’s been through something like this knows that you start to look for reasons this happened, and you start to blame yourself.”

“Is that what started the commitment issues that you talked about?”

“My therapist thought so.” Even as I said it, I could see Edward shoving his face on his hands in desperation behind the cameras. Right, so… Probably shouldn’t tell the world I was in therapy. “Luckily Harry was the kind of patient person who was willingly to allow me time to deal with what I had to, and that truly was what kept us going.”

“Was who he is and what comes with marrying him a big issue on deciding if this was something you wanted or not?”

“I wouldn’t call it an issue.” I started. “It was part of the decision, of course. I believe marriage is a serious commitment and I wanted to make sure of what I was getting myself into, sort of, before I told him I was headed in that direction. So I did think about it, and ask about it, I wanted to know what it would involve, what it would mean…”

“Was that why you broke up the first time? We know you were apart for a while in 2014.”

“No.” Harry said, looking at me. “That was sort of, uhm… sort of a distance problem, really. Because I had been living in New York for almost nine months, and then I’d have to come back home, and Jen was going to be traveling a lot for work, so we-”

“Yeah,” I agreed, “we literally sat down and looked on a calendar all the times we’d be able to see each other and it came down to maybe two weeks in a six-months period. So we decided it was better to just go on separately as friends.”

“And did you remain friends?”

“No.” I said, and we laughed. “We actually didn’t see each other until a year later.”

“How did that go?”

“We were in Brazil for the World Cup.” Harry smiled. “And we ended up in the same party in the British ambassador’s house, so we chatted for a bit.”

I also kissed him even though I was seeing someone, but no need to tell the world that.
“How long after that did you get back together?”

We exchanged a look. We couldn’t say before my date with Todd, because they knew I had kissed him. “A few months.” I said, vaguely. “We didn’t start dating officially until May of next year.”

“She was trying to keep it casual, but, hey,” he shrugged, smugly, “she couldn’t resist me.”

I rolled my eyes, and the room laughed.

“I imagine with meeting the family, this all got a little more real and scary. Not your typical meet-and-greet, right? Because, I assume, you must have been intimidated, but so must they. You are after all one of the most famous people on the planet. How was that? Were they overwhelmed to meet you too?”

I remembered the first time I met them, in Scotland, and the second time, when Harry’s dad and Will caught us making out against his door once. I smiled, almost too much, as I failed to suppress a giggle.

“I don’t think anyone cared much that I was an actress.” I said. “They were really just interested in meeting this random Brazilian girl Harry was dating… To me, it was definitely a little overwhelming, but I think we got through it okay.” I looked at Harry. “Right?”

“You could say that.” He grinned.

“They are all very nice and helping.” I said, deciding to talk about the present as not to lie too much. “We get along fine, they’ve all been very welcoming. So that’s really nice.”

“And the Queen? Did you meet her too? Again, not your usual grandmother-in-law.”

“No, definitely not.” I laughed. “She’s fantastic, of course. We met in a holiday in Scotland in 2013, and I saw her a couple of times since then. Prince Philip, too, who’s such a wonderful man. I really admire their work and it’s an honor to have met them, really.”

“Granny really loves Jen.” Harry said. “She’s expressed before her admiration for her work with the UN. And grandpa, I think, if he was single and a tad younger would be the one marrying her. So… there’s that.” We laughed.

“And when your family met Harry, was that overwhelming for them?”

At this, Harry and I really couldn’t help but chuckle.

“They loved him.” I lied. “They thought he was very nice.”

“They did not care one bit about who I was or who my family was.” Harry told him. “So that was scary, in a way, but at the same time very comforting, I think. They made me prove my worth by playing football with them, which is both the most British and also Brazilian thing ever.”

We laughed.

“You mentioned Harry grabbed you by the stomach,” Tom started, and Harry blushed, smiling awkwardly. “I’ve interviewed William in the past, he told me Harry didn’t cook. So, what is it? Does he? Doesn’t he? Does he do it well, or do you usually take over to stop him from burning the house down?” He joked, making us laugh.

“You can’t believe everything William says. William is a liar.” Harry said, playfully, looking
serious as we laughed.

“I promise you,” I started, “when I say I don’t cook, I mean it. I cannot cook for my life. Harry is almost weirdly good at it. He keeps me alive, really.”

“That’s very interesting, and not something people would expect. Can you tell us something else that people maybe don’t know about you? About the other, I mean?”

Harry and I looked at each other. “Harry…” I started, thinking. “Harry can play the piano.”

“Please!” Harry scoffed, laughing as Tom looked surprised.

“It’s true!” I said. “You can play really well!”

“Only if I practice a lot.”

“That’s already better than most people, I’d argue.” Tom said. “Has he serenaded you before?”

I smiled. “Sadly no.”

“Excuse me,” Harry complained, “what do you think that was in 2013? Fourth of July? Maryland?”

I thought about it, feeling my eyes widening when I remembered him playing Hey There Delilah at Taylor’s house. “Oh, that’s true!” I looked at Tom. “He learned how to play one of my favorite songs.”

“Can we know which song?” Tom asked.

“No.” Harry said, blushing. “That’s enough, thank you. Let me think of something people don’t know about Jenifer… hm… how can I embarrass you the most?”

I laughed.

“Jenifer,” he started, “Jenifer is a dork.”

“Everybody knows that.” I told him.

“No, they don’t know the extent of it.” He argued. “Jenifer loves Harry Potter.”

“Everyone loves Harry Potter.”

He looked at me, daringly. “Jenifer has a secret tumblr account she uses to fangirl about Harry Potter.”

My smile faded. “Okay, that’s- thank you. Let’s, let’s move on.”

Tom was smiling. “Do you really?”

“Listen,” I said, “everyone is a little obsessed with Harry Potter.”

“She sorts everyone she knows into Hogwarts houses.” Harry went on. “I have this theory she only likes me because I am both ginger and called Harry.” Tom laughed.

“Dude,” I said, exasperated, “you need to chill!”

“Do you have a thing for gingers, Jenifer?”
The room was laughing now, Harry included, and I could feel myself blushing.

“There’s only room for one ginger in my heart.” I said, hearing an ‘aw’ in response from the people watching us. “But Ronald Weasley is fictional, so I’ll settle for Harry.” I caressed his knee, gently, and they all laughed.

“You’re probably the only girl in the world who would say she’s settling for a prince.” Tom joked. “What Hogwarts house is Harry in?”

“Hufflepuff.” I answered, in a heartbeat.

Harry pointed at me and gave Tom a look of ‘see?!’

“Really?” Tom asked.

“He’s kind and passionate, and extremely polite and nice to everyone he meets.” I said. “I’m positive.”

“What house are you in?” Tom asked.

“Slytherin.” I replied. “We’re not all evil, don’t be prejudiced!” I said, as Tom had given me a shocked glance. He smiled.

“You look very calm. Very in love and at peace with all this, are you?”

“I think we underestimated how much of a big deal this would be.” I said.

“I didn’t.” Harry smiled. “But I, I… well, we’re nervous, sure, but when it comes to this, I don’t think we’re worried in anyway. We’re very sure this is what we want.”

He nodded, smiling.

“Jenifer, you’ve admitted in interviews before that you are a workaholic. Do you think that will translate into doing royal work? Do you feel prepared for that kind of job?”

“I don’t know how not to work too much.” I said. “So probably, I think. And I am certainly hoping I am prepared for this. I have been working with charity work since I was sixteen, I created an organization in Brazil a long time ago, and I’ve been working with the UN, so I’m hoping it’ll all come in handy with this new type of job here. I’m definitely looking forward and excited about it."

“Have you had time to plan much else about the wedding? Can we know about, you know… bridesmaids? Wedding dress designer? Church?”

We smiled, nervously. “We’ve just announced this yesterday, Tom, give us some breathing room.” Harry said.

“You’ve been engaged since August, though! It’s February!” He joked.

“We’ve been busy, it’s not that easy!” Harry smiled.

“I have to ask…” Tom took a deep breath. “Kids? Yes? No? How many?”

We smiled, blushing, and exchanged a knowing look, wondering if we should tell him about the five kids plan.

“We have so much to decide before it’s time to think about that, that I think we should focus on the
“Yeah,” Harry agreed, “we’re talking about all this, but Jenifer still the Oscars to go to on Sunday. She’s nominated to three awards, so that’s the priority for now.” He said, playfully but seriously.

“That’s true!” Tom smiled. “Are you going, Harry? Will we see you there?”

He smiled. “Oh, I- I don’t know. We’ll see.” He said, vaguely.

Tom checked his notes, and looked more serious as he looked up.

“This is the sort of life, you know… in the public sphere, in a way, which you can’t escape. That has been something that caught people by surprise in the past. So, does that… scare you? Is that something you feel you’re ready for? Especially with, you know, the criticism that comes with it… people are already comparing you so much to the Duchess of Cambridge and the late Princess of Wales, so, is that something you think about? Will you be looking up to them, in a way?”

I paused, considering the question as I breathed deeply. Harry looked impatient by my side, probably annoyed at the question and wanting to give him an answer, but holding himself back to give me a chance as he knew I’d be mad if he did.

“I think there’s a big problem in the way women are always put in boxes in our society.” I started. “And I understand the desire to understand and get to know us, in a way, but I think these comparisons only hurt us as a gender, because, you know… Harry’s mother was one of the most incredible women of her time, and I am so sad that I don’t get the honor to meet her. And Catherine is an amazing mother and an amazing patron to her charities, and I admire her so much. But at the end of the day, they are both very different women, and I am very different to both of them. And that is not to say that any of us is better or right, we’re are just… you know, human being. We’re different. We’re doing our best, and we’ll do some things alike, and we’ll do some things differently, and I think the important part is that we do good and we help, and as long as we’re doing right by what makes us and the people we love happy, I think that’s what matters.” I sighed.

Tom nodded, and checked his notes to give me some time to catch my breath.

He looked up. “This is a massive thing you’re going into… and, you know, when your brother and the Duchess of Cambridge got engaged no one really knew how it was going to go, but having that as a parameter, knowing how big things will get from here and how much it involves… are you… happy? Excited? In a pit of despair?” we laughed.

“All of the above.” I joked.

“Yes.” He agreed. “Hugely excited, really. Excited to… to spend the rest of our lives together.”

I looked at him, and we smiled, before looking back at Tom.

“Well,” he sighed. “Thank you so much for talking to us. As I said, you look very sure of yourselves and very in love, so we know you’ll be just fine. So… good luck.”

—

“Okay, so here are the cards you have to reply to.” Clara said, dropping a cardboard box almost her size in the floor of our kitchen. “You’ll be using Harry’s stationary as we get one done that’s both of yours.”

“Reply to them?” I asked, looking at the cards that I recognized as the ones form the flowers. “As
in them all?! Why? I posted a picture on Instagram, isn’t that enough?!”

“That was good for publicity, but is not the traditional etiquette.” Thomas said. “You have to answer at least most of the letters people will send. These are just the ones from public figures, Clara left the most important ones on top, like from politicians and royals. We’ll be certainly receiving many from civilians too on the upcoming months, so you’ll have to answer them too, but those can be just one answer to all.”

I sighed. “That’s… that’s gonna be exhausting.”

“The Instagram thing was smart, by the way.” Monica said. “I think it’s on the way to be your most liked picture ever, along with the one of your engagement ring. And just because you tagged the Kensington account, they gained more than a hundred thousand followers.”

“Because of her picture?!” Harry asked, astonished. “That was just hours ago!”

“Did no one tell you, Mr. Prince?” I grinned. “You’re marrying the most followed person on Instagram.”

“We need to address something.” Said Edward, putting down his phone and looking at us with a serious expression.

“Oh, that’s never followed by something good.” I mumbled, and Thomas, who was sitting closer to me, laughed.

“The Oscars.” Edward started, and I straightened up from the kitchen stool where I was sitting.

Harry pointed a finger at him. “She’s going.” He said, matter-of-factly. “We won’t hear about it, Edward. It’s her last time, she’s nominated for three awards, she’s earned this. A tabloid almost leaking our engagement making us announce sooner than we planned doesn’t mean you get to stop her. This is literally the last thing in her career—”

“Will you calm down?” Edward interrupted. “I didn’t say she shouldn’t go. I mean, granted, ideally, she wouldn’t. But it would only raise more questions. Which is my point.” He stared, but seeing the confusion in our faces, he sighed before going on. “I think now that we’ve announced your engagement, if Jenifer goes alone to the Oscars, it’ll raise too many questions. It’ll appear the royal family isn’t supportive of her career, even though she’s leaving it behind. It’ll appear they’re embarrassed of it. So… I think you should go with her.”

There was a long, silent pause.

I took that moment to realize how far we had come. Edward, the one I used to call Lame-Fucks. The one who basically told me I would be damaging to Harry’s image when we met. He was standing right there, in the kitchen of our apartment, telling us he thought Harry should be my date to the Oscars… because he was my fiancé. When did all of this happen? When did everything change?!

“Are we in an alternate universe?” I mumbled, playfully, but at the same time genuinely concerned.

“I think it’s a good idea.” Monica agreed. “God knows it’d be brilliant press. And it would certainly avoid a lot of negative press.”

“I don’t see the big deal.” Clara said. “He’s her fiancé, he could have been going even if they weren’t engaged.”
“It would be too much of a big deal.” Thomas said. “Harry is too private, and it’s a televised ceremony, they would be filming him the entire time.”

“Nothing he is not used to.” She argued.

Harry was biting his lips, staring at the black marble of our kitchen countertop. From time to time, he looked at me from the corner of his eyes, in such an obvious way it was hard not to laugh.

“We’ll think about it.” I said, noticing his discomfort with the subject. “And let you know later.”

“Yes, but remember if you decide to go we need to plan this well, do it fast.”

——

I had my head rested on his naked chest later that night, circling his skin with the tips of my fingers lazily, enjoying his smell and the sound of his heartbeat. I could feel his hand caressing my spine as he brushed my hair, and though it felt like the entire world was in silence, my mind was very loud.

“You don’t want to go.” I said. His hand stopped, so I explained. “To the Oscars. I saw the way you reacted when Edward suggested it. It’s okay, I get it. You’re too private and you’re right, the Oscars are a circus. They would make a big deal out of it. Probably mention you on the host’s monologue. And I’m nominated so I’ll be in first row, and they be filming me all the time, so they’ll be filming you too. And they’d expect me to mention you in a speech if I win anything, which I probably won’t, but still.”

“…What are you saying?”

I looked at him. “I’m saying it’s okay. You don’t have to be cautious of telling me you don’t wanna go. I get it. I’ve been going to these things alone all my life, I can handle it one last time.”

He sighed, looking at the ceiling.

“Deal.” He said, and I sighed. He looked at me when I didn’t speak for a while. “Come on, tell me what’s on your mind.”

I considered lying, but I knew this was too important. Our deal to always be honest about what we were thinking was too important to our relationship.

“Oh…” I started. “There’s a… a really small part of me that would like you to go.” I tried to make it sound casual. “But it’s not a big deal, really, you know? I mean, I just… I know that you would rather never have to be anywhere near the press again, so it’s okay. I get it, I promise.”

“It’s our last Oscars.” He said. “I just think if I go they’ll make it all about us. It’ll be like today, you know? It’ll be all about the engagement and not enough about your accomplishments. Your career. Your nominations. This is too important to you for you to have it reduced to your fiancé.”

I smiled. “I don’t care.”

“Jen, how don’t you care?”

“I just don’t.” I laid on my stomach, supporting myself up on my elbows on the bed. “I… I’ve had enough exposure. I’ve done what I wanted to do. I’ve won two Oscars already. My industry will remember me. The nominations are honor enough. But this… this is my last time there, and this is such a big part of what I’ve done with my life for the past fifteen years, Harry.” I sighed. “This
Oscars is my past, but you see, you are my future. And I kind of wish I could share my past with you before I say goodbye to it, so… if this is the last time, I wish you could go…” I smiled, sighing. “But I don’t want to make you uncomfortable, so it’s okay. You can say no.”

He raised his hand, delicately brushing my hair out of my face behind my ear. I saw a smile slowly crypt into his lips before he took an impulse forward to come closer and kiss me. I felt his warm breath strike my skin gently before his soft lips framed mine in a delicate kiss. It was slow, calm, as if tasting me was all that really mattered in that moment. It still felt amazing that after so long he could still so easily leave me breathless.

“I wanna go.” He whispered, breaking the kiss, still striking his nose against mine.

“What?” I asked, still a little light-headed.

“I wanna be your date to the Oscars.”

Chapter End Notes

JEN AND HARRY ARE GOING TO THE OSCARS TOGETHER! JEN AND HARRY GAVE AN INTERVIEW TOGETHER! HOW CUE ARE THEY

Thank you so much for reading! I love you! I’d love to know your thoughts!
The pandemonium didn’t diminish over the days. There was still always a piece about our engagement in every news. There were Buzzfeed posts about the best internet reactions to it. There were huge articles detailing the timeline of our relationship, from our first kiss in Morgan Bay, through our coming out in the polo match, all the way to moving in together and Harry following me to the hospital every day when I was hospitalized.

Over the days that followed our interview and press conference, Kensington Palace released our engagement portraits and announced our wedding party. That was when the world found out we would be married with the help of a bunch of Harry’s otherwise unknown childhood friends and two unknown friends of mine (Bee and Alli), plus Selena Gomez, Taylor Swift and Ophelia Callis. Which was interesting was that Sel, Tay, Oh and I were the four most followed people of Instagram. So there was that.

Another thing we released on the following days after the engagement announcement, was an interview we taped right after the one with the British interviewer, with a Brazilian one for a popular news and varieties type traditional show there, called Fantastico. The Brazilian interviewer was very kind and asked us basically the same questions as the British one, adding a bit more about what Harry thought of Brazil, and how much could he actually talk of Portuguese. The idea itself had been Monica’s, a good publicity move since I was from there.

As the world was loosing their minds trying to speculate who my wedding dress designer was going to be, what the girls would wear to be royal bridesmaids, and whatever other detail they could think of that Harry and me still didn’t even realize we would have to figure out, we pressed pause on the planning. We flew with our staff to Los Angeles for the Academy Awards, and tried to keep our nerves in check.

My Los Angeles house was swarmed by paparazzi, even the sky had two or three helicopters flying around by the hour. It was like we were magnets and they simply couldn’t stay away. Since they saw us arriving, they started speculating if Harry would go with me or not to the ceremony, and Monica, Edward and Thomas were getting so many calls from the press about it that they finally released a statement letting the world know that ‘Prince Harry will attend the Academy Awards ceremony on Sunday with his fiancé, Miss Jenifer Silva. He will not be posing for pictures or taking any press questions on the ceremony.’

Knowing he wouldn’t have to pose or give interviews eased Harry’s mind; not that he was too annoying about it, he was actually more excited than I had expected him to be. He was playfully excited about what he was going to wear, pestering me to find him a good suit from a good designer.
“I wanna be on the best dressed list.” He joked. “It can’t just be a suit either; it has to be a statement.” I laughed.

“You have the Hollywood jargon down.”

I talked to Rachel, my stylist, who happily agreed to find him a good Armani tux – after giving me a lecture for not telling her I was engaged.

“Do you have any idea how differently I would have dressed you this award season if I knew?!” She asked, dramatically.

“Sorry, Rach, but we had to keep it to a need-to-know amount of people.”

“I could have been putting you on so many ball gowns!”

I refused to let her change the dress we had previously picked for the Oscars just because she now knew about the engagement: a sleek, mermaid shaped, black Stephane Rolland sleeveless dress matched with a blazer-looking half-cape. The cape looked like a blazer, but with no sleeves, merely hanging down my shoulders to cover them until my hips – which Edward was happy about.

“It also covers your tattoo, which should be your fashion goal from now on.” He added.

“If you think I’ll be going out of my way to cover this tattoo, you have another thing coming.” I told him, remembering how the media was making such a big deal out of me on being on my way to become the first British royal who had tattoos.

“Do you wanna know your number?” Rachel asked, as she finished strapping the short cape to my shoulders.

“Why not?” I asked.

“What number?” Harry inquired.

“How much my outfit is worth.” I explained.

“Okay, well, you have the R$3600 Stephane dress, R$800 Guiseppe Zanotti sandals,” she typed away on her phone, “the necklace is worth R$425 000 and the-”

“What?!” Harry exasperated.

“And the earrings are R$600 000.” Rachel finished.

“Okay, what?!?”

“And I didn’t count the engagement ring,” she grinned, “which is, what? I’m guessing about R$650 000?”

“Hey!” he protested, making me smile.

“Love, they leaked the price of the ring yesterday.” I told him.

“You’re not supposed to know this.” He complained.

“Don’t worry, it’s an impressive number.” I winked.

“Bigger and more expensive than the one you gave your ex, which is what counts.” Rachel told
him, who was flustered at her blatancy.

“And you’re paying for all this yourself?” He asked, changing the subject.

“Hell, no. The designers and jewelers lend us the stuff for publicity and we return them later.” I explained.

“Are we sure we want her hair down?” Rachel asked her assistant, who was putting all their materials away. “I feel like we could do with a big up do.”

“I like it like this.” I said. “It’s elegant and simple.”

My hair was gelled down, with both front parts tucked behind my ears and pinned behind the rest of it in the back of my neck. It was straight and shining and falling smoothly down my back, as dark as the black of my dress, not to obfuscate the blazer lapels of my cape and the simple diamond necklace.

“If I get a vote, I also like it like this.” Harry smiled, and winked at me when smiled.

“Well, I guess it’s decided.” Rachel said. “Jenifer Silva’s last Oscars… It’s the end of an era.”

——

I still hadn’t grown used to being with Harry in public without having to fear that our relationship would suffer the consequences. So as the car parked in front of the theatre where they were holding the Oscars that night, I gave him a nervous look.

“You can still make up some illness and go back home.” I offered.

He smiled at me. “Are you kidding? I’m very invested in this. I have so money on who’s going to win Best Director.”

I made to get out of the car, but he quickly jumped out from his side. “Don’t get out, I’ll get your door!” He said, and I was left alone in the limo, smiling like an idiot.

The moment he opened my door, the sound of screams became deafening, and I couldn’t help but smile at the familiar feeling. From afar, I could see the police in front of metal barricades containing the screaming fans away. Closer, was the rails forming a large corridor for the red carpet, separating the press from the guests, which, almost in a maze, led to the theatre after the wall for photos, and a small lounge where the official red carpet hosts were interviewing people for E!. A few official photographers were nearby, taking photos of the people who as they arrived, and I could spot the usual amount of cameras, streaming the arrivals to E! and the online livestreams.

Harry held my hand and helped me out, and I wanted more than anything to stop and take that in, the fact I had him there, at the Oscars, with me. Handsome in a tux, unapologetically holding my hand in front of the world’s lenses. The same hand he had put a ring on, which he held with one I had put a ring on. It felt so surreal and incredible that I wanted to remember the moment, but I knew he was nervous. I knew he didn’t like the media attention. So I reminded myself he needed to be into the theatre and away from the press as soon as he could.

I let go of his hand to make sure my cape was in place, and that my hair was back, and smiled at him as Monica hurriedly guided us inside – this was her first time as my sole handler for PR in the Oscars, as Janine was no longer with me, and she was nervously anxious to get everything right.
“Jenifer! Look over here!” Shouted a reporter.

“Harry, Jenifer! Stop and look over here!” Tried a photographer.

I smiled and waved at the fans on the other side of the street, and walked with Harry and our staff through the sea of people into the red carpet area. Before we left the house, the TV was on the live red carpet event, so we knew one thing everyone was talking about and waiting to see: us. Every five minutes, after every interview, the hosts would always bring us up, saying that we should be ‘arriving at any minute’ and about how excited they and everyone else was to see us. So I knew I had to get Harry out of there before he was swarmed in with me.

The panel in front of which the actors and other nominees were photographed left some space in the back, forming a private corridor away from the photographers to the other side so unknown guests and staff could pass by it without ruining the celebrities’ pictures.

“I’ll see you inside.” I told Harry, signaling the way he should take. Then I looked at Clara. “Take him to our seats, make sure he doesn’t get lost.”

“You too.” Edward added, to Thom. “I’ll stay and make sure she sticks to the script.”

“She can hear you.” I told him. “I don’t need a babysitter, LF.”

“The jury is still out on that.” He mumbled, and I rolled my eyes dramatically, making Harry smile.

“I’ll be fine.” He smiled, looking entertained. “You go and look beautiful. Make them all wish they were me.”

“I will.” I winked, before taking Monica’s queue and walking in front of the panel to stand in the first section, posing for the closest photographers.

The red carpet posing station was comprised of three sections – far left, center, and far right – to make sure all of the photographers could have the chance to the same amount of pictures of the same angles of every celebrity.

I stood there, for what felt like the millionth time, with my shoulders back and my left hand on my hips – showcasing the ring – smiling happily instead of seductively, as instructed by Edward, trying not to be blinded by the flashes. After the engagement photo call, though, these flashes felt easy. It was still day light, so they weren’t as bad. The hard part was ignoring the shouting of:

“Jenifer, to your right, please?!”

“Jenifer, will Harry pose with you?!”

“Jenifer, over the shoulder!”

“Jenifer, over here!”

I kept breathing heavily, looking to all sides, ignoring them as best as I could, not letting my smile flicker, as I was so used to.

“Next section.” Clara told me, approaching to show me the next place, a couple of steps to my left, where I should stand next.

When I looked at her, I noticed that Harry and the others were still where I had left them. He caught my eye when I did, and we exchanged a smile. His, a peaceful, happy one. Mine, a little
confused. Why was he still there? Didn’t he understand they could easily photograph him? He should walk fast behind the panel and into the theatre!

“Jenifer, will you pose with Harry?!”

“Jenifer, over here!”

I sighed, and looked ahead, away from Harry, as Clara stepped back so she wouldn’t be seen in the pictures.

I wasn’t standing for half a minute when I heard the photographers get much louder and euphoric; their flashes speeding up at least twice as before. I didn’t see anything different about it, though, until Harry was at my side.

“What are you doing?!” I asked, in a whisper, trying not to move my lips too much so they couldn’t read them. He placed his hand in the small of my beck, over my cape-blazer in a side-hug, letting his body face the photographers.

He smiled at me. “Posing with my fiancé.”

I smiled, broadly. I wanted to tell he should go; that he didn’t need to do this; that I understood. But as I looked at him, he was so peaceful. He was so calm as he stood there, tall and proud, that I couldn’t even tell myself he would regret this. He seemed sure. He seemed okay.

I adjusted myself, getting an arm from inside the cape to rest it behind his back so we were posing properly. I couldn’t help but smile broadly as I stared into the cameras, now happier and calmer than before. It wasn’t just that he was overcoming a fear to pose with me; it wasn’t just that he was willing putting himself into my world instead of just waiting for me to be done with it so I could join him in his; it was, simply, that he was there. And when he was there, I was happy.

“You’re supposed to look ahead.” I said, playfully, noticing he was still looking at me with a stupid smile on his lips – ever since he had gotten there.

“Nah.” He mumbled. “This view is better.”

I closed my eyes, blushing, and looked at him. We stood there, looking at each other and smiling like two teenagers in love until Clara came to tell us to go to the next section, where we did the same. He finally looked ahead, after the photographers yelled enough, and I took this time to look at him.

The same feeling of warmth twisted inside of me at his handsome, bearded smile and blue eyes.

“What?” He asked, grinning, looking at me.

I shook my head, dismissively, but didn’t my eyes from him. “You look so handsome.” I said.

“I know.” He nodded smugly, making me laugh.

“Jen, you need to pose alone in this section.” Clara said, approaching again.

Harry kissed my temple quickly – something the photographers caught – and walked away. I posed for another minute, happier and more excited than before, then I took a deep breath and walked away from my last red carpet.

I held his hand this time as we continued to walk down to my first interview.
“Thank you.” I told him, who winked at me with a grin.

“Jenifer Silva!” two small voices reached. What caught my attention was that they sounded like children’s voices and had a British accent, so I looked to see Sofia Grace and Rosie, the young duo Ellen DeGeneres sent to red carpets since they were seven and five, respectively.

The little blonde and brunette girls, who were now just about to become teenagers, waved at me excitedly when I looked at them, and I simply couldn’t resist.

“Monica, I’m gonna go talk to them.” I said, quickly, and she nodded. “Harry, I’ll be right back.”

“We don’t have much time, the ceremony is gonna start and you have scheduled interviews with Ryan Seacrest and E!.“ She warned, but I was already walking away.

“Hi, girls!” I greeted, smiling, as I approached them, who were standing wearing tutus on top of small steps so they could be the height of the people they were trying to interview.

“Hello!”

“Hi, Jenifer Silva!” They greeted, in their adorable accents, smiley, and I hugged them both careful not to disarrange the tiaras in their head, which they were famous for.

“How are you guys? Are you enjoying the Oscars?”

“Yes, we love it!” Said Rosie.

“Are you nominated tonight?” Sophia Grace asked.

“I am, and I am so excited!” I told them. “It’s very flattering!”

“Is it true you’re going to marry Prince Harry?” Rosie asked, and I smiled. They were so cute it was hard to mind intrusive questions.

“It is. Look!” I showed them the ring in my finger, and they leaned in to look, letting out ‘wow’s that made me giggled.

“Are you excited to be a princess?” Sophia asked.

I felt myself blushing as I struggled to come up with an answer. “Well… I am excited to get married. And being a princess sort of goes with it, so I guess I am.”

“Is that Prince Harry there?” Rosie asked, pointing to where I had just walked from.

“Yep, that’s him.” She gestured with her little finger for me to lean down so she could whisper in my ear.

“Will you introduce us?” She asked, and I smiled, knowing as I saw her blushing cheeks I could never say no.

So I looked back at Harry, who was discreetly keeping an eye on me, and gave him a look. He eyed me questioningly, and I gestured for him to come closer with my head. He gave Edward a worrying glance, and then walked to us before he could stop him.

“Hi, guys.” He said as he joined us. I could see the reporters around us focusing their cameras on us, but tried to ignore them.
“These are Sofia and Rosie.” I told him. “They’re British.”

He smiled. “Oh, hello. What brings you guys to America?”

“We work for Ellen.” Sofia told him. “She says she’s related to you.”

I laughed, but Harry merely smiled. “Is she? Well, I do have a big family. I wouldn’t know.”

“I think she’s technically a long lost cousin of Kate’s.” I explained, remembering Ellen had made the discovery when someone mapped Kate’s genealogic tree when she got engaged to William.

“We’ve been practicing our curtsy.” Rosie told him. “Can we show you?”

“Of course!”

They bended their knees with a leg back as best they could.

“Nice!” Harry and I said, nodding appreciatively.

“Will you live in a palace?” Sofia asked next, and Harry and I exchanged an amused look.

“We will.” He told them, who exchanged excited smiles.

“When will you have babies?” Asked Rosie, and at that Harry and I giggled, blushing.

He looked at me. “They’re really good.”

“Aren’t they?” I asked. “They’re so cute we just can’t say no.”

“Yeah…” He nodded. “Uhm… I don’t know. Jen, when are we going to have babies?”

I gave him a sarcastic smile, hoping he would see that in my mind I was saying: ‘thanks for throwing me under the bus, buddy!’

“Well,” I started, “I don’t know! When do you guys think we should have babies?”

“Now!” Sofia jumped, excited, making us laugh.

“Right now?!” Harry asked, “Right here?!”

“Yes!”

“That could be difficult…” He said, looking around. “I don’t see any doctors here. It wouldn’t be very hygienic.”

“After you’re married!” Rosie replied.

“Oh, now that could be arranged.” He joked, and I was still laughing. “That’s a reasonable compromise…”

Someone behind the cameras handed them something, and Sofia hid it behind her.

“We got you something.” She smiled, secretly.

“Me?” I asked, smiling. “What is it?”

“Do you want to wear a tiara, too?” Rosie asked, shyly.
Smiling, I gave Harry a desperate look, and he laughed – probably, like me, knowing I couldn’t say no.

“…Sure?” I said, knowing as she handed me the plastic princess tiara that the internet would never recover from this. “Is this okay? Is it straight?” I asked, after I placed it atop of my head.

“Yeah.” They smiled.

“You look like a princess.” Rosie smiled, sweetly.

“She does, doesn’t she?” Harry asked, smiling mysteriously at me. “Don’t I get a tiara?” They giggled. “Here, you can try on mine.” I told him, taking off the plastic tiara and placing it in his ginger hair.

“Do I look like a princess?” He asked the girls, who nodded, laughing happily.

“We have a bowl of questions, do you wanna take one?” Sofia asked, handing us a transparent bowl with a number of folded paper inside.

“Sure.” I smiled, grabbing a piece of paper and reading it aloud. “If you could be a meme, what would you be?” it said.

I exchanged a look with Harry, who seemed to be almost hilariously seriously considering the question.

“Jenifer is that, uhm… looks into the camera like she’s in The Office.”

I laughed. “But why, though?”

“You’re too sarcastic for your own good.” He smiled.

“Okay, well…” I shrugged, blushing. “Harry is that one that says, beautiful cinnamon roll, too good for this world, too pure.” He laughed.

“Why?!"

“You’re a nice person.” I argued. “You’re a Hufflepuff. That should be obvious.” Edward approached us from the back, pointing at his watch discreetly.

“Sorry, we have to go.” I told them. “It was nice seeing you guys. Give me hugs!”

I hugged them quickly, and Harry did the same, and we waved them goodbye walking to my scheduled interview.

“For the love of God, take that off.” Edward begged, whispery, looking at the plastic tiara still in Harry’s head.

“Don’t be jealous, you can wear it, I’ll lend it to you.” Harry told him, handing Thomas the tiara for safekeeping as we walked.

I stopped to chat with Ryan Seacrest, who had a spacious area surrounded by his cameras – a privilege when all the other reporters had to fight for space along the red carpet. He greeted me excitedly, and didn’t even pretend to care about my nominations before going straight at the wedding topic, which I had to answer as best as I could. I would have been happy to demand to be
questioned about my work, but a sassy response when you’re about to become a royal is apparently frowned upon, so I had to smile and explain I didn’t yet know what my wedding dress would look like or if he would be invited (“We haven’t even made a guest list yet! Sorry! We just announced it this week, you’re gonna have to wait a bit to know more!”). I finally managed to include my nominations into an answer, and so he asked about it.

“I’m the most excited about Best Foreign Language Film.” I told him. “Though Best Adapted Screenplay is amazing, too, because I wrote the movie! I already have two Best Leading Actress Oscars, so I know it’s very unlikely I’ll win the Supporting Actress one I’m nominated for tonight. But receiving nominations for making a Brazilian movie, which speaks so much about my home country, it’s truly inspiring and flattering, and already a great end to the fifteen years I spent in this industry, so tonight any of the categories I’m nominated with You Will Come Back to Me will feel like winning Best Picture, you know?”

I wasn’t kidding, or exaggerating. Brazil had been nominated three times before for the Best Foreign Language category, and had lost all of them. If I could be the first to bring that one home – for a movie I wrote and directed myself – I didn’t think anything else would ever feel more satisfying. I almost didn’t care about my Supporting Actress nomination – I knew I didn’t have that one, but I didn’t mind not having it. I had two Leading Actress ones, those were enough. And Hamilton would do well enough without my help, but You Will Come Back To Me was a political piece about a military dictatorship coup when the government inflicted torture against its own people. It mattered too much for me, which is both why I was so invested in the two categories we were nominated for and why I didn’t think we would win – it would be too amazing.

The interview with E! was more of the same, and then I finally was able to rush to the theatre where the ceremony was about to start. Harry was standing before our seats in first row, Adam, Oscar and Orlando were with him, and the girls were standing right beside them talking amongst themselves. They smiled broadly when I approached – it was the first time I saw them since the announcement went public, but we barely had much time to talk before the lights blinked and we had to take our seats.

Seth Meyers took to the stage, handsome in a white tux, he smiled at the audience excitedly as he started his monologue. He made a few jokes mentioning the movies nominated and spent a good time talking about Hamilton before he set his sights on us – as in, literally us. We were in the middle of first row, he was standing in the stage right in front of Harry and I.

“There’s another reason this night is special.” He started. “We have the honor of receiving amidst us today real royalty.” The room erupted in applause, and I smiled at Harry, who was blushing slightly. “A person we have watched grow up and become a real inspiring force of humanitarian work and, of course, the true life of every party… That’s right, you know who I’m talking about… Jenifer Silva, everybody!”

I laughed, and everyone else joined me, as I was sure that just like me they all also thought he meant Harry.

“That’s right. That’s right…” Seth smiled as the applause died down. “Oh, Prince Harry, you’re here too! Welcome!” Harry laughed. “Of course they’re the reason everyone is suddenly very caught up in wedding talk. Everywhere we go it’s all we can talk about, wedding dresses, churches… Taylor Swift is a bridesmaid! Yeah… I mean, this is the engagement news of the century, because after they get married, Jenifer will be a princess.”

He was interrupted by applause and cheering as I felt my own heartbeat speed up. “Apparently having an entire life of luck isn’t enough.” He joked. “But what I don’t understand is that some
people were actually surprised by this... I mean, were talking about Jenifer Silva, everyone. Jenifer was already a TV start at twelve, she overcame bullying and prejudice and abuse to become one of the world’s youngest millionaires at sixteen years old. She started her own charity organization in Brazil, she started her own investment company, she’s the first Latin American actress to win a Leading Actress Oscar and the youngest person ever to have the EGOT and on top of that she’s a Human Rights ambassador for the United Nations.” There was more applause. “I mean, is it really that surprising that the next obvious step was for her to become official royalty? She’s been Hollywood royalty for years! The girl was born for this!” The room erupted in cheering again. “In all seriousness, Jenifer, you’ll always have a home here and the truth is, you were always a princess for us.”

I placed my hand above my heart in my chest, looking at him with gratitude in my eyes as the sound of applause made my cheeks burn.

“I mean that’s what gets everyone so excited about this, isn’t it? How can someone be born to so much luck and then on top of that get engaged to an attractive person that is going to change their lives forever?!” He asked, seriously. “We can’t help but be jealous and sort of wish that would happen to us. That’s, right, Prince Harry, we are very jealous of you.” He pointed at Harry from the stage, and we laughed again, because now it had seemed like he was talking about me. “You better look after her, buddy. Or everyone in this room is coming for you.” He was supported by another round of applause, as I felt touched and a little embarrassed. “We have an amazing show prepared tonight, so let’s get started. Ladies and gentleman, to give out our first category, Tom Hanks and Halle Berry!”

After the show had gone on, and we knew the cameras wouldn’t be panning on us anymore, Harry leaned in. “That was sweet.”

I smiled. “I was trying not to cry.” He laughed. “Are you okay?”

He sighed. “A bit overwhelmed, but fine.” He granted. “Is it hot in here?”

I giggled. “You’re just embarrassed. You’re red.”

“There’s a lot of people here.” He said.

“I know.” I said. “And apparently they’re all coming for you if you don’t look after me.” He laughed, and we joined the rest of the room in applause as the winners of the first award of the night, Best Production Design, took to the stage to make their speech.

It all went on smoothly. Seth would show up now and then to make jokes and call more people to the stage to introduce the next category – the more technical ones came first, paving the way to the ones everyone was the most excited about at the end – Best Actor and Actress, Director and Movie.

The first category we were nominated for was Best Adapted Screenplay, and it was being announced by Michael Keaton, who stood before the microphone and read the text from the teleprompter before the video with the nominees was screened.

‘You Will Come Back To Me, based on Slow Motion, by Renato Tapajós and You Will Come Back To Me, by Bernardo Kucinski. Adapted by Jenifer Silva.’ the melodic voice-over narrated, with a shot of the script lines I had written, followed by a scene of the movie. Dressed in clothes from the 70s, I sat on a bench in a São Paulo park besides Caio, and said, in Portuguese to English subtitles, staring at the passersby:
“They don’t even know. They walk around as if life is still the same. It’s like they don’t know there’s a war going on. They’ll never know we’ll spend the rest of our lives carrying the weight of our dead friends in our shoulders.”

Two more movies were shown after mine, and I took a deep breath while Michael opened the envelope as a cameraman stopped right in front to focus his lens on me.

Harry leaned in very slightly to whisper in my ear. “You want me to hold your shoe for you?”

I was so appalled that he was making a joke about my disastrous Bafta Awards fashion misfortune two seconds before someone read out if I had won a motherfucking Oscar or not that I closed my eyes and opened them after I turned my head fully to the side to look at him. I leaned back slightly so he could properly see my face, and he had the audacity to shrug while grinning.

“And the Oscar goes to…” Michael’s voice said, distant as I still tried to think of a response to give Harry. “Hamilton, Adapted from the musical book, by Lin-Manuel Miranda.”

I joined the rest of the theatre in giving Lin a standing ovation, and watched, proud, as he quickly hugged his wife and half-ran to the stage to take the award from Michael Keaton and approach the microphone, where he gave out his now traditional rhyming speech. We took our seats, and Lin thanked everyone from the cast, to the director, producers and studio until his parents, wife and son at the end, before ending dedicating his win to the all the other nominees who, much like Hamilton, made a living out of writing like they were running out of time.

I smiled, applauding again with the others as he made his way out of the stage, feeling touched and contemplated by his dedication, and honored for having been nominated in a category with such geniuses.

“You okay?” Harry asked, when Seth introduced the next presenters, for Best Screenplay.

“Yeah.” I smiled, sincere.

“Would you tell me if you weren’t?”

I gave him a look. “Probably not… at least not now that we’re being watched.”

He nodded, and fidgeted in his tux’s jacket until he found my phone, which he was keeping since I didn’t have a handbag that night. I watched as he typed a text message to no one in particular before he gave me the phone. The text read:

‘You should have won.’

‘It was a foreign movie against the materialization of American patriotism – I never stood a chance.’ I typed back, smiling at his loving concern. ‘I’m fine.’

I meant it – being picked by the culture secretary of Brazil to be up for an Oscar nomination, and then being nominated not only for the Best Foreign Film award, but for Best Adapted Screenplay, too, was extraordinary and overwhelmingly flattering, especially considering I had written the script. The nomination was enough to last me a lifetime of joy, but the award I truly cared about was the one presented a good half an hour later.

Kevin Spacey took to the stage and smiled as he, too, read his teleprompter little monologue before introducing the nominees for Best Foreign Film. I felt a jolt of anxiety in the pit of my stomach as his prerecorded voice read out the names of 2018’s nominees, always followed by a clip of the movie.
A cameraman approached, with an assistant holding the heavy cables behind him, and set foot right in front for my close up. I took a deep breath as I heard the words ‘You Will Come Back to Me, directed by Jenifer Silva and Camilo Cabello’.

The clip showed a protest scene, led by college students. The military police was attacking them in order to punish those who went against the military regime. My character was desperately running amidst the protesters, trying to avoid the police as she looked for her boyfriend. You could see the despair and fear in my face, mixed with sweat and blood from when she had fallen just seconds before. Finally, she found him, who held her up by the waist as they kissed, both forgetting for a couple of seconds the war going on around them.

I smiled at the sound of applause once the clip was over, avoiding Harry eyes as he looked at me from where he sat at my right.

“And the Oscar goes to…” Kevin read, as I remembered that Brazil had never won this category before. As I remembered the hundreds of people who had been tortured, killed, exiled for fighting for democracy. As I remembered the torture scenes that had been so difficult to film and that had been real to those people, whom the country now tried to forget. “You Will Come Back to Me, directed by-“

But I didn’t even hear my name or Camilo’s, because the loud applause was all that mattered. Because Harry’s excited ‘YES!’ was putting a smile on my face as he stood up. Shaking, I got on my feet just in time when his arms rapidly wrapped around me in a tight hug. He didn’t say anything, and I didn’t either, but we were both smiling when he let me go so I could make my way to the stage.

My co-director Camillo and our producers Renato and Bernardo, whose works had been my inspiration for the script, joined me from their seats rows behind (foreign movie nominees sat in the back, I was in front row because of my Supporting Actress nomination).

Camillo was carrying a Brazilian flag leading the way up the stairs – when I saw the green, yellow and blue of my country, I felt my throat hurt as it became harder to suppress the tears. I was holding Renato’s hand as we walked on stage, as I heard the voice over say:

‘This is director Jenifer Silva’s debut on Brazil’s fifth nomination on this category, and the first win.’

My debut. The first and only movie I would ever direct. And now I had Kevin Spacey handing me and Camillo an Oscar each for it.

“Isso aqui é a prova de que o povo brasileiro vai sempre lutar pela democracia! Isso aqui é orgulho de ser Brasileiro! Brasil!” Camillo said, euphoric, before stepping away and gesturing for me to take the microphone as he excitedly hugged the other two.

“Thank you so much to the Academy for honoring a movie about one of the darkest parts of my country’s history.” I started, with a shaky voice. “Camillo just said that this is our pride for our people who fight for justice and democracy, and I make mine his words. In 1964, aided and supported by the United States, military leaders in Brazil decided our country would no longer be a democracy. They claimed to be acting against the ‘communist threat’, even though there were no signs of it being an actual threat to our way of life. We had five military presidents between 1964 and 1985 and through that time, they caused many damages to our economy, education, culture and environment, but most horribly, they were the perpetrators of horrific violations of human rights, such as exile, people disappearing, political imprisonments, torture and death.” I paused, gathering my strength.
“I have never had to live in a Brazil where I had to fear speaking my mind,” I went on, hearing my
own magnified voice break in emotion, “and if there are kids today who don’t even understand the
magnitude of that horrific period in our history, it is thanks to people like Renato.“ I turned back,
pointing at him. “He was one of the many who fought for democracy and still today suffers the
brain washing the military left behind as a way of trying to dismiss the guerrilha fight. What I
endured for this movie was fictional and acting, but there are so many people who had to endure it
in real life. And there are so many families who still don’t even know what happened to their loved
ones…” I paused, breathing heavily. “I wanna thank the people who, like Bernardo and Renato,
throughout their adversities and demons, still have so much love for their art that they write about
it so we never risk forgetting what happened. And so we never risk making the same mistakes
again… I wanna thank the Academy for honoring this history tonight, for helping us keep this
memory alive. And I wanna dedicate this award to those people, who have to live with their ghosts
because of the freedom they gave us.”

My voice broke as I started to cry, and I paused again, incredibly overwhelmed at the sight of Lin,
sitting in the first row, who stood up to applaud again. Harry quickly joined him, as did the whole
Hamilton cast and soon enough most of the theatre was standing up, and I was biting my lips to try
to control myself to finish my speech. I knew Lin - and most of the Hamilton team - came from
immigrant families, and seeing that sentiment so well mirrored in them made my heart ache with
love.

I could see my time running out on the teleprompter clock, but I had one more thing to say.
Something Edward had spent a good amount of time telling me I shouldn’t. Something Harry had
whispery told me I should. I looked at him, standing in first row, staring up at me with such love
and pride I knew what I had to do.

“In 1979,” I started, shakily, but with renewed courage, “In 1979 the military dictators passed an
amnesty law, under the excuse of allowing exiled activists to come home and not punish the other
activists who committed smaller crimes to maintain the fight for democracy. What it meant then
and still means today is that human rights violators are still being shielded from prosecution. Some
of them have died, but Brazil’s Truth Commission has uncovered that about one hundred of
torturers and perpetrators from those dark days are still alive. The United Nations has
recommended, and we defend today, that the amnesty law be lifted so victims can have justice. Not
for-“ I paused, as the thunderous applause muffled my voice. I spoke louder. “Not for vengeance,
not for payback, but so that no Brazilian has ever again to fear being inflicted pain by its own
government, but the very people that should protect them. So we never forget, so we never go
back.” I raised my Oscar high in the air and spoke my final words in Portuguese: “Torture never
again. This is for Brazil. Thank you!”

I hugged my team, I took photos with my – third – Oscar, and hanged around backstage until they
ushered me into the pressroom.

“Jenifer,” the first reporter started, “Congratulations. What does it mean to you to win one last
Oscar at the end of your career for a Brazilian movie? The first time your country has won.”

"God, it means… it means everything, truly. It does! It means shining a light on an issue that we
don’t get to talk about a lot in Brazil, and it means trying to give back to the people who fought for
us and endured torture for us. It means everything.”

“Jenifer, over here?” I looked over, at the next reporter. “Will you still attend the future
ceremonies after you’re married?”
“Dude, we haven’t finished this one! Give me a break here.” They laughed.

“Jenifer, Cathy Wyatt with Vogue, any particular reason you chose that dress today?”

I looked at my dress. “Not really. I just thought it was cute.” I shrugged.

“Will your wedding dress look similar?”

“Nice try.” I smiled, making her giggle. “I don’t know yet.” I lied, as if I couldn’t already see my wedding dress in my head.

“Jenifer, you might have just made your last Academy speech ever, is there anything you wish you would have said instead?”

I felt my own smile fade as I realized he was right. Shit. “I… I hadn’t realized that was my last speech. Oh God.” I said, my voice void of emotion, my eyes lost about the room distractedly. “Oh, God, I forgot to thank my parents…” They laughed. “And my management! Oh, God…” I covered my face with my hands.

This was the first thing I told Harry when he greeted me with a huge smile when I made my way back to my seat during the break.

“Congratulat-!”

“I forgot to thank everybody!” I complained, interrupting. “My parents! Richard, Janine and Monica!”

“Well, you were saying important things, though.” He argued while I sat down.

“I forgot to thank you!” I said, miserably. “The first time I actually could, and I forgot.”

“Good thing you did…” He joked, smiling. “I mean, it would be a little embarrassing.”

I smiled at him. “Really? Said the guy who once talked about me in his Invictus speech?”

He rolled his eyes. “You got pay back at the Baftas, that doesn’t count anymore.”

“Holla, chica!” Sofia Vergara said as she walked by us, stopping to say hello. I stood up and greeted her back with a tight hug, in Spanish. “Congratulaciones por lo premio!” She smiled, congratulating me for my win, and then gave Harry a look. “Presenta a su guapo novio!” She said, in a teasing voice.

I laughed, and turned to him. “Sofia, this is Harry. Harry, this is Sofia.”

“Holla, come estas?” He asked her.

“El habla español! Muy bien, gracias!” She smiled, shaking his hand before giving me an affectionate side-hug. “You take good care of this one, okay?” She asked in her heavy accent. “A Latina hottie like this, you better!”

“Yes, ma-am.” He smiled.

The next people who stopped by to talk to us was George and Amal Clooney, whom we hadn’t seen since having met them for dinner a few months before.
“It’s like we don’t even live in the same city!” Amal complained while George congratulated Harry on the engagement. “We barely see you.”

“Well, I’m unemployed, so it’s not my fault.” I joked, as she covered her face with her hands.

“That’s true, I’m working too much. But we should do something!”

“Absolutely.” I smiled.

Soon the break was over and we took our seats to watch as the next few categories unfolded. There were many, but I barely minded. I had a shining Oscar in my lap and Harry by my side, whose hand I held gently. I liked to look at him from time to time, making sure he was enjoying himself.

At one point, Seth Meyers came back from break standing in one of the rows in the middle of the audience.

“So, guys, since so many of her friends are here, Jenifer asked if I would mind passing around this,” he was holding a clipboard with some paper in it, “this is their registry for the wedding, so you guys can pick whatever you want.” Harry and I laughed loudly with the others. “So I’m gonna pass this around and you can just write your name beside what you wanna give them, alright? Like, for instance, we have here… uhm… oh, this is mine, monogrammed crystal glasses. Hey, Jen, I got this, okay? I’ll write my name here!” He said, looking at where we were sitting. I covered my eyes with my hands. “Here you go, here you go, Meryl, you wanna start? What do you wanna give them?”

“Oh, my God.” I said, blushing, watching as Seth thrust the clipboard in Meryl Streep’s hands and she began to flicker through the pages.

“Tupperware, Meryl? You can do better than that…” Seth joked, making us laugh again. “No, here, here, how about this, award shelves? For her awards, makes sense. She has many… Or here, a tiara holder. Will be useful. Or how about a,” he leaned in to read in the paper, “guide to palace décor? That works, I guess.”

I laughed. “Oh, my God!”

“This is good,” Seth went on, “Hogwarts houses themed couch cushions, Slytherin and Hufflepuff only, please.” We laughed harder, and I could see Harry blushing as much as I was. “You know what? You got this. Just pass it around and I’ll pick it up later. Open your wallets, Hollywood!” He stood up, and looked at the camera now. “Please welcome to the stage, Mr. Matt Damon!”

We applauded as Matt walked on stage, still trying to stop smiling.

“You know…” Harry started. “Slytherin and Hufflepuff couch cushions? That’s not a bad idea, actually.”

I giggled again, and grabbed my phone from his pocket. “Good joke. I’m gonna steal it.”

“Don’t steal my joke, Silva.”

“Oh, okay, fine, I’ll give you credit then.”

I twitted: “‘Slytherin and Hufflepuff couch cushions are not a bad idea, actually’, my fiancé, ladies and gentleman.”

The show moved along; the Hamilton cast performed a song from the show, the third number, My
Shot, for which they were nominated – and won – Best Original Song. They also won every single one of its categories, and Leslie Odom Jr. was just walking off from winning Best Supporting Actor when Matthew McConaughey walked onstage to present my final category.

“Ladies and gentleman, these are the nominees for Best Supporting Actress.”

I heard my name again, ‘Jenifer Silva, for Hamilton’, and realized it was the last time. My clip was from my hardest solo, Burn, a sad song about the day Eliza finds out her husband cheated on her.

“You forfeit all rights to my heart! You forfeit your place in our bed! You’ll sleep in your office instead! With only the memories of when you were mine!” I sang, hanging on to the last note until I fell on my knees crying. They cut the clip, and gave me a close up again, as I smiled bashfully.

“And the Oscar goes to…” Matthew read as he struggled against the envelope. “Jenifer Silva, Hamilton.”

As the orchestra played an instrumental version of Burn, I felt more than saw the people around me – the cast of Hamilton - stand up. If you were watching from home, you saw my mouth half opened as I stood up, holding my first Oscar of the night, to hug my fiancé, who had his eyes squinting because his smile was so big.

“I’m so proud of you.” He said, in my ear, and I tightened the hug closing my eyes, trying to tell myself that was real. That was happening.

I hugged Lin and his wife on my way to the stage, and as I walked up, I heard the voice-over say:

‘Four time Oscar winner Jenifer Silva is the first Latin American woman to win an acting Academy Award and the first to win two years in a row since Katherine Hepburn in 1968. She won the leading actress category last year for the movie Heathers.’

I hugged Matthew as he handed me my Oscar, which I held with my only free hand, as the other still held the Best Foreign Language one. When I approached the microphone, with my heart on my throat, I realized the entire theatre was standing up as they enthusiastically applauded… me.

I held my two Oscars in my hands, trying to breathe deeply so I could make a speech that they would understand, but as they realized the tears in my eyes, they started to applaud harder. And I realized if they didn’t stop I would never stop crying.

“Sit down, all of you, you’re too old for this!” I joked on the microphone, dismissively, making them laugh as they sat down. “Oh, God. Uhm…”

I smiled, looking at the thousands of faces in front of me, wearing their best black tie outfits. The best and the brightest of an industry to which I had dedicated my life. How do I say goodbye?

“I’m very happy I get a second speech because I completely forgot to thank my family in the first one.” I started, smiling at encouraging smiles looking back at me. “So I wanna take this moment to acknowledge my parents, my brother and my sister-in-law, and my nephew Arthur, for their love and continuous support. Through the most difficult times in my life making you happy and proud was my only goal, and I hope I succeeded. I wanna thank Richard and Janine Artchet, and their entire family, who more than my manager and publicist, have been my family. Thank you for taking me in and making me stronger along the way. I owe you much more than ten percent of everything I have.” The room laughed at my manager-salary joke. “I owe you who I am. I wanna thank Monica, for being a friend, for being a conversation, for being silence, for being there…” I paused, breathing deeply. “That being said, I wanna thank Lin and Lacamoire, and everyone from
the Hamilton team, for inserting Eliza in this story when it would be so easy to do as people always do and focus on the story of the men around her.”

The room erupted in applause again, being started, I noticed, by the women. I smiled noticing Harry having so eagerly joined them.

“I wanna thank the Academy for honoring Hamilton. It has never been easy, but particularly over the last few years it has been especially harder to be an immigrant in this country, and honoring a movie that tells the story of America by the lives of immigrants means more to our community that I will be able to ever say. Thank you!”

They applauded some more, Lin waving his Puerto Rico flag as he did. I waited for the silence to take over again, still trying to steady my breath. Trying to decide how to say goodbye.

“I have dedicated fifteen years of my life to this job.” I started. “And I’m sure any of you will understand when I say that it hasn’t always been easy. And I hope you know I have no agenda to further when I say this, because I’m quitting… but to every writer and director in this room, please take Hamilton into your heart and realize that if you write stories about people of color, if you write stories about women… people will watch them.” There was applause again. “People will watch because our society is not made up of white, straight men, so make stories for everyone else, too.” I said, over the sound of their cheering.

I took another breath, trying to stay calm. Trying to speak clearly. Trying not to cry – more than I already was. In my head, all I could hear was One Last Time – the song from Hamilton when Washington says goodbye to the presidency. I smiled.

“Allow me to quote from our show, or, technically, from Mr. George Washington when I say that…” I sighed, “in reviewing the incidents of my administration, I am unconscious of intentional error, I am nevertheless too sensible of my defects not to think it probable that I may have committed many errors. I shall also carry with me the hope that my… peers will view them with indulgence.” I smiled, as my voice broke as I realized I could not stop myself from crying. They applauded again, and stood up, and I realized they were just making it harder. “And that… and that, after fifteen years of my life dedicated to this industry the faults of incompetent abilities will be consigned to oblivion, as myself must soon be to the mansions…” I smiled through my tears, “of rest.”

I waited until the applause faded, hoping they would give me unlimited time since this was my last speech. Hoping I could make the tears stop falling. Hoping I would never miss this.

“I hope you know that… that I hope my records will be taken. I hope there’ll be someone else to become the youngest EGOT winner, or the fourth youngest Academy winner.” I smiled, looking at where Ophelia was sitting in front row a few seats away from Harry. Hoping she would take my EGOT record one day. “I hope there will be so many talented people making their way into this industry, because that will mean the art will be moving along. That will mean there will always be more and more amazing movies out there. I hope you’ll never stop writing, I hope you’ll never stop challenging society with your stories, I hope you’ll never stop telling stories. Because…” I smiled. “I’ll be watching, I’ll always be…” I sighed, looking at my handsome fiancé smiling at me nearby. “A little because he asked me not to, and a lot because I would not like to imagine my life without him… I wanna thank Harry for… For…” I took in a deep breath, and grinned, “…for not giving me a reason to insult him at the end of this speech.”

I enjoyed the pause when they laughed to dry my tears. Harry was laughing when he raised his hand from his seat, closed in a fist, showing me his golden ring. I raised mine, in a fist around my Oscar, and we air-fist bumped.
Filled with love, I took another deep breath, deciding I was done. It was time to say goodbye.

“So… I guess this is it.” I shrugged, and looked around at every corner of the theater, at every smiley face looking at me, trying to carve it all in my memory. “Stay beautiful, Hollywood. And thanks for everything.”

I took two steps back to walk away, and they started applauding again. The noise was deafening and heartwarming. It was both overwhelming and flattering. It was almost unbearably nice. Biting my lip to stop myself from crying, I took a bow. My last one. Then I straightened up and raised my awards to the air, like I had done with the first one I won. In victory. In joy. In pure, unaltered happiness.

I gave Hollywood one last smile, and turned on my heels to walk backstage. And I have never felt so ready to take on whatever came next.

Chapter End Notes

!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! HONESTLY I CANT SPEAK ABOUT THIS. I’M NOT READY. JEN AND HARRY TOGETHER IN AN AWARD SHOW. JEN AND HARRY IN YOUR TV! JEN THANKING HIM. THE FIST BUMP! THE INTERVIEW! THE RED CARPET PICTURES!

Oh boy. I hope you liked it. This chapter means a lot to me and well, I cried writing it.

I’d love to know what you think! Hope you’re well! Bye
Hollywood Fairytale

Chapter Summary

Jen and Harry attend the MET ball and run into an unfriendly acquaintance.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

I was living on a cloud. A fluffy, perfect cloud of happiness. Even as I walked, I felt light. I felt new. I felt… happy. There was hardly anything that could put a damper on my new state of mind, because it wasn’t the type of passing happiness I had experienced before; this was the kind that stayed, the kind that would stick around, because it was about a permanent change.

It wasn’t just Harry, but everything else around him, and the fact that since everyone now knew we were getting married, I could share every part of my life with him without holding back.

After the Academy Awards, the United Nations wanted to take advantage off the hype my speech about the Brazilian Amnesty law had and so – after carefully talking about it with the palace advisors – we announced I would be starting to work for them later that year. That was followed by a quick statement from me via twitter, expressing how excited I was about it, and a statement from the Queen, who felt the need to express her support, so everyone knew I was doing everything in accordance to my new role as a royal.

The fact that Harry was my date to the Academy Awards was a very big deal. I was online after the ceremony (where I got to go on stage one more time after my final speech, because Hamilton – expectedly – won Best Picture), even at the after party, having way too much with the world’s reactions to us. People seemed to be freaking out about everything from our red-carpet pictures together (“look how he looks at her!”), our interview with Sophia Grace and Rosie (“OMG JUST HAVE BABIES!”) and Harry’s picture with a tiara, to every moment during the ceremony the cameras had panned on us. We barely had time to breathe after the Oscars, because about one month later we flew again to New York.

The Manhattan MET ball was traditionally exclusive, high class, and a fashion event to compete with the Oscars and fashion week. Packed with celebrities wearing their best, every year had a theme, and the last time Harry and I had been there, we were still fake-dating. It had been a good night, ruined only by the moment I found my ex-boyfriend, David Cobb, and his wife were there too. The bad moment led to something good, as that was the first time I kissed Harry thinking of what it would be like if he actually wanted to kiss me.

That year, the organizers had announced the theme of the ball would be ‘Hollywood Fairytale’ and it would be honoring – you guessed it – us. The night, according to their press release and invitations, would be ‘honoring the love story of Prince Harry and Jenifer Silva, two accomplished young people who make the world a better place by living their love to the fullest’.

Our first instinct was to politely decline the invitation, but then they offered to transform the traditional ball into a fundraising event and revert the money to our charities, and we were sold. After all, there was something else we announced right after the Oscars: the fundraising website we set up instead of a registry list. We did it because Seth Meyer’s registry joke during the
ceremony had been very popular, and so jumping on that, we quickly twitted that if anyone wanted to actually give us something, they could make a donation. The website would be opened until the wedding on August 3rd and all the money would be split and reversed to Harry’s Sentabale and mine EducaUP.

With that, came the need for a proper website that could host the donations. The immediate idea was to link to Harry’s site, which was gov.uk page. After the wedding, I would be getting one, too, so they started working on it. They set up a page on Harry’s site for the fundraising and another about the engagement, which would later lead to my own website, after the wedding. This page had a brief summary of our story and some personal never seen before photos. When William and Kate had gotten married, they needed to do this because Kate was a private citizen, and so the people needed to get to know her. We did this so everyone could have an official account of how our relationship came to be and could stop speculating about it.

We wrote the summary ourselves, explaining we had briefly met in late 2012 on a gala for the Prince’s Trust in Kensington Palace where I was representing a charity and Harry was representing his father. We explain we kept casual contact until January, when I helped him find a place to live in my building in Manhattan, to where he moved in February, when we became close friends before dating. After Harry moved back to England later that year we chose to go on as friends until more than a year later when we started dating again, as we had been until the engagement three years later.

My personal summary included childhood photos in Brazil and California, of my High School graduation and of my own bloated sixteen-year-old face when I was nominated for a Bafta for the first time. There was also photos from my Oscar wins and U.N.’s General Assembly speech. This was the moment to rehearse talking about my career as a pro, instead of a con; so my summary read a lot about how I had ‘exceeded’ in my high school career and decided to go into ‘the performing arts’, where I worked for fifteen years, winning four Academy Awards ‘and more’. Except instead of ‘and more’, they listed all of my awards and records, always making it sound super serious and professional, as if it was something for the royal family to be proud of instead of the shame I knew felt more usual to them.

We added photos from our personal archive: of Harry and I celebrating New Year’s in Bulgaria together – me in piggyback in his back in the middle of a snow storm, the two us smiling like idiots – and then next year in Brazil. Of us celebrating Fourth of July with our friends in Maryland, and a picture that had been taken of us in his 30th birthday party, while we side-hugged and laughed crazily.

It gave the public a good timeline of our relationship, and it helped us have a story we could stick with instead of constantly panicking every time someone asked us something and we didn’t know how we could spin the truth around to something that wouldn’t be easily confusing considering the fake-relationship part of our story.

—

Harry was handsome in an all-black ensemble: pants, suit jacket, shirt, vest and tie. His hair was slightly shorter, as he had gotten a haircut, and his beard was slightly longer, as he was growing it just a bit to get a feel of how he wanted to have it for the wedding. He was leaning against the wall in our hotel bedroom, hands in his pockets and legs crossed, staring at me with a look I could only describe as lustful.

“What?” I asked, smiling, as Clara finished buttoning the back of my cream lace Krikor Jabotian gown. He was silent; he waited until Clara was done, and left the room saying she had to find my
earrings, to approach.

“You look…” He started, dangerously close, his hands rounding up my waist; the dress had a tube skirt just tight enough from my hips up, though it had somewhat of a train in the back. “…incredible.”

I couldn’t help but smile; his words were but a whisper, his touch was light as a feather, but his eyes were intense enough to make me wish we could skip the ball. But considering we had taken the jet here, announced we were going, and had a lot of charity money in the balance, we probably shouldn’t. Which is why I had to push him away with a deep sigh.

“Behave.” I told him.

“Have you got any idea how many times I had to watch you get all dressed up on skype, or just see pictures of you in gorgeous dresses online, and wasn’t able to be there to touch you?” he asked, walking back closer to me. “Or, better yet, to…” he leaned forward, rubbing his lips gently on my ear sending chills down my spine. “…rip the dress right off you?”

“This is couture, Mr. Prince.” I said, leaning back. “You’re not ripping anything.”

He grinned; his fingers tracing my hips were starting to make me wish he would, though.

“I’m just really happy I now get to stand close to you as everyone wishes they were me.”

This was another problem of being able to have Harry there: the sexual tension when we were in public was intense. It just felt too different and new to be able to be together in front of everyone, not having to hide how we felt about each other. It helped that we were dressed in our best black tie, of course. We spent most of our time in these events admiring each other until Edward approached with a reproving look, saying:

“Children, behave.”

The annual fundraising gala for the benefit of the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Costume Institute in New York City was known as the Met Ball. It marks the grand opening of the Costume Institute’s annual fashion exhibit. Each year’s event celebrates the theme of that year’s Costume Institute exhibition, and the exhibition sets the tone for the formal dress of the night since guests are expected to choose their fashion to match the theme of the exhibit. The theme of the night, inspired by us, ‘Modern Fairytale’, had most of the guests wearing big ball gowns with skirts worthy of Disney princesses. Trust Hollywood to go all out when it comes to a fashion statement. My tube skirt ended up being one of the most modest ones, but at least I looked different. And the lace of the fabric made me look delicate and regal, which I suppose set up the ‘modern’ part of ‘Modern Fairytale’.

The grand staircase leading up to the Metropolitan Museum was covered in a magnificent tent, protecting the red carpet covering the steps where all the guests would be arriving and posing for the photographers. The paparazzi were kept at bay from the large carpet by low, ivy-covered rails and from the top of the tents ceilings hanged glorious chandeliers – it made the place look like a palace even though I knew most of it would be dismantled by tomorrow.

We arrived in a limo, and walked up the red carpet hand-in-hand; our smiles shining in the flashes. We didn’t pose, although we stood smiling for pictures for a short while, side hugging so the world could see how proud we were to be about to spend the rest of our lives with each other.

“Are you stalking us?!” Harry joked, when, about to enter the party, we found Brandon, the
Humans of New York photographer that had taken our engagement photos.

He laughed as we greeted him with warm hugs. “Of course, I am, you give me my most liked pictures on Facebook!” He joked. “Vogue hired me to take portraits of the guests.”

“Oh, that’s so cool.” I said. “It’s funny to be here, exactly where you took those photos of us in 2013.”

He smiled. “I wonder if they’d let us go back there to take an updated version?”

Turns out people don’t deny you much when you’re the guests of honor of the party. So less than ten minutes later, we had a staffer of the gala waving a hand at the security as he escorted us through the closed parts of the museum to the exact place where the Van Gogh painting were.

“It’s almost as empty as it was that Sunday.” Harry noticed, as there was only security and museum staff here and there.

We found Vincent’s self-portrait, and Harry and I held hands in front of it in the same place we did in the other pictures, looking back at Brandon who photographed us from the back.

We walked back to the party, and Harry and I were escorted around to greet people, thanking them for the good wishes. It was a nice experience being in public together, but it was even better being there with close friends. We were constantly exchanging playful whispers and looks when possible. The organization had invited people from our past, friends and former co-workers, such as Harry’s Halo crowd, and people I had been in movies with.

“Princess Jenifer, congratulations!” Emma Stone smiled broadly when she came by to give me a hug.

“Technically, my title will be Duchess of something.” I told her. “Or Princess Henry.”

“I don’t care, I’ll keep on calling you princess as long as I live.” She replied, and I smiled. “I know this is, like, super tacky, but am I gonna be invited to the wedding? Because I have to start thinking about dresses.”

“Of course!” I told her. “Just don’t tell anyone I said that, we don’t have an official guest list yet.”

“Oh, my God, I’m gonna have to wear a hat, aren’t I?” She asked. “Oh, that’s gonna be so much fun! Can you imagine some of these Hollywood types wearing hats? It’ll be a crazy parade.”

We finished talking, and I still greeted another group of people before I managed to find my way to the dance floor, the only place Harry and I could have some privacy.

“We have to change the dress code.” I told him, who had his arms around my waist, rocking slowly to the beat. “If we make the wedding dress code morning dress, all of my guests will make it their mission to wear a crazy hat.”

Harry laughed. “You wanna change the dress code just so they don’t get that chance?”

“Yes!” I said. “Harry, you don’t know these people like I do. Remember how everyone reacted to Beatrice’s hat in your brother’s wedding? It’ll be like that, except half of the church will be wearing something crazy!”

“I think you’re underestimating your friends.”
“I think you don’t know these people like I do.” I replied. “They will not waste a photo opportunity.” He giggled again, leaning down to rest his forehead on mine. “You’re not taking this seriously enough.” I complained.

“Jen…” He sighed. “Our guests can go naked for all I care. As long as you’re my wife at the end of the day, it’ll be all that matters.”

I sighed. “It is very hard to be a little mad at you when you say things like that.”

He smiled. “Remember the last time we were dancing here?”

I nodded. “I was still just pretending to be your girlfriend.”

“You were scared I was going to meet Taylor.” He remembered. “Now she’s gonna be our bridesmaid.”

I smiled. “David was here and you kissed me because he was watching.” I sighed, feeling his warm breath on my lips, remembering the first time I had pretended he was kissing me, not for any other reason than because he wanted to, and how it had made me feel so absolutely special. “It was the first time you called me the most interesting person you know.”

“You were saying that you missed being worthy of interest.” He recalled. “And I just couldn’t understand it. I looked at you and you were so absolutely gorgeous and funny and smart… and yet you looked so sad because of that old bag of bones.” I giggled. “I hated that you didn’t understand how amazing you were.”

I got on my tiptoes, and touched his lips with mine, happily ignoring whomever by be watching. I felt his soft lips dance with mine and my insides warm as his eyes tightened around me, and I was so absolutely happy to be right there, with him, in that room full of people.

“Children, behave.” Edward interrupted, and we pulled away. “Jenifer, you have a request.”

Sighing, we put smiles on our faces and held hands as we followed him across the room to whoever it was we needed to greet next.

“Hey!” We smiled, greeting George and Amal Clooney, and so we went on, throughout the night, saying hello to friends, old and new.

“Forgive me, but I must ask,” started Zac Posen, one of my favorite designers, after we had been chatting excitedly for a few minutes, “do you have a dress for the big day already?”

“No.” I told him. “I have an idea of how I want it to look, but it’s not finished.”

“Well, look no further.” He smiled. “I’d be honored to work with you to achieve your dream dress.”

I grinned, a little awkward. His designs were divine, but they were more red carpet than church.

“It’ll have to be British designer.” I justified, apologetically.

He wasn’t the only one I had to dodge that night: wedding dress mogul Vera Wang, Jason Wu, even British Stella McCartney, all showed up to tell me they had brilliant ideas of what they thought I should wear. It was getting harder to be polite about it.

Finally, we sat down in the same table as Taylor, Adam, Ophelia, Oscar, Selena, Orlando, George
and Amal to have dinner with all the other guests, chatting and joking around as we did.

As much as I had been tired of this life before, when my future was so attached to what came with it, being there with Harry felt different. All I had to do was turn around to see his charming smile; hold his hand in mine; exchange a joke. His voice, his accent, it was enough to make me wish the night would never end. There was something so extraordinarily entertaining about dressing up and going to a fancy party with people you love; it gave the night a magic feeling. Or maybe it was just because I was so happy.

I kept looking at my ring, and at Harry, and my heart would beat faster on my chest at the thought of the future. Oh, I was so happy I could burst. Nothing could ruin my night.

Except for the one thing that happened.

“Hello, Jenifer.”

Harry was too busy looking at our new companion to notice how my smile faded in less than a second. I could feel my heart beating slower and the room suddenly seemed to spin. I tried to breath slowly, and deep, so no one could notice, but even then I knew I must have been pale.

Holding on to my champagne glass tightly so my hands wouldn’t shake, I slowly turned around.

“Hello.” Harry said, as he reached with his hand to greet the familiar tall, thin, gray-haired man that stood in front of us.

Adam Harper hadn’t aged one day. He stared at Harry’s hand for just one second before shaking it excitedly, grinning conniving as he looked at him with his dark eyes.

“You are…?” Harry asked, politely.

“You are…” He said, looking at me. “Jenifer and I have known each other for a long time, haven’t we, dear? How have you been?”

Before I could process what was happening, he took a quick step closer and kissed my cheek. I didn’t move, though I held my breath when I noticed his smell so close. He still smelled of cognac, cigarettes and old books. I wasn’t prepared for how easily the memories came back after his smell was all over me.

Suddenly, I could perfectly see the messed up bed in his apartment in Queens. The shelves of books I had planned to, but never read. The long monologues in class about how complex acting was, and how it would take the luckiest of us years to achieve it – the rest would have to accept we simply weren’t good enough.

It was like I could still feel his eager, brute hands all over me; keeping me closer than I wanted to be; holding my arms behind my back even after I asked him to let me go. But I could also still feel his delicate caressing of my hair. His gentle arms around me. His smile when I showed up late at night, or after class in his office.

I could still remember his cold ‘don’t’ when I had told him I loved him, and how he made a point to avoid my eyes after his wife caught me in his apartment.

“Professor.” I finally greeted, through clenched teeth.

“Oh, Jenifer, it’s not like you’ve ever actually called me that.” He grinned. “I’ve always been so much more than your professor, after all.”
His voice was full of innuendo and I had to use all of my energy to remain very still. I was still breathing as slowly as I could, and I felt like I might throw up at any minute.

“Professor?” Harry asked, still smiling politely with his hand on the small of my back, looking between Adam and me. I felt my stomach clench in nausea and guilt as I only now remembered he was there. I felt more shame then than I ever had in my entire life.

“Oh, I’m a Broadway director.” Adam explained. “But I met Jenifer in NYU a few years ago. I taught her drama…” I felt his eyes drifting to me, but I was still busy staring intently off into nowhere, trying to keep from puking. “Not that I managed to teach her anything. Even then she seemed to think she knew all there was to know already.”

“I did win four Oscars and a Tony.” I heard myself say, though I had no idea where I had found the strength. “So I guess I must know something.”

“Yes, I did see that.” Adam said, dismissively, eyeing me intensively. “How was it? He can kiss my Oscar-winning ass.” He chuckled. “You’ve always had no filter.”

“I meant every word.” I grinned.

“Oh, I’m sure you did.” He nodded, now looking serious. “I did read your book. Or tried to. I might have skipped to the interesting parts.”

“According to most critics all of it was interesting.”

“Right, dear, you’ve always been so naïve.” He chuckled again, before taking another step closer to whisper: “I did tell you I’d make you interesting, didn’t I? And to think you almost regretted us…” He smiled, and gave Harry a look. “You’re welcome, by the way. We both know you would still be a one-hit wonder without my… help. Even if you had to twist all of it to fit into a narrative that was more profitable for you.”

“If anyone twisted anything it was you.” I whispered, weakly, somehow managing not to look down. “You twisted everything I was.”

Adam sighed, and I almost saw him roll his eyes.

“Right. I’m the big, bad wolf… Well… Look at you.” He smiled. “I don’t see any damages, Miss Oscar-winner, princess-to-be. You’re welcome, by the way.”

“You think I got here because of you?” I asked, my voice but a whisper. “Everything I am, I am in spite of you.”

“You always had a nag for the dramatic.” He looked at Harry. “She couldn’t do comedy for shit. And before you bring it up, yes, I did see your SNL sketch, we both know you didn’t write any of it.”

“What did you say your name was again?” Harry asked, now sounding impatient. I felt his hand a little tighter on my waist.

Adam grinned at him for a long minute, before looking back at me.

“You’re lucky no one was able to pin me to your little book, or else I would have sued you for everything you have.” He said, bitterly. “Though I probably deserve some royalties considering how much you’re making off of your lies about what really happened.”
“What really happened?” I asked, now a little stronger, feeling the anger burning in my chest. “You mean when you purposely neglected to tell me you were married?! Or when I asked you to stop and all you did was hold my arms down and keep going?! Or how you ignored me when I came to see you after your wife sent me to the hospital?! Or how, after all of it, you gave me a fucking C for a grade?!”

“Really?” He asked, now sounding bored. “You’re gonna pretend you didn’t deserve your grade now?”

“How’s your wife doing, Adam?” I asked, pointedly.

“Don’t bring her into this.” He said, warningly. “And your final piece was shitty, Jenifer. That’s why you got a C.”

“I got a standing ovation.”

“Right, and college students have been known for their accurate critical thinking.” He rolled his eyes. “You made the piece about you, it had no acting on it.”

“Fuck you.” I said.

“Grow up!” He replied. “Stop playing the victim, it never suited you. You got what you wanted, didn’t you? Stop pretending I didn’t play any part in it—”

It was faster than I could understand. One minute he was angrily spitting rage centimeters from me, both of us too caught up on our own exchange to remember Harry standing right there. If I wasn’t so nauseated, so angry, I would have felt him take his hand from my waist. I might have seen his face grow more and more infuriated when he started to slowly realize who was it I was talking to. I didn’t know which part of it was the final blow, which part of the conversation had given him the certainty he needed, or made him decide it was enough, but suddenly had pulled Adam away from me, and in one punch, had him on the floor of the MET.

As I jumped back in the scare, Adam bumped into a waiter who had a tray of champagne flutes, and both of them were in the floor, with most people stepping away from the sudden collision. Harry was quick to help him in his feet again.

“Sir, are you okay? You tripped there. You gotta watch where you step.” He said, his voice calmer and politer than I ever remembered hearing. He pulled Adam up – who now had his face bloody and his hand covering his nose - and proceeded to dust off his jacket. “What happened? Did you lose your balance?”

Adam was leaning back as much as he could, looking at Harry with a mixture of shock and fear. I had never seen fear in his face before. It didn’t suit him.

I don’t think anyone had seen what really happened; there were no cameras inside the MET ball, and if anyone knew it hadn’t just been an accident, they wouldn’t have been able to prove it. The people around probably took Harry’s words for it, and imagined Adam had merely tripped on his own feet. Someone was helping the waiter up now, and other waiters had come around to clean up the champagne mess on the floor. A staffer was assuring us everything was fine, and they would have it all cleaned up in no time.

“Is everything alright, sir? Can I do anything to help you?” the man asked Harry and Adam. My fiancé was still using a little too much force to clean up my ex’s jacket.

“No, no, he’s fine.” Harry assured him. “He must have fallen on his nose, there. Isn’t that right?”
Adam gave him a long look, still covering his face with his hand. “He should probably see a
doctor, though. Can you maybe call him a car? He should go to a hospital.”

“Of course.” The man said, eager to help. “I’ll have someone drive you in ten minutes, sir.”

He left, but the two men were still staring seriously at each other.

Using the little strength I had left, I forced my legs to move and approached them. Though Harry
seemed calm, I could see a vain in his neck pulsating and his lips were pale as he clenched them
together. His hands were closed in fists.

Adam was still holding his nose, blood dripping from his wrists, tainting his tux. I couldn’t tell if
he had more anger towards Harry or me. I tried to think of something to say. Something that would
make him leave. Something that would make my heart stop beating so fast in my throat. Something
that would make the shame and guilt disappear. I tried to stop the sound in my head – the sound of
his daughter crying as he wife beat me up almost ten years before.

“Adam?” Before I could think of anything to do, she was there too. She walked in from behind
Harry and me, and stared at her husband with some despair. “A staffer came to tell me we’re going
to the hospital? What happened?”

Finally, she looked at me. And it was as if every doubt she had ever had in her life disappeared. It
was as if I answered every question she ever had and I knew, without the need of any further
explanation, the answers to questions I had been asking myself for the past ten years.

I knew she hadn’t left him. I knew she blamed me for the affair. I knew she didn’t regret beating
me up. I even knew – because of the necklace she was wearing one of those with the shapes of two
kids – they had another child, a boy.

She scoffed as she looked at me. I hoped Harry wouldn’t beat her too, because, towards her I didn’t
feel anger.

I felt so much pity.

“Look at you.” She said, her voice filled with spite. “After all you put us through, and now you get
to live some fairytale life….” She shook her head in anger. “You can fool the whole world but
you’ll always be a home wrecking whore.”

I didn’t want to engage. I almost decided to simply walk away. But after ten years thinking about
this, seeing her hands scratching my face whenever I closed my eyes, I knew what I wanted to say
now.

I stepped closer, and Harry held my hand – probably thinking I would slap her. I didn’t, but I held
on to his hand for strength.

“I was seventeen years-old when I met your husband.” I started, as calm as I could. “I was eighteen
when you beat me up and threw me to the street half-naked. I still have the hoodie I was wearing
that day, stained with my own blood. I can still hear your daughter crying as if it was yesterday.
And maybe I deserve it, because I did sleep with him. I didn’t know you existed until later, and I
should have walked away, but I didn’t, and I regret that. But here’s the thing…” I took in a deep
breath. “I wasn’t much more than a child. A stupid, naïve, overly optimistic child. I was still
learning. But your husband, he was twice my age. He was my professor. He vowed to be faithful to
you. He should have known better. And quite frankly, so should you.”

I didn’t feel like crying. I didn’t feel nauseated anymore. I didn’t feel shame. I had spent ten years
regretting this part of my life, but I had proved my talent. I had learned about consent and responsibility and I knew that though my actions weren’t right, I wasn’t the bad guy. I was a victim too.

“I know for a fact I wasn’t the first person he cheated on you with, and I’m willing to bet everything I own that I wasn’t the last…” I told her. “I was a kid, and I will always regret not knowing better, but I was a kid. I had room to grow, as I have. I was still learning then. But you physically assaulted a teenager for something your cheating husband did… What’s your excuse?”

“Sir? Madam?” The staffer came back, walking around the waiters cleaning the champagne on the floor. “Your car is here, it’ll drive you to the nearest hospital.”

“You can play the victim if it helps you sleep at night.” She told me, as the staffer busied himself giving the waiters orders about the cleaning of the floor. “But you’ll always be the slut who almost ruined our family… so you can go on and pretend you’re so special, but soon enough you’ll be standing in my shoes.”

“No, I won’t.” I said, without missing a beat. “Unlike you I won’t marry a cheating, raping asshole.”

Adam tried to hold her arm to pull her away, but she rid herself off him and left, without giving one look his way. He sighed, tiredly, and glared at me.

After ten years, after all that had happened, with Harry by my side and, despite what Adam had thought would happen, my successful career behind me, there was only one thing I could do.

I smiled. I smiled because of my career, because of Harry, and because despite the last ten years, I survived. I survived him. I succeeded. And he might spend the rest of his life pretending he hadn’t done anything wrong, but I had one comfort: I knew that he would spend the rest of his life having to hear or read about Jenifer Silva, the youngest ever EGOT winner, the UN ambassador, the royal. All while trying to keep his life from scrambling.

I felt Harry’s hand in mine, tighter now, and his warm touch was enough to calm the rest of the turmoil inside of me.

Adam squinted in rage, his bloody hand still covering his face, and walked away, putting – I noticed – a lot of unnecessary space between himself and Harry as he rounded him in his way to the exit.

Chapter End Notes

I LOVE THIS CHAPTER. I LOVE THIS CONFRONTATION. I LOVE NANGRY JEALOUS HARRY!

But most importantly, I love that Adam didn’t regret his actions. I love that he didn’t see the error of his ways. I love that he doesn’t think he raped Jenifer. Because kids, here’s a lesson for you: bad guys never think they’re the bad guys. They think they’re misunderstood. They think they’re the victims. So for him, and his wife, Jen will always be the manipulative homewrecking whore who ruined their marriage. And Jen just has to take comfort in the fact that she knows the truth and the people who love her do too. Remember that. It’s important.
I love you! Thank you for reading! You’re the best! Let me know what you think please?
I let my puppy down from my arms in the bedroom, and she sniffed around the floor absentmindedly until she found herself in her little white mattress near our bed. I could still hear Harry in the kitchen, making himself tea, as I walked into the closet ready to get out of my party clothes.

I leaned against my dresser watching my reflection in the mirror and sighed, tiredly and happily. My slightly smudged makeup, my golden leaves earrings, the yellow diamond in my left hand, and the dark green, knee length, skintight velvet dress; all of it looked nice enough that although I wanted a shower and bed, I didn’t want to take it off. So, instead, I grabbed a hair brush and started smoothing my long, jet-black hair. It reached past the middle of my back now, and I realized when the wedding day came it would be almost at my hips, which was a good thing. I had after all been growing it out since the engagement.

I heard the kettle boiling; Harry must have been done with his tea. Other than that and the slight sound of Vodka playing with her chew toy in the bedroom, the apartment was quiet. Knightsbridge was an overall quiet neighborhood – though, in my mind, I could still hear the upbeat sound of the music from the party mere half-an-hour before.

I had thought it would be a quiet night, but Harry and my friends weren’t about to let that happen. When we walked into the Chiltern Firehouse, I had imagined Harry and I would just have dinner, even the quiet then suggested it.

“You have to stop buying out restaurants for me, Mr. Prince.” I had teased, as we walked in, noticing the lights out and lack of chatter from inside.

“Is that a complaint?” He asked, grinning. Before I could answer, the lights came on and a chorus of ‘surprise!’ deafened me.

Unlike what my friends thought, that was the first surprise party of my life. The one they thought was the first – when I had turned twenty-three – had been spoiled when Harry had to tell me about it because of our fake relationship. This time he made it his mission to surprise me, and he managed well.

They were all there, or most of them. My bridesmaids and their boyfriends, Harry’s ushers and their wives, and overall friends who lived nearby and even some who had luckily been in the country for work.

The Artchets had flown in for it exclusively; famous Youtuber Asher, famous NFL player Hunter, up and coming musician very recently signed to a label Payton, and even increasingly handsome teenager Aiden. My godson Kidd, the youngest of them, had stayed behind in Los Angeles with his
grandparents, but according to his mother, sent his love.

“I one day wondered if we would see the day Jenifer Silva turned 28.” Richard said, smiling, as he handed me a box with a pair of what I knew were priceless earrings inside. “But I guess you’re tougher than you look.”

Though my former-manager had a knack for the melodramatic, it was a happy night. A happy, loud night, which happens when most of your friends are musicians. Adam took care of the music, making sure we were dancing the whole night through, and Taylor made sure to tell me my bachelorette party would be even cooler.

“I don’t think she’s willing to understand I’m not supposed to have one.” I told Harry on the way home.

“Maybe you should have one.” He replied. “One last hooray for party-girl Jenifer Silva.”

I turned to look at him. “Are you saying we won’t have killer parties after we’re married?” I asked, faking outrage.

“More like royal tours and celebratory Anglican masses.” He smiled, and winked.

As if the party prince would ever let us have a quiet, boring life.

“You know…” Harry started, entering the closet with his tea mug, “I’m very glad that dress made the cut.”

I smiled; the reason I hadn’t been too surprised to know Taylor and Selena were in town was because I knew they had flown in two days before, to help me — and Ophelia — with wedding planning and also take part in a little throw-away party I had had. With becoming a royal, there would be many things in my wardrobe that I wouldn’t be able to wear anymore. Crop tops, short skirts and dresses, skintight everything… even particularly punk jackets and ripped up jeans. So I separated everything I wouldn’t be able to wear and called my friends to see if they wanted to keep anything — most of it was designer and kept in perfect conditions, so of course they did.

“I figured I could wear it with a blazer or something.” I said, about the tight green dress I had worn for the party. “I mean, at least it goes to my knees. No one can say is too sexy, right?”

“I don’t know…” He walking closer. He let his mug on my dresser and came to a stop right behind me, resting our bodies together. His hands rounded my waist, smoothing the fabric over my hips. “It looks pretty sexy to me…”

I smiled, biting a lip as a tingling sensation started coming over me, from the deep of my gut to every extremity.

“Maybe I should give it away, then.” I said, teasingly, as his hands started hovering too close to my chest.

“You wouldn’t dare.” He said, whispery, as his lips rubbed against my neck.

His hands brought me closer to him, and as he pressed himself to my back I could feel his growing erection. It made me urge for him, and I let my head fall back to rest on his shoulders as his hungry hands started pulling my dress up. He caressed my breast, and as soon as he could reach my underwear, his hand was under it, finding its way into me.

I locked his hair between my finger, letting him arouse me as I started to lose all feeling in my legs.
Our quiet apartment was filled with the sound of my heavy breathing and, soon enough, of my moaning.

I felt him nibble on my earlobe, his stubble sending chills down my spine; I thrust my hips against him, the bulge of his erection giving me all the incentive I needed. I let one hand to my back, to find the way to it, caressing him and being way too entertained by how much heavier his breathing got. I enjoyed the sound of his increasingly louder moans, satisfied at the effect I still had on him.

With his left hand, without ever stopping his movements in my clt with the right one, he unbuttoned his pants. Tired of waiting, I pulled his hand out to turn to him; he quickly picked me up, sitting me in the dresser and slamming my legs opened, pulling me by the crooks of my knees towards him. I guided him into me, feeling myself stretch to his volume; his hands grabbed two fistfuls of my hair and pulled my head back, kissing my neck almost violently as he started to rock himself against me. All I could do was pull him closer with my legs around his waist and moan at will as he made me forget everything else that wasn’t us – as he usually did.

As we panted our breaths calmer, he pulled himself out, making me fast at the move as I was still throbbing around him. He kissed me, his tongue making my heart beat faster again just as I was trying to calm it down.

“Don’t give away the dress.” He said, softly, and I smiled.

“I won’t be able to wear it too much.”

“Just wear it at home.” He said, teasingly, resting a kiss on my jawline. “For me.” As he laid kisses down my jaw to my neck, I knew I couldn’t give away the dress – even if all I could do was wear it at home.

I was glad he wasn’t at the throw-away party, because if he started asking me to keep every dress he thought I looked hot in, I might have end up keeping everything.

The party wasn’t as much of a party – I had Taylor, Selena, Beezus, Ophelia, Alli, Zoe, Lizzy, Susannah, Melissa and Natasha over to pick amongst my things at their will. It was useless to call Kate – or Harry’s cousins, Beatrice and Eugenie -, as I knew they couldn’t wear the same things as me. But James had made his way in – he agreed to be my referee, but truth is he just wanted to lounge around drinking wine seeing A listers fight for designer clothes.

“Ladies! You could have been anywhere in the world tonight, but because the universe has smiled upon you, you’re here with us in what will surely become the luckiest night of your lives!”

James was usually dramatic, but he was taking it to new extremes that day as he guarded the doors to my bedroom before the girls walked in. I had laid down all of the clothes I was getting rid of around the bedroom, and I just smiled to myself as I waited for him to be done dramatizing the opening of the doors.

“Now as you know, Jenifer Silva, the world’s youngest EGOT winner, first Latin American actress to win the Oscar, People’s most beautiful woman alive in 2015 and 2016-“

“We know her!” Ophelia interrupted, impatiently.

“Fine, fine!” He said. “As you know, Jenifer is about to become a royal, and so she will have a responsibility to dress modestly and in mostly British brands, which deems most of her wardrobe unfit for a royal. We’re talking crop tops, short dresses, shorts-“

“Just open the doors, James.” I heard Alli’s voice.
Even through closed doors I could hear James’ sigh. “Fine, fine! Here are the rules.” He started. “No scratching. No pulling designer clothes. No stealing. No throwing things at each other. The only clothes up to give away are in the bedroom area, not in the closet! If more than one girl want something, the rule is they both wear it and the group will vote on who wears it best. Jen will always be the deciding vote if it comes to it. You are allowed to bribe her vote by offering favors or donations, whatever you see fit. Now, ladies…” I saw the doors crack open. “This… is… Sparta!”

He opened the doors dramatically, and suddenly my friends were inside. I was amused at their wondering eyes and happy smiles, and they quickly walked around the room to the pieces of clothes they liked best. I spotted Zoe Warren’s blonde hair as she checked out a light pink Elie Saab dress, with one long sleeve – too short for a duchess, but which would go great with her skin tone. Taylor – who had flown in from her tour -, had her mouth dropped open at the sight of a Zuhair Murad blue piece.

“I wore that to the Heathers promotion.” I told her, who quickly took off her top to try on the dress.

“Jenifer, don’t waste my time.” Ophelia said, approaching me with her game face on. “Where’s my Balmain dress?”

I smiled, and walked her to the closet. She had been eyeing my black Balmain dress since she had seen me wear it for the first time.

I grabbed it from the rack to give it to her. “I saved it for you.”

She hugged me. “You love me. You really love me!” I giggled.

“I have another one just for you.” I found the short green dress I was looking for, and showed her. “Do you remember this? I wore it to Comic Con when we met.”

“Oh, my God.” She smiled. “You still have it?!”

“It’s Dolce and Gabbana. Timeless.” I replied. “And I think it’ll go nicely with your hair.”

She gave me a sweet look. “I love you.”

I found Taylor next, to give her an Erdem yellow dress embroidered with strawberries that screamed country; it looked like the dress she wore when she came to film for The Mediator when we had met. And I had separated a dress for Beezus that I had worn when Harry and I went on the double date with her and Kit.

“It might not fit me.” She said.

“I’ll give you my tailor’s contact.” I told her. “But you’ve been gaining weight consistently since the transplant, so I think we might not have to alter too much.”

“Are you calling me fat?” She asked, grinning.

“Yes, I am.” I told her.

“Good.” She nodded, watching appreciatively her own figure in the mirror.

“I doubt you’ll manage to find what you were wearing when we met.” Alessa said, watching this. I noticed she was holding about twenty different pieces of clothes in her arms.
“Let’s see… first day of freshman year? Please… I burned that after graduation.” I told her, jokingly.

“What about me?” Selena asked. “You were… what? Twelve? Thirteen?”

“How about this?” I asked, handing her a white lace dress, that came with a black leather jacket attached. “I was wearing it on that Teen Choice Awards when we met again years after Disney Channel.”

“Oh, my God, this is the most Jenifer Silva outfit ever!” She smiled.

I had managed to convince Alessa not to drag me to our ten years high school reunion, but when I had cleaned up my closet in Los Angeles to move the rest of my things to England, I had managed to find something to give her, which I now handed to her. “Here.”

“Is this…?” She asked, looking at it.

“Yes.”

The Yale Drama hoodie still had my bloodstains on it. It was the hoodie I was wearing when Adam’s wife found me in his apartment when I was eighteen – his hoodie. It was the hoodie I was wearing on top of my underwear, and nothing else. It was what I was wearing when she threw me out, throwing my purse and pants after me, making me get dressed hurriedly in the stairs, right before running ten blocks until I found a subway station.

It was the hoodie I was wearing when I got to our dorm rooms, the one I was wearing when Alessa found me – my face bloated, purple and wet from tears and blood. It was the hoodie I wore when she dragged me to the hospital. The hoodie I wore when I refused to tell what happened. The hoodie I had kept for the last ten years at the bottom of a drawer, to make sure I never forgot what he had done to me.

When I had written my book, I had sat down with Alli to tell her everything myself before it came out. I figured as the person who was there, worried sick about me not telling her why I suddenly had my face all fucked up, she deserved to know. She told me she had assumed it was a guy, though she didn’t think it was our professor. ‘I knew you had a crush on him’, she had told me, ‘but I never thought he would act on it.’

“Why are you giving me this?” She asked, holding on to the hoodie.

I shrugged. “After seeing him on the Met Gala, I don’t know… I don’t need it anymore, I guess.”

“What should I do with it?”

“Whatever you want.” I smiled. “The point is… I don’t care anymore.”

She smiled, and hugged me tightly. “So… everyone else gets a fancy dress and I get a blood stained hoodie from an asshole we both hate?”

I laughed, and walked back inside the closet. I had known that, despite getting the meaning of the act, she would make that joke. So I had separated another dress for her.

“Oh, I remember that!” She lit up at the sight of the gray with pink floral embroideries dress I held up. “You wore that to your first People’s Choice Awards! I was your date!”

“Yep.” I smiled. “It’s one of my favorites. It’s Ralph and Russo, all their dresses are beautiful, soft,
and make you feel like a damn queen!”

“Oh, thank you!” She said, dropping everything she was holding to put the dress in front of her body. “Are you sure you’re okay with all of this?”

I looked at her. “You mean giving away my clothes?” She nodded. “Yeah. I’m fine…” I looked out at the room, where my friends all were picking dresses, crop tops and short skirts, and throwing one to the other, excitedly. It gave me a warm feeling that I could make them happy. “I don’t feel like the same person who wore these clothes one day. And I’m excited to dress like an adult now.”

Alli smiled. “You’re gonna make a fashionable duchess.”

“Amen, sister.” I joked.

“Hey…” She started caressing the fabric of the Ralph and Russo dress I gave her. “Aren’t they British? Ralph and Russo?”

“Hm.” I mumbled. “I think they are… Why?”

“Well, you still haven’t found someone to make your wedding dress, right? And you just said their dresses are comfy and soft and pretty, so… why not them?”

“James!” Selena shouted. “You’re a guy! Why do you want this dress?!”

“I want it for Beezus!” He replied. Alli and I made our way out of the closet to find them pulling a gray dress like in a tug of war. “She’s picking nothing because she’s too shy! All of her clothes are so boring, Selena, she needs this!”

“What?!” Beezus approached. “James! That’s not even my style!”

“Yeah, because it’s sexy and chic!” he replied.

“You know what?” Selena let go of the dress. “This will look awesome in you, Bee, you should try it!”

“What? No!”

“Try it! Try it!” Ophelia started chanting, and Alli and Taylor quickly joined her.

“Look at this neckline! Check out this cleavage!” James argued. “Kit might just die, Bee!”

Blushing furiously, she got the dress and marched to the bathroom to change. I had a feeling she was doing it only so they would shut up, though I knew, from personal experience, the dress would do wonders for her self-esteem.

I picked up my phone as my friends continued to exchange opinions about who would look better in what, and googled Ralph and Russo. I told myself I could do it later, but I just couldn’t stop thinking about it. If I was being honest, not yet knowing who would make my wedding dress had been keeping me up at night.

I barely looked up when the room erupted in a chorus of long whistles when Beezus walked back, all trying to convince her she looked stunning in my old dress. I sat down in my bed and didn’t join in when Ophelia and Taylor both teamed up to convince Zoe Warren she could definitely pull off a short Blumarine green dress, even though she was, in her own words, ‘someone’s mother!’.

“I’m someone’s mother too, now, and I don’t care!” Said Lizzy, walking around in my old Mary
Katrantzou pink and blue dress. Lizzy had given birth a few months before, earlier that year, to a healthy baby girl she and Guy called Clarice. “And you are way younger than me!”

“Jen?” Natasha called. “Earth to Jen. You usually have an opinion about these things.”

I looked up, and sighed. “I don’t wanna speak too soon, but I think I just found my wedding dress designer.”

—

“I should stay.”

“You have to go.”

“But I think I should stay.”

“Well, by all means, you should stay. But you also have a job and people counting on you.”

Harry sighed. With his suitcases all already down in the car and the security waiting downstairs, all left for him to do was walk out the door. And yet his feet were firmly on the ground, and his arms tightly around my waist.

“What if you just came with me?!”

I smiled. “I have an appointment with Ralph and Russo.” I reminded him. “I have to get the wedding dress started soon, or else it won’t be done in time.” He sighed. “It’s so much more fun when you’re there.”

“Think on the bright side… I’ll be there next year. We’ll be married then and no one will think it’s weird if I fly out to go to your work events with you.”

He leaned down and kissed me. “Can’t we just fast-forward to then?”

“Sadly, no.” I said, giving another quick kiss. “Before that time comes we still have to make decisions about the guest list, invitations, decorations, the church…”

“Ugh.” He sighed again, louder now, and I giggled.

“Just go. The sooner you go, the sooner this year’s Invictus Games will be a success, and the sooner you’ll be back.”

“When you put it that way…” He smiled.

The Invictus Games had become a yearly event – each time being hosted in a different country. After following the event in Florida, Toronto and Paris, this year, after much planning, Harry was flying to Denmark.

After he was gone, I picked up my purse, called Eddy and Johnnie and we drove to Mayfair, where Ralph and Russo held it’s main Maison on Park Street, where Beezus was already waiting when I arrived.

“Why do they call it a Maison?” Beezus asked as we made our way inside. “Why not just… store? Headquarters?”

“Half of fashion is calling things by their French names.” I joked.
We were greeted by a smiley receptionist, who guided us to a fancy lounge where we were told someone would be right with us. The gray room had high ceilings and long curtains, a shiny, silk couch, two armchairs and a settee, with mannequins around sporting the brand’s most famous designs. On the wall, an inscription shone with the brand logo.

“Sorry I’m late- woah. You could fit most of my apartment in here.” Alli arrived, painting and breathless, carrying a good four big books in her arms, as she usually did when she was coming from work.

With Taylor and Selena back to their schedules around the globe, I had to make do with the bridesmaids who lived in London, which wasn’t to say I had anything missing. Beezus was great at keeping me calm. Alessa was great at making me laugh. And for fashion advice, I had Ophelia, who arrived almost right after Alli.

“Am I too late?” She asked.

“The designer is not even here yet.” Alli told her.

“Woah.” She let out, wide-eyed, walking towards the mannequin with a lace, off-white wedding dress and embroidered veil. “That is gorgeous!”

“Is this what you want?” I asked, smiling, trying to picture her inside it.

“Kind of, yeah.” She nodded. “But with long sleeves, I think.”

“Maybe both of us will get wedding dresses started today, then.”

“No, today’s about you!” She said, dismissively, though I could see that despite turning to me, her eyes were still on the dress. “Today is about your dress!”

“Yeah, but you need one too. And I am your bridesmaid, so if we can get two birds with one stone, we’ll do it, deal?”

“I don’t even know if I want them…”

“Okay, excuse you. Did you know they designed Beyoncé’s tour outfits in 2013?! If they’re good enough for Beyoncé, they’re good enough for you, Callis!”

She giggled. “Well, these dresses are indeed really pretty.”

“Sorry to keep you waiting!” The accent found us before the young woman it belonged to did. “Tamara Ralph, it’s a pleasure to meet you!”

“And I’m Michael Russo.” The brunette man beside her greeted.

“Jenifer Silva.” I smiled. “These are my friends-“

“Ophelia Callis, of course.” The blonde Tamara shook Oh’s hand, and walked forwards to the others. “And Alessa McKenna and Beatrice Quinn, I presume? It’s a pleasure.”

Bee and Alli seemed extremely confused to be recognized. Michael laughed. “Tamara, don’t just assume people’s names like that. Sorry about my partner, but the two of you are everywhere since you were announced as the royal bridesmaids.”

“Oh!” They nodded, understandingly.
Every magazine and website available was writing profiles about our wedding party members – and now even Bee and Alli were a little famous.

“Please, sit down!” Tamara smiled, and we took our seats in the big couch as they sat on the armchairs in front of us.

“I must say, I love that dress!” I told them, gesturing to a sleeveless white gown in another mannequin, with blue flowers, shorter in the front. “I saw it earlier this year in fashion week. I’m just sorry I didn’t find an occasion to wear it.”

“Oh, that’s right, you were there!” Tamara smiled.

“We were very honored to have you there.” Michael smiled.

“Oh, it was my pleasure.” I told them. “One of the only things that saddens me about not being an actress anymore is that I won’t have as many chances to wear beautiful dresses like these.”

“So, excuse me,” Ophelia started, “how does this work exactly? Do the two of you design the dresses together?”

“Tamara is our creative director.” Michael explained. “I’m the brand’s CEO.”

“He’s the brains, I’m the muscle.” The blonde joked.

“Does the CEO always attends appointments?” Alessa asked.

A better question would be, I knew, if both of them did. I knew for a fact creative directors only dealt with very A list clients. Though I supposed I was one of those.

Michael and Tamara chuckled, seeming to struggle to find a way to explain that.

“Only when we can find the time.” He said.

“So, what can we do for you today?” Tamara asked me.

I took in a deep breath. I had spent a good amount of time thinking about this, but now that it came down to it, I really didn’t know where to start.

“Well, you see… I’m getting married.”

They smiled. “We know.”

“Right.” I giggled. “Well… I’ve worn your dresses before and I love how soft they are even though they look so innovative and feminine, so I was wondering… I have an idea for my wedding dress, though I’m unsure if it would work. And I need someone to make it or tell me what I need to change to make it work… and I really want it to look like your dresses do, you know? Innovative and feminine, elegant and fashionable. So I was wondering if you would like to make my wedding dress.”

Tamara and Michael exchanged an excited look, and broke into big smiles. I had a feeling they had imagined this is what the appointment was about, thought they couldn’t be sure as I hadn’t explained when I scheduled it.

“We would be honored.” Tamara smiled.

“We thought you would never ask!” Michael joked, and we laughed. “Does anyone else want
wedding dresses too?” He asked the girls. “We’re on a roll here!”

They giggled. “Sorry, I’m married.” Beezus said, showing them her ring.

“I could see myself getting married in that.” Alli said, looking at a white dress nearby in a mannequin, with a cape. “But I’m not- I’m not… you know, engaged. So…”

I thought I heard some bitterness in her voice, and I made a mental note to tease her about it later.

“I was actually wondering about that dress.” Ophelia told them, gesturing to the lace dress she had been looking before. “Could it be altered to have long sleeves?”

“Of course!” Tamara said.

“We could also use it as a base to design a new one, more to your liking if you want something exclusive.” Michael added.

“I’m going to get my sketch notebook and we can start bouncing off some ideas!” Tamara stood up and walked away excitedly.

I fished my notebook on my purse when she came back, and opened it on the page I wanted.

“Actually… I wasn’t sure I would be able to describe what I wanted, so I tried to draw it myself. Look.” I showed her my sketch of the wedding dress I wanted, watching her reaction anxiously. “It would be sort of a sheath cut in the front, see? But on the back here, the skirt from the hips down would open in a cathedral train. So in the back it would look like a-“

“Ballgown.” She nodded. “Brilliant!”

“You think it’s possible?!”

“Well… I might have to make some tests. But with the right sewing, we could find a way.” She smiled. “And this? Are these off-shoulder sleeves?”

“Yes!” I smiled. “In sheer tulle, with lace embroideries, from top to bottom.”

“Tell her about the lace idea.” Bee reminded me.

“Oh, right! So, I’m from Brazil.” I started, nervously.

This was such an important thing for me from the moment I had had the idea that I wanted to describe it right. So I told them about the Brazilian bobbin lace makers. I told them about how Portuguese colonists brought their native tradition of weaving renda, or lace, to Brazil in the early 17th century. Centuries later, Brazilian women - particularly the fishermen’s wives in southern Brazil – keep the tradition alive by still making lace in the daylight of their front doorways, sitting in simple wooden stools before a cylindrical fabric pillow, which varies in size depending on the village and on the type of lace to be made. Filled with grass or banana leaves, the pillow rests on a wooden cradle that can be adjusted to suit the comfort of the rendeira, or lace maker. The traditions, techniques and lore of lace making are passed informally from one generation of women to the next. Wives and daughters of fishermen or farmers create lace collars, doilies and tablecloths to sell to supplement their families’ income.

The names of Brazilian stitches, translated from the Portuguese, are richly evocative: eyebrow, shell of the beetle, donkey’s ear, crazy rooster, good night, remember me. Poor man’s happiness is a simple lace that can be quickly made and is thus affordable to the less than prosperous. A
sinuous design in the center of a piece of lace is called pig’s intestines.

“And the women still sing this folk lyric from years ago, it goes, uhm,” I translated in my mind before telling them, with a smile on my face, the words, even in English, making me feel like I was back home. “Hey, lace maker. Hey, woman making lace. If you will teach me to make lace, I will teach you to fall in love.”

Tamara brought her hand to her heart, seeming emotional. “That’s beautiful!”

“Tell her the best part!” Beezus smiled.

“Right! Well… my great-grandmother was a rendeira. Sorry, lace maker, whose great-grandparents immigrated to Brazil from Portugal. That’s how she learned, her grandmother taught her. And her husband, my great-grandfather was a fisherman. When they got married my great-grandmother made her own dress, which my grandmother later wore to her wedding to my grandfather. That’s as far back as I know of my family’s history, sadly. But I like that story.”

“That’s incredible!” Tamara smiled.

“So, I want the lace on my dress to be southern Brazilian lace from the local lace makers,” I told her. “They are usually think because of the material they use, but when we hire them to make the lace we need, we could ask for thinner, more delicate material, so it would go better with the dress.”

“And you said they can make any design we want?” She asked.

“Sort of.”

“You could make it anything, then.” She nodded. “You could make it your favorite flower, or add Harry’s name! Or the shape of your hometown. The possibilities are endless!”

“Lilies!” I said, excitedly. “Harry’s mother’s favorite flower was lily! It would be a discrete enough way to honor her, right?!”

“Oh, I love this!” Tamara squealed. “We are going to have so much fun!”

Chapter End Notes

I love this chapter. I love the dress! I love everything. I hope you liked it too! Let me know? Thanks for reading! Hope you’re well!
Chapter Summary

Jen and Harry attend engagement parties after finally making the final decisions on the wedding.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“If I killed them, would I have to go to jail?”

Edward Lane-Fox looked at me for a long time before answering – I thought he might be trying to distinguish if I was joking or not.

“Pretty sure that would be mass murder, so… yes?”

“Okay, but what if they deserve it?”

“Still murder, Jenifer.”

I sighed.

“Rose!” My aunt called from where she sat in the living room beside Camilla. “Rose, vem contar pra sua sogra sobre aquela vez quando você tinha seis anos que você achou que ia morrer por causa de diarreia!”

“Oh, god.”

“What is it?” Edward asked.

“My aunt wants to tell Camilla about a time when I was six and thought I would die because I had diarrhea.”

“Oh.”

“I better not be seeing a grin on your face, Edward.”

“I’m going to go get you more wine.” He said, before grabbing the glass from my hand – which I was almost breaking – and slipping away.

“I mean, we were very surprised when they moved in together. We’re Christian, you know.” My mother was telling Charles. “I understand you’re Anglican. Jenny told us she’ll convert, which is fine since it’s bureaucracy, but we like to think she’ll still consider herself Methodist. Do you go to church regularly?”

“Mom.” I called her, smiling warningly. “Why don’t you tell Charles about your work with the foundation? My mom is the new chairwoman of my charity.”

“Oh, how fantastic.” Charles smiled, giving me a knowing look, probably glad to move away from the religion topic.
I walked away, finding Harry sitting beside my uncle Rúben and his son, Leo.

“We just don’t understand why this engagement party tomorrow can’t be here. We’d like to go too, you know?”

“Uncle,” I sighed, “the president is throwing us the party. She lives in Brasilia. So the party is there.”

“Well, the president can suck my dick.” I looked around, glad Charles and Camilla didn’t speak Portuguese. By my side, Harry, who was getting better and better at it, was struggling against a smile. “That communist! She’s using you for her party, you know? The election is gonna be tight after your wedding, she wants people to think you support her so they’ll vote for her candidate.”

“She’s not a communist.” I started, patiently. “And I can’t have an opinion on politics anymore. We’re just going because it is an honor to have the president of my country, whoever she may be, throwing us an engagement party.”

“Isn’t it enough the wedding has to be in England?!” He asked. “Traditionally it would be on the bride’s hometown, you know.”

“Traditionally, Harry wouldn’t be marrying a commoner.” Leo pitched in.

“I’m just saying, we don’t get to see you often enough and now even your wedding will be far away.”

“Uncle, please, you didn’t even came for Christmas last year.” I said, dismissively.

“Yeah, because I live away! But if the wedding was here…”

I ignored him, and walked away pulling Harry by the hand.

“I mean, she is dressing better now that she is going to be a princess, which is a good move, but she’s always been a little slutty, you know?” My aunt was telling Camilla. I walked faster.

I didn’t stop pulling Harry by the hand until we were safely in the pier in my parents’ backyard.

It was now June and our wedding was less than two months away. The Brazilian government was throwing us an engagement party in the country’s capital, Brasilia. President Dilma was hosting it, as it was her last year on the post, and my very traditional and right-wing family was convinced this was a plot on her side to get people thinking we supported her party so they would vote for them on the upcoming general elections. We didn’t actually support her party – I, for one, supported Luciana Genro, from a socialist party, but as I was about to become a royal I wasn’t allowed to share that information with anyone.

Because we were traveling to Brazil for it, Harry and me, and also his father and stepmother, my parents decided it would be a good idea to throw a dinner to introduce them to my extended family. The point was to include those of my family who wouldn’t be able to fly to England for the wedding because of work, or because of old age, like my two surviving grandparents. So now, my parents were hosting a little engagement party for everyone to mingle, which was enough to make me go insane.

I sat down in the pier, glad my strappy black heels were tied up so I wouldn’t risk letting it fall in the water, and Harry sat by my side.

“So.” He started. “Your aunt seems to be under the impression that she will sing at our wedding?!”
“Ugh!” I groaned, laying back in the pier, covering my face with my hands.

“I mean, is that a thing that she does? Does she sing at every wedding in your family?” I groaned louder, so he would stop talking, and he did.

“You know, grandma thinks I shouldn’t get married in white.” I told him, who laughed. “Can you believe that?! She told me. To my face. You probably shouldn’t wear white, sweet cheeks, it’ll be bad luck considering, you know…”

“Oh, god.” He shook his head.

“Yeah, you can laugh. But soon enough they’ll be your family, too.”

That wiped the smile off his face.

“They have a point, you know? About having the wedding here instead of London.”

“They do not have a point.” I rolled my eyes. “I love this place, but I haven’t lived here since I was ten, Harry. London is where we’re gonna spend the rest of our lives. I want to get married there.”

“I just…” he sighed. “I’m sorry you can’t have the wedding you want.”

As a rush of love passed through me, I smiled, sitting up and turning to him.

“We are having the wedding I want.”

“Don’t lie to me.” He shook his head. “The first time we came to this city you told me about the wedding you wanted, remember? That small church uphill, the white carpet so it wouldn’t look like Hollywood-“

“We are having a white carpet in the church.”

“The modern music, the baby’s breath-“

“Harry, please.” I interrupted, holding his hands in mine. “That was the wedding I dreamed of when I was a kid! I’m a different person now, I changed. I want different things…”

I remembered the planning we had been doing, of our wedding in the previous months. Harry’s father had helped us chose the hymns for the service, including a couple in Brazilian Portuguese. Kate and Camilla had helped me chose the flowers, a mixture of white hibiscuses, orchids and Harry’s mother’s favorite flower, lilies.

I remembered the little church up the hill and how funny it seemed in contrast to how our wedding would actually look like – the big traditional ceremony in an enormous cathedral with a service live casted around the globe. My dress with a long train. The tiara in my head. But as I imagined seeing Harry waiting for me at the altar, I realized the reality of what I was telling him.

“I want this.” I smiled. “All of it. I want our ridiculously big wedding with the expensive flowers and pretentious invitations, Harry.”

He smiled. “Our flowers are gonna be so expensive.”

“I don’t think anyone has ever spent that much money on flowers before, Harry.” He chuckled. “And the invitations? I’m very proud of them, but come on!”

“They ended up very elegant.” He argued.
“It’s so pretentious, though. They’re gonna think we’re such show-offs!” we laughed.

The invitations struggle had been solved a few weeks before, but it wasn’t before another struggle, even worst, had to be dealt with: our guest list.

You don’t know true exhaustion until you have to actually write down the names of everyone you care about – which is what Harry and I spent weeks doing. And we didn’t even need to worry about contact information – Clara and Thomas would do that later – we literally just needed to write their names. So we called our families and wiped out our phone’s and started to list everyone we wanted to see there on our big day.

Harry had a lot of friends, from school, family and military, and even friends he made when he moved to New York. On top of that, his family was huge and they were all coming. As for me, my family wasn’t all coming, because of work and age and simply because a few of them weren’t that close to us anyway, but I did have a lot of friends. Not from school, though, as Alli was the only one I actually kept in touch with, but from work.

I wouldn’t have survived working in Hollywood for fifteen years without friends – people who had learnt about me, and told me about them, people who cared and listened and made me laugh, on movie sets, on interviews, on award shows… people I had played golf with, went to dinner with, shared hair stylists with. People who cared about me before I was Prince Harry’s girlfriend, before I was even nominated for any award, and I would be damned if I didn’t invited them to my wedding.

Of course the palace had different opinions.

“You can’t invite this many people…” Edward complained. “I mean, Beyoncé? Do you even know her?”

“Yes, in fact, I do.” I told him. “Her publicist in Janine. We’ve met countless of times and she’s always been very supportive.”

“Okay, Sofia Vergara?”

“She’s a friend! She invited me for her wedding, I was so sad I couldn’t go… I was working.”

“Her husband is part of the reason she shouldn’t come, Jenifer. He was in a movie about strippers.”

“Oh, boy, you clearly haven’t seen Channing Tatum’s name there yet.”

“What?!” He asked, checking the list. “Jenifer…”

“Matthew McConaughey, too, by the way. Who was in the same movie with them and is also an Academy Award winning actor.”

“But Jenifer-“

“It’s a movie, Edward. It’s just a job. Let it go.”

“Harry?”

“Let it go, Edward.” He told him, without even raising his eyes from his own list. “How many people did you say we could invite again?”

Edward sighed. “Your family’s list is about 600 people, amongst royal families, politicians,
dignitaries and so on… so, maybe 500 for each of you?”

Harry nodded. “Well, I have 750. So…”

Edward checked my list, sighing again. “Well, Miss Popular has 870.”

“So how long is our guest list?”

Edward did the math silently. “2220.”

I laughed. “Jesus.”

“It’s not funny.” Edward dramatized. “Westminster only sits two thousand people.”

“We don’t know if we want to get married there yet!” Harry told him.

“This is too many people, guys. You need to cut back!”

Harry shrugged. “We have a lot of friends.”

“Yeah, the press has already picked up on that.” Edward said. “They are comparing your wedding to your brother’s saying you’re clearly a lot more sociable than they are.”

“It’s true, though.”

“Harry, please.” Edward sighed.

“Edward, we can’t have a big-ass wedding broadcast to the whole world and tell friends that we couldn’t invite them because it was an intimate ceremony!”

“Then don’t tell them anything! You don’t owe them an explanation.” He argued. “You don’t need to invite everyone you know!”

“We’re strictly inviting people we like! People who would make a difference.” I told him.

“Oh, really?” He asked. “Like your exes?! Because the press won’t have anything to say about that, huh?”

“Will’s ex was in his wedding.” Harry argued.

“And Tyler is barely my ex.” I replied. “We never really dated.”

“You’re inviting Tyler?!” Harry looked at me.

“Of course, he’s one of my best friends. Who did you think he was talking about?”

Harry gulped. “Uh. Chelsy.”

“You’re inviting the woman you almost married?!”

“And her husband!” He bargained.

“Harry…”

“What? You’re inviting Tyler!”

“Tyler is my friend!”
“Chelsy is my friend.” He said, and tilted his head, considering that phrase. “…ish.”

“I know!” Edward offered. “How about we cut them both off? And also around 250 more of your guests.”

“No.” Harry and I answered, together.

“You slept with him!” Harry reminded me.

“You almost married her!”

“Almost!”

“Oh, that’s much better.” I said, sarcastic.

“Jen, Chelsy is married.”

“And Tyler is living with Stacey!” I argued. “And we’re friends, Harry. We had a one night thing years ago.”

“Well, Chelsy is part of my group of friends, it will be weird if I don’t invite her.”

“Not to mention the press might pick up on the fact she invited you for her wedding.” Edward added.

“Okay, okay, fine!” I sighed. “They both come. Deal?”

Harry sighed. “Fine.”

“Not fine!” Edward interrupted. “What about the guest list?”

“You wanna cut names off?” I asked, grabbing the list from him. “How about… oh, here. We have never even met the Prime Minister of New Zealand. Why does he get to come?”

“We’re inviting Prime Ministers of all commonwealth countries.” He replied.

“Right. And this guy? Who is this?”

“Ja Song-nam? The North Korean ambassador for the United Kingdom.”

“Right, why?”

“Relations, Jenifer!” He said. “We’re inviting Brazilian and American politicians as well, you know.”

“Right. And if the royal family gets to invite all these people we don’t even know, we get to invite whomever we want.”

So that was a battle Edward lost. Wedding guest list down, it was time to send invitations. After some research I had the idea of a boxed invitation: a silk nude box opened with two tabs to the sides revealing a golden handcrafted Brazilian lace in the base, serving as bed for the card, which had a beige edging with golden borders in cream colored paper. In the middle, in gold embroidery with golden calligraphy writing, it read: The Lord Chamberlain is commanded by the Queen to invite _____ to the marriage of His Royal Highness Prince Henry of Wales with Miss Rosangela Jenifer Ferreira. Friday, third of August, 2018.’
It was important to my parents I used my birth name, so that was a battle I lost. We approved the invitations. Pretty and elegant? Yes. Pretentious and snobbish? You bet. And so the only other big detail to figure out before sending them out was the place where we would get married – which was a detail that needed to be printed in the invites as well.

And so Harry and I set out in a tour of traditional London churches to decide which one we liked best. The press had a field day, as it was impossible to hide from them doing something like this. They closed all of the churches we were checking, but still, they could see us arriving and leaving and there was nowhere we could run to. Bystanders started following us around too, and so we had ourselves an audience.

We checked the Saint George’s Chapel in Windsor, which was very pretty, but even if I didn’t want to get married in the capital so it was easier for our overseas guests to get around, the place only held 800 guests. So we set out for Westminster Abbey.

The place where Will and Kate got married was gorgeous, though a little too grim and gothic for my taste.

“It just seems so… dark.” I argued, as a priest guided us around. “No offense, though, father.”

“I’m not a fan either.” Harry assured me. The priest gave us some room and, in the privacy, I stepped closer to Harry.

“Don’t you really? You have a say in this, Harry. I don’t wanna make all the decisions.”

He shrugged. “It reminds me too much of my mother’s funeral.”

“Oh.” I nodded. “Right. Well…” I sighed. “I suppose we could always cut off a lot of our guests and get married in Saint George’s Chapel.”

He gave our staff a worried glance from where they stood at a distance, with the priest.

“There’s one last church.” He said. “But they’re not gonna like it.”

On Ludgate Hill at the highest point of the City of London, sat Saint Paul’s Cathedral, the seat of the Bishop of London and the mother church of the Diocese of London. It was built between 1675 and 1710, after its predecessor was destroyed in the Great Fire of London.

The bishop of London himself walked us around the empty church that afternoon, telling us a bit about it. “This was the first Cathedral to be built after the English Reformation in the sixteenth-century,” he explained, “when your namesake, sir, Henry VIII removed the Church of England from the jurisdiction of the Pope and the Crown took control of the life of the church.”

“Fitting, then.” Harry joked.

I was barely listening to him, or the bishop. I was walking around absentmindedly admiring every detail of the inside of the church. Its grayish-white magnificent walls were large and had golden detailing, forming arches on the top, close to its very high ceilings. The floor was black and white, as a chessboard, and I knew it would look wonderful with a white carpet. And then we reached the center of the aisle, the dome. St. Paul’s dome was one of the most famous parts of the country – it could be seen from miles away. From the inside it was even more impressive: every edge was gold. Every surface wide enough had a painting in it, of angels and other Bible passages – I spotted Jesus carrying the cross in the center. There was so much to observe I could have stood there the whole day trying to make sense of it, but it didn’t feel overwhelming. It felt open. Light. Illuminated.
“I like it.” I told Harry, after a long silence, when he stood by my side.

“Me too.” He smiled.

I looked down, remembering something. “You said they wouldn’t like it. Why?”

He took in a deep breath. “This is where my parents got married.”

It took a bit of convincing to get the palace officials okay with our choice, but considering we had so many guests, they were forced to say yes, and so it was announced. The problem was that it would seem as if we were trying to imitate Harry’s parents wedding, and it would be weird that the fifth in line to the throne would have a bigger wedding than his brother - the heir. There was nothing we could do about it, though. We simply had too many guests. And we didn’t care.

So the invitations were sent and a picture of the main text was sent to the press – one that didn’t contain the other information in the invites, about RSVPs and the reception and party, that was private. Still, our request that that information be held secret didn’t stop most of – admittedly - my guests posting pictures of it to Instagram. So everyone ended up seeing our little pretentious choice, which I honestly felt proud of.

Ellen DeGeneres, an old friend, even opened hers on her show, showing it to everyone and comparing it to most wedding invitations, making jokes about how that wasn’t your typical invite, and how she felt the need to send a classical quartet to accompany her RSVP, so it would be on the same level.

“And do you like the church?” Harry asked, on the pier in my parent’s backyard, weeks later.

“Yes.” I smiled. “I’m really excited about the church… I’m not as excited about climbing all those steps in a wedding dress, but I’ll manage.”

He smiled. “And your tiara. You like your tiara?”

I smiled largely. “I love my tiara!”

The Queen had called me to Buckingham Palace not long before. I was ushered to her sitting room, where after the whole yada-yada of curtsying and small talk, she showed me to a big velvet box in a table.

“I had the crown jewels master bring this here from the vault.” She told me. “It belonged to my mother.”

She opened the box to reveal a delicate tiara with a garland of wild roses in diamonds mounted in silver and gold. It looked like a diamond version of a flower crown.

“It’s called the Strathmore Rose Tiara.” The Queen told me. “My father gifted this to my mother in 1923, but it is understood it was already an antique when he purchased it. She’s the only one who’s ever worn it.”

Breathless, I approached, noticing how the light reflected in the diamonds making it shine as if it was made of stars.

“It’s amazing.” I told her.

“When Harry was planning his wedding to Ms. Davy,” she started, “I offered her the same tiara Catherine wore to her wedding.”
“That was beautiful, too.”

“Ms. Davy didn’t seem to think so.”

“How come?”

“She politely declined it.”

Though she was a well of manners, I could hear something else in her tone. A sort of… bitterness.

I knew what it was, of course. Though Harry had told me I could wear whatever I wanted in our wedding – even the flower crown I had dreamed of – Edward had been more forward and explained to me that lending a tiara to brides marrying into the family was a way the Queen had to welcome them. To let them know how she felt, and acquiring a sense of how they would fit into their new role within the firm.

Edward had explained to me when the engagement had been cancelled, rumors had it that the Queen hadn’t been surprised because, according to her, she knew something was wrong when Chelsy refused the tiara. So Edward urged me to accept whatever she offered.

However, I couldn’t pretend I didn’t understand Chelsy’s anxiety over this.

Going against what I had been warned, I spoke. “I can imagine why she would do that.”

“And why do you think that is?” Queen Elizabeth asked.

“Well… when you grow up in a world that has no tiaras in it, it’s hard to see yourself as the type of person who would suddenly wear one.” I shrugged, still completely mesmerized by the shine of the diamond flowers. “And Chelsy was never sure enough in herself to understand that wearing one doesn’t change who she is, like marrying Harry wouldn’t either. It’s more about…” I sighed, thinking about it. “It’s more about allowing yourself to change. About knowing who you are and knowing that change will come either way, no matter who you’re married to. If she had been strong in who she was, she would know that it was possible to keep that and be willing to change at the same time. Not everything is black and white.”

“And you?” She asked. “Are you sure enough in yourself to remain who you are after you marry him, and also be willing to change?”


She smiled. “Harry tells me you wanted to wear a flower crown.”

I nodded. “When I was planning a different wedding… I don’t think the flower crown would go with the cathedral.”

“What about this one, then?” She asked, looking at the tiara. “It is basically a flower crown, but made of diamonds.”

“Yes, it’s gorgeous.”

“Do you think it goes with the cathedral?”

“I think it goes with everything.”

“Would you like to wear this tiara, Ms. Silva?”
I smiled, excitement taking over me. “I would be honored to, ma-am.”

Twenty-four hours after surviving my family’s engagement dinner, Harry and I – along with our parents and my brother and sister in law, were all in black-tie in my country’s capital shaking hands with the most high profile politicians and business people Brazil had to offer. We were seated at the main table, with myself beside the president and Harry beside the vice-president, and our parents besides their plus ones. I could see my mother and father were a little overwhelmed by the type of event, eyeing worryingly the cutlery and crystal plates, fidgeting in their clothes as if they didn’t belong. Their most interesting looks came when the president – or literally anyone - would speak to me and I replied smilingly and politely in a heartbeat. It’s like they were impressed I wasn’t bothered by the occasion, and it made me wonder how long would it take for them to grow used to the fact that this is what my life would look like now.

Chapter End Notes

JEN HAS A TIARA! THEY HAVE A CHURCH! ITS HAPPENING ITS HAPPENING! I’M SO EXCITED!

Question: where would YOU have your royal wedding? what tiara would you use? Tell me!

As usual thanks you for your awesomeness and I hope you’re well! Let me know if you liked it? Love ya, bye!
Family Issues

Chapter Summary

Harry takes Jen to meet his mother.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Jenifer…”

“Back off, L.F.,” I warned, spinning in my pleated skirt to look at him, “I’m not changing.”

Edward raised his hands, defeated, and didn’t say another word about my attire.

“For whatever is worth, I think you look great.” Harry smiled.

I smiled back, spinning in place to show him my whole outfit: my purple floral pleated skirt almost covered my knees, and the bodice of the dress was dark blue and had only one shoulder. I had paired it with purple pumps, the same shade as the print in the skirt, and the same shade as the hat in my head, which looked more like a disc hanging to the side of my face with a bow on the other.

“Thank you. I think I look great too.” I replied. I was particularly excited about dressing as a royal – the whole thing, including the hat, made the change in my life feel realer. “You look like a penguin.” I teased. He grinned despite himself and made a big wave with his arms before dramatically putting on his black top hat.

All ready to go, we headed to the car and drove to Berkshire, more specifically, to Ascot, where that month of June we were to attend the opening of the traditional horserace Royal Ascot.

The only thing I knew about it was what I had seen in My Fair Lady – the fancy people and hats – and funnily enough, I wasn’t that far off.

I had never been to a horserace before, and the fact that my debut would be in Ascot was a big deal because, as I had been properly informed, the Ascot Racecourse was a big deal. One of the leading racecourses in the United Kingdom, hosting nine of Britain’s 32 annual Group 1 horse races, Royal Ascot is owned by Ascot Racecourse Ltd, and it was founded in 1711 by Queen Anne, which is probably why it is such a big tradition that the royal family attends every year.

The Queen arrives each day in a horse-drawn carriage with the Royal procession taking place at the start of each race day and the raising of the Queen’s Royal Standard; that year, she was joined in her carriage by Prince Philip and the Princess Royal and her husband. Behind them, followed Harry and me, and his cousins Beatrice and Eugenie, with one last carriage behind us with Harry’s uncle Andrew, Edward and his wife Sophie, the countess of Wessex - a stunning blonde that made me pray I would age that well.

Eugenie and Beatrice had been the ones to help me shop for hats for Ascot – Kate wouldn’t attend that year, and the only hat I owned was the one I wore to Chelsy’s wedding. Considering it was my first event as a semi-official part of the family, I thought it would be best to not repeat it, so purple it was, a lot darker than the pale pink from back then. It was also a lot bigger as Ascot was known
for its eccentric fashion and hats. Ascot was, after all, a major event in the British social calendar, and press coverage of the attendees and what they are wearing often exceeded the coverage of the actual racing, so I knew I had to dress to impress.

Attending this with the royal family meant a lot for a two reasons: one, I wasn’t yet married to Harry, which made my attendance with them – and the rolling along in the carriages – a bit of a novelty. The second reason was that despite it not being traditional for fiancés to attend, I had been invited because apparently the public wanted to see me.

After attending the Invictus Games in Denmark alone, Harry had to deal with a lot of public disappointment and media hell as well as they all wondered why I hadn’t gone with him. My press secretary, Monica, had explained I had issues to deal with in England, which wasn’t completely a lie, though the truth was we didn’t think it would be appropriate to attend while we weren’t yet married. The edition in Florida had been different, of course, as I lived in the country. But traveling to another country just to attend could wait until we were married – or that’s what we thought before realizing people really wanted to see us together these days.

“Besides,” Thomas had explained to me, “you’ll be married in less than two months, so there’s really no need to pretend you don’t belong.”

Still, I wanted to make sure I would act as belonging as I could. I had prepared for a lot of problems in Ascot, but now for the weather. It was cold – it was actually exactly 18º C, so not cold, but chilly. Chilly enough to make me regret not wearing an overcoat or blazer. Chilly enough to make me realize – as we rode in the open carriage through the fields into the horserace arena – that I would have to adjust more than my hemlines when it came to fashion after getting married. I would have to accept I needed to cover up more, not for prude reason, but because England was cold!

Riding into racecourse, it was easy to accept the changes in my life. Starting by the outskirts of the area, where the public could buy the cheaper places to watch the race, the crowd was already wearing different gear.

“Oh are these people?!” I asked, on a low tone, trying not to move my lips too much.

“The masses.” Eugenie replied, smiling and waving to the crowd as they started to see us there.

“They like Ascot, it makes them feel a little more posh.” Her sister, Beatrice, added.

The women were wearing multicolored dresses of all shapes and big headpieces to match. Their legs were overly tanned and they hair was smoothly straightened, but they still looked like they were in a costume party. Those were the attendees of the Windsor enclosure, the one with tickets starting at 75 and 85 pounds, which allowed the people to watch from the sides of the field, where we could see the same women in heels and men in suits and ties sitting in picnic towels or benches. The next was the Queen Anne enclosure and then there was the Royal enclosure.

The Royal Enclosure was, according to what I had been told, the most prestigious of the three enclosures, as it was the one the Queen and Royal Family members attended. Access to the Royal Enclosure, which offered fine dining and hospitality, and a selection of bars, is restricted, with high security and all. First-time applicants must apply to the Royal Enclosure Office and gain membership from someone who has attended the enclosure for at least four years. The dress code is strictly enforced – as opposed to the lighter one from the other enclosures. For women, only a day dress with a hat is acceptable, with rules applying to the length and style. Pantsuits were welcome, but the rules about color and fabric made my head hurt. In addition, women were not allowed to show bare midriffs or shoulders. For men, black or grey morning dress with top hat was
required – the reason why Harry was looking like a penguin.

The carriages rode into an open area into the racecourse and in front of the stands where the public – a sea of colorful hats - eagerly awaited with their phones up to snap pictures of the royal family. Even the way they yelled and waved seemed polite, and as I had been instructed I could, I smiled and waved back, along with the others, trying not to think too much of what they would think of what I was wearing. It would always be a weird feeling seeing the faces of total strangers smiling happily at me as if I was making their day by simply showing up.

We were driven into the big stand and took the modern elevators in the facility to the level of the privet box the royal family used, which was filled with relatives and friends of the royal family, all of who I was ushered around to meet and greet with Harry’s hand on my lower back and the media watching from afar.

“Congratulations on your engagement, Miss Silva.” We heard, time and time again, to which we would always smile and nod appreciatively, thanking people for their kindness.

Finally, we were able to find seats ear Eugenie and Beatrice, and none other than the Warrens.

“Oh, I love your dress!” Zoe smiled, kissing my cheek in greeting.

“I love yours!” I replied, admiring her white lace dress with long sleeves.

As his family had been managing the Queen’s stud farm for years, Jake was always around for horse related events, which was good because I liked him, but even better because having his wife around made the whole thing feel natural as she always made me feel normal even with a big ass hat in my head.

“So, we need to discuss your stag do!” Jake said, tapping Harry’s shoulder. “I’ve been talking to Will about it…” They walked away, and Zoe and I took seats on a part of the stand covered by the sun, which helped me feel a little less cold.

She quickly wiped out her cellphone to show me the latest picture of her twins, India and Zalie – Harry’s goddaughters -, who were smiling to the camera with their three-year-old mouths full of little teeth.

“They don’t even look like babies anymore.” I marveled.

“I know… they’re little ladies. They’re growing too fast.”

“Oh, they’re going to look so cute as flower girls!” I squealed, making her laugh.

“I know!” She agreed. “Though it’s still weird that you call them that, they’re bridesmaids here.” She noted. “I mean, they don’t really throw flowers or anything.”

“Whatever.” I said dismissively, making her laugh.

We had decided, invited, and released to the press the children that would be a part of our wedding as page boys and what the British called ‘bridesmaids’, but were really flower girls. We had chosen our nephews and niece – George, Charlotte and Arthur -, godchildren – Zalie, India and Kidd Artchet -, Edward Lane-Fox’s daughter Eponine, who was five now, and Mia Tindall, the daughter of Harry’s cousin Zara – the one who didn’t like me very much. That had been a particular interesting invitation, as it was obvious I had had the idea to try and charm Zara into giving me a chance. I wasn’t sure she bought it, but she was excited to have her little girl all dressed up in a cute dress, which softened her up, which was exactly the plan.
“God, in less than a month you’ll be married.” Zoe marveled. “How weird is that?!”

“Too weird.” I agreed, feeling my stomach clenching away in a mixture of excitement and nerves.

“Are you overwhelmed? I remember being completely overwhelmed when I was planning our wedding, and ours was minimal compared to yours.”

“I’m not so overwhelmed by the wedding as much as I am with everything else going on.”

Zoe nodded, grinning. “Just last week I read they’re making a Lifetime telly movie about you and Harry.”

Coming back, Jake and Harry took their seats beside us. “Oh, yeah, that was great!” Jake laughed. “Who do you think will play Harry?!”

“Some poor bastard that’ll have to dye his hair ginger.” Harry replied.

“Are you going to watch it?”

“Hell, yeah.” I said, smiling. “I’ll probably have to be drunk to get through it, but I wanna see how wrong they get everything that happened.”

Unless the movie writers decided to write a movie about how Prince Harry and Jenifer Silva got together after a fake relationship publicity stunt, I didn’t think there was any chance the movie would be too realistic.

“I wonder if we’ll be in it.” Jake pondered, making Zoe chuckle.

“Sorry, love, I don’t think so.”

“Did you guys see that Telegraph piece on our wedding party?” Harry asked them. “The one that called Zalie and India the cutest kids in England since the Beckhams?”

“Yes!” They replied together, excitedly, making us laugh. “We framed it! We’ll keep it forever!” Zoe admitted.

As the wedding got nearer, things were getting weirder. One of those things were the magazine pieces about the wedding, including every detail they could get their hands on. People, Vanity Fair, Hello, the Daily Mail, and the Telegraph were all making special editions now and then with all the information relevant, from a timeline of my life and our relationship, to mini biographies of everyone in our wedding party: the ushers, the bridesmaids and the kids, explaining who they were, what they did for a living, and what was their relation to us.

It also felt like every month there was a new documentary made about me and Harry, about our relationship, our wedding, or even just about me, so that people could ‘get to know their future new duchess’. I had developed a habit of watching them with Harry and making a drinking game out of it: the rule was take a shot for every information that’s wrong. Quickly, documentary night became drunk night, and Harry decided it was time to stop, as he was still worried about my ulcer problem. We stopped watching them then, because drinking was the only way to get through the interviews with old teachers I barely remembered, so-called friends that I recalled had never been particularly nice to me or whom I hadn’t even spoken to in years, and even neighbors from when my family and I lived in California.

“Is there any planning still left to be done for the wedding?” Zoe asked, conversationally.
“The security plan is still being decided.” I told her. “But we basically don’t have anything to do with that…”

“We did get to choose some crap to be sold with our faces on it.” Harry added.

“Oh, yeah. Apparently the Royal Arts Collection, which is a thing-“

“Of course it’s a thing!” Zoe interrupted. “They care for the Queen’s art pieces, right?”

“Right.” I nodded. “Apparently no one but me finds it weird the amount of organizations that care for the royal stuff…”

Smiling despite himself, Harry added. “They showed us a proposition of designs last month, and they’ll go on sale in a few days.”

“Plates, cups, pill boxes, all with our entwined initials in gold and silver, and some hearts, doves and ribbons.” I added, still sounding as weirded out by it as I had been when Edward told us about the collection.

Prices for the china pieces will start at £25 for a pill box, with tankards costing £35 and plates £40, and the international pre-sales demand had been so big they started a global shipping service and were expecting to sell at least twice as much as the anticipated. All profits from the sales will go towards the upkeep of the Royal Collection, which looks after the Queen’s extensive art collection and arranges public exhibitions.

Along with the thematic wedding china, the Royal Mint had unveiled a commemorative coin to celebrate our wedding – it was silver, big, and had our smiling faces on it with our names and the wedding date, third of August.

I couldn’t imagine who would want to pay to have tacky china with someone else’s initials and names or a coin with someone else’s faces on it, but I will tell you of one person I knew had been one of the first to buy it: my mother. I didn’t doubt we’d find it on display next time we visited my parents in Brazil.

The horserace went as horseraces go: the horses, which were better groomed than I was, were placed on position and then ran to the finish line. One of them won and that was it. We either celebrated or not. I stood for a few raced beside the Queen and Prince Philip, and the Queen’s almost juvenile excitement when her horse won made me jump in the scare when she shouted – I’m sure the internet would appreciate the picture.

The most interesting part was, however, hanging out with the Princess Royal. The only daughter of the Queen, Princess Anne had never been particularly nice to me. That day, however, she seemed to be a different person.

“Do you ride, Miss Silva?” she asked, conversationally, at one point.

“A little.” I told her. “I haven’t had much practice, sadly. But I’d love to.”

“We’ll have to arrange that.” She replied, smiling. “We have some horses up north. I’m a bit of an equestrian, you know… I could help if you’d like.”

I tried not to look too surprised. “That would be nice.”

I spoke to Harry about it a few minutes later, when we walked inside avoiding the sea of hats to get champagne.
“I mean, does she remember she used to hate me?”

“She does.” He replied, a little angry. “She just decided that now you are no longer working on entertainment and that you will be an official part of the family, you are worth her kindness.”

“Boy, when Lizzy said this is like a mafia she wasn’t kidding, was she?”

“You have no idea.”

Harry and I turned around to find a tall, stunningly gorgeous, picture-perfect blonde staring back at us.

“Kitty, hi!” Harry greeted, leaning in to kiss her spotless made-up cheek, smiling wildly. Maybe a bit too wildly for my taste, but I kept my polite smile. “How are you? How long has it been?”

“Too long. Probably since Louis got married.”

“That right. God, how is he?”

“Good, enjoying his promotion at work like the workaholic he is. But you would know that if you bothered to see us more often.”

Harry seemed uncomfortable. “Oh, yeah. I mean, things are just so hectic.”

“They always are.” She replied, sweetly, a little too understanding, making me think she understood the reason behind his discomfort more than Harry would like to admit.

Which is probably why he chose this moment to change the subject, by turning to me. “Kitty, I don’t believe you’ve met my fiancé. This is Jenifer Silva.”

I smiled at the blonde, in her skintight white lacy dress, whose eyes were behind the sheer material falling from her delicate headpiece. “It’s nice to meet you.”

“Likewise.” She smiled through her glossy lips.

“Kitty is my cousin.” Harry explained, and to the confusion on my face, he quickly explained. “Kitty Spencer, from my mother’s side.”

“Oh.” I realized, finally. I recognized the last name from our guest list: there were a lot of Spencers on Harry’s side, all related to him through his late mother. I guessed Kitty was her niece, the daughter of her brother Charles Spencer.

“The last time we saw each other, sadly, was when my brother got married quite a while ago.” Kitty added. “Harry is terrible at keeping in touch.”

“I keep in touch,” he justified, “I’ve just been busy.”

“Sure, planning the wedding of the century.” She smiled. “Thanks for the invite, by the way, I’m looking forward to it.”

“Good, we’re excited.” Harry nodded. “I’ll be a good day.”

“Will dad have to meet your fiancé when she’s already your wife?” Kitty asked, giving Harry a sharp look.

“Well…” He sighed. “It’s been really chaotic… you know how it is. We’ll try to go and say hello.”
“Do.” She smiled. “He misses you.”

“Right. Well. Kitty, it was nice to see you. We have to go, though.”

We had literally no place to be, but I didn’t say anything.

“See?” She asked me. “Terribly awful at keeping in touch.”

“It was nice to meet you.” I told her, apologetically.

“You too. And don’t worry about the, uhm, how did you call it? Mafia.” She giggled. “You’ll get used to it.”

—

“Okay, so here’s the plan.” Harry started, as he drove us back up north a few days after Ascot.

“We’ll get in and out in a jiffy. Say hello. Introduce you. Ask some personal questions. Comment on the house. Take a house tour, that should use up some time. Then you have a work appointment so unfortunately we’ll have to drive back to London.”

I giggled. “Yes, sir… but why is your uncle so bad?”

“He isn’t. He’s nice”

“Right. And that’s why I’m meeting him a month before we get married.”

“We don’t exactly have lunch with my father’s family every week.” He noted. “Kitty just likes to be dramatic.”

“Right… Kitty…”

“What?”

“You know… what’s her deal?”

“Uhm… She’s my uncle Charles’ eldest daughter,” He shrugged. “Four sisters, two brothers. Her father got married three times, so there’s that. He was my mother’s younger brother.”

“Did you ever hook up?”

“With my uncle?!”

I rolled my eyes. “With Kitty, Harry.”

“She’s my cousin!”

“So?”

“You know, you are the only person in the world that doesn’t think there’s anything wrong with shagging a cousin.”

“Whatever. She’s hot. Don’t tell me you never thought about it.”

“I didn’t!”

“Spare me, Harry! Even I would have made out with her if she was my cousin!”
He grinned. “Now I’m trying really hard not to picture that.”

“Ugh.” He laughed.

“Jen, we didn’t make out. What’s this about?” I shrugged. “Are you jealous!!”

“No.”

He didn’t insist, but was grinning the entire way to Althorp Estate, a grand property in Northampton, 121km from London. We drove in that afternoon and I couldn’t help admire the thirteen thousand acres of the property that had been in the Spencer family’s hands for over 500 years.

“This is your uncle’s house!?” I asked, disbelieving, when we stepped out in front of the colossal red brick Tudor building.

“Uh, yeah.” Harry said, closing the door of the car and walking around it to join me as our security parked behind us.

“Okay.” I said, trying not to freak out too much about the size of the house.

“Welcome,” a butler greeted us at the door, “Earl Spencer will be right with you, Your Royal Highness.”

“Thank you.” Harry nodded, leading me into the grandiose entrance room with a hand on my back.

I let him lead, as I was too busy admiring the artwork on the walls to notice where we were going.

We walked through a big room with black and white tiles and yellow ruffled curtains which had three of its walls covered from floor to ceiling with beautiful paintings of horses on perfectly real meadows.

“This is ridiculous.” I marveled.

“I’ll take that as a compliment.” Harry’s uncle said, joining us from the south door.

“It is.” I smiled.

“Uncle.” Harry greeted, hugging the tall, half-bald, round faced man.

“Harry. It’s good to see Kitty scared you into coming around for a change.”

They laughed. “This is Jenifer.” Harry added, and his uncle shook my hand enthusiastically.

“It’s a pleasure to finally meet you, Jenifer.”

“Likewise, sir.”

“Please, call me Charles.” He smiled. “Do you like it?” he asked, looking at the painting in the walls.

“Yes, very. It’s magnificent!”

“Most of these were commissioned to John Wootton in 1733 to reflect the family’s love for horses.” He explained. “At the time, he was considered to be the finest painter of horses in the country.”
“I can see that.”

“Congratulations on the wedding, by the way.” Charles Spencer said, as he walked us out of the room into another gallery.

“Thank you.” Harry smiled. “Are the kids not home?”

“Charlie is with her mother at the grandparents hose.” He explained. “The others are too independent these days to spend time with their old dad.”

“Right…” Harry chuckled.

“Laugh away, it’ll be you’ll in no time, you’ll see.”

“We are trying to get through the wedding first, uncle Charles.”

“And how is that going? Everything ready for the big day?”

“Mostly, yes.” I told him. “It’s quite unnerving realizing there’s nothing more to get done. Now we can only sit and wait, which I’m not particularly good at.”

“Jen is almost as much of an workaholic as Louis.”

“Good for you!” Charles said. “Nothing wrong with hard work.”

Harry let out an almost inaudible scoff.

“Here, here, Jenifer, if you like art, you’ll enjoy these,” he guided us into a drawing room with red walls and more paintings, and pointed at one of a lady. “That is Lavinia Bingham, Countess Spencer. And that is the first Earl Spencer, painted with his father and their servant.”

Who was, of course, black – a commented I refrained from. It occurred to me then I knew why the house seemed so impressive to me: it was because I had seen houses like this before. In Downton Abbey and every historic movie ever made where there’s a rich, high class family with a bunch of servants, who in the movies were still called slaves.

As impressive as the place was – as much as it reminded me of one of my favorite scenes from Pride and Prejudice – I couldn’t help feeling a little wrong when I realized this.

“The first John Spencer purchased Althorp estate in 1508 with the funds generated from the family’s sheep-rearing business.” Charles told us. “The mansion dates to 1688, replacing an earlier house that was once visited by King Charles I. This house once hosted Queen Mary and King George V. During the 18th century, the house became a major cultural hub in England.”

We walked around the mansion like that, with Harry’s uncle telling me the story of the Spencer legacy and how it would go to his son Louis after he died – which I found particularly bullshit considering I knew Kitty was actually older than him. Still, I was quiet and polite and expressed my most sincere amazement when Earl Spencer told us about the paintings and rooms and especially the pair of Italian black and Beschia marble blackamoor torchers in the doors of one of the halls, originally given to the First Duke of Marlborough as a present from General Charles Churchill. They even had a china museum and in the Garden Lobby, we were shown to a blue and gold cherubic Meissen chocolate set-for-one which was believed to have been made for Marie Antoinette in 1781 as a present celebrating the birth of her son, the Dauphin of France.

“Shall we have tea before or after you go down to the lake?” Charles asked once the tour was over.
“Oh, actually we won’t have time to do both.” Harry told him. “Jen has a work meeting she has to get to in London.”

“Oh, that’s too bad.” His uncle returned. I gave him my Oscar-winning disappointment face, though I knew the excuse was total bullshit.

“We’ll have more opportunities in the future, though.” I smiled.

“Yes, of course! You must promise to bring him around more often, Jenifer.”

“Absolutely.”

“Well, I’ll walk you out, then.”

“Are we having tea outside? I think it might rain.”

“No, I’ll walk you out to the lake.” Charles replied. “You said you wouldn’t have time for tea.”

“Oh. Right. Actually I thought we could have tea and go to the lake some other day.”

“Don’t be silly. Jenifer is right, we’ll have more chances to do tea, but your future wife should meet your mother, that’s more important.”

As Harry sighed, I let the confusion sink in as we were ushered outside by his uncle.

“Meet your mother?” I asked Harry, in a whisper I hoped his uncle couldn’t hear.

I didn’t wanna be insensitive, but wasn’t that a little difficult considering she was, you know, dead?

“My sister, Jenifer.” Charles explained, so I guess he could hear me. “She is buried in the property, in a small island in our lake.”

Oh.

“Her favorite place in the estate.” He explained. “Well, her favorite outdoor place. Her favorite place in the house was the studio where she used to dance. We buried some of our favorite pets in the island. Diana wanted to join them, so we made sure of that when she left us.”

“Right. Of course.” I said, feeling suddenly very out of place.

Harry hadn’t told me this was a ‘visit my dead mother’s grave’ type of visit. Then again, he had gone to great lengths to try and get us out of it.

We walked out of the big mansion and through the rock pathway surround by the greenest of grass all the way until a sand pathway surrounded by threes. Earl Spencer told me the Round Oval lake in the property was created by Teulon in 1868 and a series of 36 oak trees had been planted along the access road to represent the years of his sister’s life.

“Thirty-six years… she was so young.” I marveled, melancholically.

“And in such a short time she was able to touch so many lives. She changed the world, I reckon.”

“She did.” I agreed.

“We planted thousands of plants here, including 100 white rambling roses on the island and 1000 white water lilies, donated by Stowe School, in the water around it. Those were her favorite
flowers.” He added, pointing out the flowers around.

We had finally reached the lake, so Harry’s uncle gave him a hug, saying he should give us some privacy, and urged him to come around more often.

“And you, Jenifer, it was pleasure meeting you.” He smiled. “I look forward to bowing to you next month.” He winked, making giggle.

“Thank you for a lovely day, sir. You have a beautiful house.”

He walked away, and we kept on walking around the lake – which had a small island in its center filled with small trees. At the other side of the lake, sat the silhouette of a one-store temple with ‘Diana’ inscribed on the top, in the center of her years of birth – 1961 – and death - 1997. Inside it, covered by the small roof, was a black bench under a picture of her profile.

I stopped in front of it, and watched it in silence for a while before realizing Harry had walked on without stopping, so I hurried my step to reach him. It was a gray summer day, which was both weird and also awfully common in London, but there were little ducks swimming around the lake, and I busied myself watching them until we had rounded the lake to find a wooden bridge to the island.

Without a word, Harry walked on to it and I followed. There was a pathway of dirt amidst the island’s trees, which lead us across the island to the other tip, where a tall, gray, plinth with a big urn on top. The black marble plaque on it read simply: Diana (1961 – 1997). On the ground in front, a big arrangement of white lilies and roses. With three tops high above, the place was private and almost dark.

We stood before it for what felt like a long time, in absolute silence, as I wrecked my brain trying to think of a way to make this feel better for Harry. Should I make a joke so he knows I’m not uncomfortable? Should I say something profound and deep so he knows I understand?

The thing was, I knew, I didn’t understand. My parents were alive and well; I hadn’t had my life turned upside down in the most horrible of circumstances. I hadn’t had to grow up with my family’s most cruel moments splashed up on tabloid covers. How could I know?

I took a step to the side, closer to Harry, and held his hand in mine, leaning down to rest my head in his shoulder.

“What happens now?” I asked.

He seemed to wake from a trance and made to walk back the pathway. “We can go.”

“No, we don’t have to.” I assured, squeezing his hand and keeping him in place. “I’m just asking, you know… what do you usually do when you come?”

He shrugged slightly. “I don’t come often.”

“Why not?”

He sighed, looking at the urn. “I don’t like to think she’s here… like my uncle, you know, the way he said you should meet my mother. This isn’t my mother, Jay. It’s… it’s a stone. It’s some threes and yeah, maybe some bones deep in the dirt, but that’s not her, is it? I mean, I wish you could meet my mother too, but you can’t, can you? Because she’s dead.”

I nodded, slowly, trying to make sense of his words. “People grieve differently. You like to think
your mother’s memory is more than this, your uncle just needs something more material to remember her by.”

He nodded. “I know. I just…” he frowned, and I gave his hand a gentle squeeze.

“Anyway.” I went on. “What do you do, do you… do you talk to her?”

He grinned, uncomfortable. “No.”

“Why not?”

“It feels weird.”

“Why?”

“I told you, she’s not here. She’s up there somewhere with God, watching us. I can talk to her whenever, this is just some place.”

“Well, it’s as good a place as any, isn’t it?” I asked. “It feels like we should say something.”

“Be my guest.” He teased.

“…Okay.” I straightened up, and gave me a curious look.

I eyed the stone plinth and urn and the plaque with her name on it, the woman I would be calling my mother-in-law if things had been different. It felt awkward, with Harry by my side, grinning, so I took a couple of steps ahead so he was out of my eye view.

It felt too strange that this woman who had changed the course of the world was buried right here, but I tried to think of her as just my future husband’s mother, and I deeply wished she was around to tell me if I was making the right choices.

“So…” I started, knowing without seeing it that, behind me, Harry was smiling in victory at my uncomfortableness. I cleaned my throat, trying to block that thought, and focused on her. I forced the name on my mind: Diana. It alone meant so much it felt overwhelming to get the words out. Feeling overwhelmed, I felt the need to bend my knees in a slight curtsey.

“Did you just curtsey to a grave?!” Harry asked, and I could almost see him smile in his voice.

“Sh! This is a private moment.” I teased, glad he couldn’t see me blushing. I looked at the stone plinth again. “Hi.” I started, nervously. “I’m… I’m Jen. I’m marrying your son. I’m sure wherever you are you know that already, so… what can I say? Uhm… Very-very few things make me as sad as thinking I won’t get the chance to meet you. I would have been honored to.” I tried not to think too much of how it would have gone, if she was around to meet me. “Well, if you were anything like the rest of Harry’s family chances are you wouldn’t have liked me very much, but I like to think you would have… Anyway… Harry’s here.” I gestured blindly to my back as if she could see me. “He’s embarrassed, so I’m talking in his behalf. He misses you. Everyone does. Will is fine, too, by the way. I’m sure you’re seeing the awesome girl he married and your two adorable grandkids. Don’t worry, we’ll teach them about you. We’ll make sure they know the about the best things you left behind, like love and laughter…”

I tried to think of what else to say; I remembered how reluctant my parents had been about my relationship with Harry because of exactly her and her story. And how she ended. I remembered how scared they were I would end up the same.
I gulped. “If I’m being honest, I’m a little scared. I know it’s nonsense, as they are so kind and welcoming, but this isn’t exactly a regular family to marry into, is it?” I sighed. “I think you would have known what to say to that, and I really wish you were around so I could ask advice about it. But I’m not that scared, though.” I realized, shrugging. “I have Harry. That’s comfort enough that I’ll be okay. He’s…” I smiled, as my eyes dazzled off into the lilies. “He’s incredible. I didn’t get to know you, but I think he got that after you. He… he is kind, polite… smart… brave… caring… funny, loving. Compassionate. I’m sure you already know that. You would be proud. You…” I gulped again, trying to get rid of the painful knot on my throat. “You did a good job, ma-am… thanks for… for him.” I paused. “Hopefully I’ll be able to raise kids half as well as you did.” I took a deep breath. “Anyway, I… I just wanted you to know this. That you did a good job. We’ll make sure your legacy lives on. And, uhm… thank you.”

I curtsied again, and took three blind steps back. Harry’s arms rounded my waist on the last one as he hugged me tightly from behind, resting his chin on my shoulder. I held on to his arms gently, touching his head with mine.

“I really wish she could have met you.” He whispered. “I wish she could have known how happy you make me.”

I smiled. “I wish that too.”

“Jen?”

I closed my eyes, letting the sweet, soft sound of his voice so close to my ear calm my heart.

“Yes?”

“I know you’re scared, but… I love you.” He said. “We’re gonna be fine.”

I turned my head to the side, placing a kiss on his cheek. “It’s okay, Mr. Prince. I’m not scared when I’m with you.”

Chapter End Notes

Fun fact: this was one of the first scenes I thought of when I came up with this story =) Hope you liked it! I’m back home to good internet so this is the last of the pre-drafted chapter updated! Talk to you soon!
Royal Prenup

Chapter Summary

Jen has a bridal shower and decides she has had enough with the royal family’s shit.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Summers were funny in London: it was 20ºC outside, something the British called warm, though in my country we would refer to as a not-as-cold-as-it-could-be winter. For that very reason, when they invited me to the Trooping the Colour ceremony, I decided it was a good idea to wear a white, structured Balmain blazer over my white, off shoulder Lela Rose dress with blue floral prints matching precisely the tone of my headpiece.

Much like what had happened with Ascot, I wasn’t supposed to be there. They had invited me for publicity reasons, something I was used to after fifteen years as an actress. As much as the royal family didn’t like to consider themselves celebrities, they still needed good press, and having the soon-to-be royal bride around brought more public interest, so there I was. Trooping the Colour was a tradition of the British infantry regiments since the 17th century. That afternoon, we joined the family on Buckingham Palace to leave in the carriage procession to the Horse Guards building in front of which we would watch the troops march with their flags for the Queen to inspect.

I enjoyed the company to ask Prince Philip what the hell the ceremony was about – though not in those terms – and he was kind enough to clarify that on battlefields a regiment’s colors, or flags, were used as rallying points, which meant regiments would have their ensigns slowly march with their colors between the soldiers’ ranks to enable soldiers to recognize their regiments’ colors. Trooping the Colour also became known as “The Queen’s Birthday Parade”, though it wasn’t her actual birthday, and it was broadcast live by the BBC within the UK and telecast in Germany and Belgium, so as usual, the world would be watching.

The Queen travels down The Mall from Buckingham Palace in a royal procession with a sovereign’s escort of Household Cavalry (mounted troops or horse guards). After receiving a royal salute, she inspects her troops of the Household Division, both foot guards and horse guards, and the King’s Troop, Royal Horse Artillery. Each year, one of the foot-guards regiments is selected to troop its color through the ranks of guards. Then the entire Household Division assembly conducts a march past the Queen, who receives a salute from the saluting base.

“Mademoiselle.” Harry smiled, wearing his black military uniform, as he held up his hand to help me up on the carriage. It wasn’t my first time anymore – the second -, but it still felt surreal and overwhelming to roll around being pulled by horses with a hat in my head as a sea of people waved at us from the streets.

“Oh, my God.” I laughed, pulling the fabric in Harry’s sleeve so he would see the sign someone was holding up. It read ‘forget Prince Harry! Call me!’ followed by the guy’s phone number.

“What the hell?!” Harry let out, grinning. He looked at the guy holding it, faking outrage, but soon enough we were pass him.
We watched the ceremony from the big stands as the Queen ‘inspected’ the uniforms and flags – or whatever. There was a 400 person band playing which made for a pretty impressive and upbeat day. The whole pump and circumstance felt very foreign to me, but it made the situation a lot realer: the fact that this family I had grown somewhat used to was a monarchy that so many people respected and worked for, especially the hundreds of soldiers marching in front of us.

We then rolled back the same way to Buckingham, waving at the public, before we prepared to walk out into the balcony.

“If I’m not mistaken, it is the first time someone joins us in the balcony before being officially part of the family.” Prince Philip told me, as we waited for everyone to be ready before they opened up the doors. I knew he meant it as a compliment, so I would feel like I was accomplishing some kind of achievement, but I couldn’t help but wonder what the hell was I doing there.

Then the doors opened. Three big, glass doors in the middle of the front columns in Buckingham Palace. The first thing that happened was the sound of people screaming at the sight of the Queen, who was the first to walk out with Prince Philip. After they had been out for about a minute, the palace staff signaled us out too. Harry let his father, Camilla, Will and Kate walk out – George and Charlotte with them – before gesturing for me to walk out first.

“Nah-uh.” I told him, giggling nervously. “I’m not going out there before you.”

“Okay, come on.” He smiled, offering his white-gloved hand. I held on to it for dear life and, together, we walked out into the balcony and into the view of God only knows how many people.

“Woah.” I mumbled. “This is insane!”

The Mall in front of Buckingham was taken over by people, all who screamed and waved frantically at us. George and Charlotte were joining their cousins in the front, on their tiptoes to try and see as much as they could. They had placed a little box for Charlie to step in, but even then she couldn’t see well, so pulling a crying face she quickly turned to her father who picked her up.

“What do you think, dear?” Prince Philip asked, grinning at me.

“This is so intense!” I told him, honest.

He laughed. “Yes, a few people showed up. It’ll be fuller on your wedding day.”

A few people, he said. A few people showed up. It’ll be fuller on your wedding day.

“Are you okay?” Harry asked.

I looked at him, focusing on the blue of his eyes to calm the nervous nausea inside. He looked so absolutely handsome in uniform my mind was immediately filled with different thoughts than the ones I had just been worrying about.

“I’m fine.” I smiled, leaning in to whisper in his ear. “Just can’t wait to get home to rip that uniform right out of you.”

Blushing, he bit his lip to stop form grinning too much.

He gave me a playful look. “This is couture, Silva, you’re not ripping anything.”

I threw my head back laughing loudly, and he joined; a few of the family members around gave us funny looks, so we avoided looking at each other to try to pretend it was just an inside joke –
which wasn’t wrong.

Then, from down the horizon I spotted three colorful dots - red, white and blue – as nine airplanes flown in position over the palace making the crowd and the kids go wild. It was hard not to let my eyes follow them as they flew past us; it didn’t get much more impressive than that.

After the ceremony, the crowds started to walk home, as did everyone in Buckingham. We followed Will and Kate by car to Kensington to take a look at how the renovations were going in our soon to be home there.

As Harry had predicted, the palace officials – more specifically, the security intelligence – hadn’t allowed us to keep on living in our apartment in Knightsbridge, so Her Majesty had offered us one in Kensington Palace, much like what had been given to Will and Kate.

“So they just give us an apartment? Just like that?” I asked Harry back when they had first told us a few months before.

“Yep.” He said. “Now we have to go and chose a good one.”

“…okay.”

I had known that was sort of how it went but to simply be given a fine piece of real estate out of thin air just felt too fairytalish not to comment. And though they called it that, it wasn’t just an ‘apartment’, either. Will and Kate’s had twenty bedrooms and had once belonged to the Queen’s sister.

Choosing ours was a little more difficult.

“Apartments 4A and 4B are too small, the State Rooms are ready to move in, but they face the gate so it would be too easy for tourists and press to keep an eye on you at all times.” Edward explained.

“How small are we talking?”

“Five or six bedrooms.”

“That’s a lot.”

“Not in Kensington.”

“Okay, let’s pretend that’s not ridiculous…” I sighed. “What are our options?”

“Apartment 8/9 is free.” He said.

“Why 8/9?” I asked, though I noticed Harry had gone very quiet by my side.

“It was two apartments, 8 and 9, before being made into a single one to be bigger. Not as big as Will and Kate’s, but big enough. Might need some renovations, though. No one’s lived there in years.”

“How many years?”

“Twenty one years.” Harry said. I looked at him. “It was my mother’s apartment.”

We made a visit that day. Apartment 8 and 9 was located in the north side of Kensington Palace, it had a view to a cottage and other smaller detached apartments in front, but facing the back gate, it
was as private as it could be. The outside was, like all of Kensington, in dark bricks and white windows and the front door was a white alcove with grey frosted windows, and dark wooden double doors with a wrought iron knocker.

It looked like a house – an actual, proper house. A house with a backyard and garden – even though it was technically part of the rest of the palace as well. Even inside, it didn’t feel oddly big and overwhelmingly magnificent as Buckingham Palace. It felt like a house. Which was a problem, because I knew whose house it had been.

I looked at Harry as we toured the place, he seemed weirdly at ease there, but I had to make sure.

“Could you live here?” I asked.

He smiled, shrugging. “I already did.”

“I know, but you know what I mean…”

“Yeah. Well… they’ve changed it a lot over the years, you know? All the furniture that was my mother’s is gone. And they even repainted most of it… I wouldn’t mind so much living here, I guess.”

“That’s not good enough.”

“Why not?”

“Harry, this will be our home. I need it to feel like that to you.”

“Jay…” He sighed. “This is my home. This was my first home. This is the last place where I saw my mother alive. To this day I still think back to here when I remember my childhood and her. I like it. I just… I don’t want you to think you have to choose this place because of me.”

I looked around. As any respectable palace, the ceilings were as high as my ambitions. The walls of the entrance hall and vestibule were yellow, not an annoying tone, just light enough that would go beautifully with a floral print in salmon or light blue. The drawing room was big and had a white fireplace. The doors all were traditional flat wooden doors with an intricate white framing that was vintage in its design, but regal. The stairs were large and impressive. It had a dining room, a study, two different receptions rooms, two kitchens – one for the family and one for the staff -, and fifteen bedrooms in the two upper floors. It was light and open with the curtains wide open and I could see my paintings around. I could see our white couches and the picture frames I would place over the fireplaces. I could even imagine which tapestry I wanted and what walls we would have to repaint.


“Are you sure?”

“Yes.” I smiled. “It’s a house. A proper house. I could have my garden. And I could come home to you.”

He smiled. “That’s the one thing you can be sure of.” His smile faded slightly. “Can I ask you to help me make sure of something else?”

“Name it and it’s yours.”

“Make it look different. Make it look like us, and not, you know… them.”
“I can do that.”

And so we began the renovations. There wasn’t much to be done since the apartment had been repaired in the last few years to serve as reception and meeting rooms for staff, so it already had updated heating, underfloor heating and encrypted Wi-Fi. We were adding a TV projector, a panic room, video cameras in every room and mesh curtains on each window designed to catch shattered glass. The basement was also receiving a proper modern laundry room and gym, and the master bedroom, as well as three other big bedrooms, were being remodeled to contain ‘his and hers’ dressing rooms and bathrooms. We also repainted most of the walls and added more modern wallpaper, as well as hiring a decorator to make a project for the whole place. We asked her to use the furniture we had in our apartment in Knightsbridge, so that Kensington would feel like home even when we had to leave our first apartment together behind.

The apartment would be ready in just under a couple of weeks, and the new furniture would arrive days before the wedding. The rest of it – our furniture from Knightsbridge – would be transferred there when we went to our honeymoon, this way we could come back straight to Kensington after, ready to start our life as a married couple.

The countdown to the wedding finally reached less than a month: we spent most of those days planning things and making sure all was in order. I also met with Ophelia a lot of times to plan her wedding as well, which would happen a little more than a month after mine.

People kept on prying for any bit of information about us, even after we had given them everything we could. We finally released a statement clarifying I would be keeping my social media accounts to promote my work, which everyone seemed excited about – except they seemed to be expecting me to post selfies with Harry at all times, which would just not happen. Clara had gone through the trouble of making a number of accounts on twitter and Instagram with all the possible handles I could go on to have after the wedding to sort of reserve them, which was harder as we still didn’t know which title the Queen would give Harry – which would go on to be my new last name. She just reserved all of the possible handles she could think of.

A heritage center traced back my family line about three weeks before the wedding, something Kate told me they had done with her as well, which was how they learned she had a few distant famous cousins – including Ellen DeGeneres. I had no famous relatives, but my heritage was a lot more interesting than I had imagined.

As it turns out, my mother’s ancestors were from Portugal and had fled to Brazil after the country declared its independence from Portugal. The Brazilian Empire wanted to incentive occupation of the provinces of Southern Brazil which were empty due to its small population, vulnerable to attacks by Argentina and the Kaingang Indians. So my ancestors, from Azores, hopped on a boat and made their way down to southern Brazil, where they settled down in the fishermen village where they lived for generations – where my great-grandmother learned about the bobbin lace and became a lace maker. There they lived until my grandparents decided to live in the city, where they raised my mother.

My father’s ancestors were even more interesting: I had always known my grandfather was a black man, something most people found strange considering my father was quite white (after his mother). I had, however, two uncles who had darker skin than he did, and their kids, my cousins, did too. My grandmother was white, with dark eyes and the wedding photographs showed us she once had striking, straight dark hair – probably where I got it from. As the heritage research uncovered, my grandfather was the descendant of African slaves brought to Brazil from
Mozambique. Most of his family had made a living for generations in the north of the country after the abolition, until he and his brothers decided to make the journey south when they were young. My grandfather met my grandmother in the way.

My grandmother’s family doesn’t have a history of how they arrived in Brazil, because they never did. They had always been there. Her ancestors were indigenous people from the north of the country, from a tribe known as Tremembé, which back in the 1500s, when the Portuguese first arrived in Brazil, ranged from São Luis Island, in south Maranhão, to the mouth of the Acaraú River in north Ceará. For generations they lived in rural Maranhão until my grandmother’s parents traveled to Goiás.

My grandfather was traveling to find work in construction in the new Brazilian capital, Brasilia, which was being built from scratch in Goiás in the fifties. He dreamed of making a better life for himself, and in the journey there he met a sweet looking indigenous girl who lived with her parents near a river. They got married shortly after and moved to the south of the country after they had run out of work in Brasilia. That’s where they raised their family, and that’s where their son, my father, met his future wife, my mother.

“You never knew any of this?” Harry asked, seeing me completely overwhelmed as I read the reports online after the ancestry organization made it public.

“No.” I told him. “We knew bits and pieces. We know my grandparents moved to the city from a fishermen village. We knew they were descendants of Portuguese people. And my grandfather is black, so we’ve always known at some point in his history there had to be something about slavery. But my grandmother? An Indian?!”

“That’s pretty incredible.” He commented, raising a hand to strike my hair. “That’s where you got your pretty black hair.”

“Why am I white?!”

“Your mother.” He shrugged. “She’s basically all Portuguese, right?”

“That’s so weird. This feels so weird!”

“Why?” He asked, seeming genuinely intrigued.

“Harry,” I sighed, “you’ve always known your history. Right? I mean, you grew up knowing your history.”

“Most people in the world knows my history.” He said, sarcastic. “Not to sound snobbish, but it’s in history books.”

I smiled. “Well, yes. But I’ve never known any of this! And now… I do.” I sighed. “It feels so… incredible. To know. To simply know where I came from… and the amount of people that went through so much to get me here. To where I am. I’m… I’m amazed.”

He smiled. “Not too shabby for a part indigenous, part black, part Portuguese girl.”

I smiled. “Yeah. Not too shabby at all, I guess.”

As hipster as it sounds, I was wearing a flower crown that day. It was the same shade of fuchsia as my lace Valentino dress, the same shade as the rose in the ankle of my otherwise nude Dolce and
Gabbana strap sandals, a gift from Ophelia.

Taylor and Alessa had pulled off a pretty incredible bridal shower. The theme was flowers, and that was what the decoration was entirely made of: the most incredible and magnificent flower arrangements everywhere in our apartment. The cake, the sweets, the sandwiches all had edible flowers in them, matching the ones in my head.

The best part was that the girls had flown in my family for it – my mother, Livia (and Arthur, who had to be fitted for his page boy outfit anyway) and Thai! Camilla and Kate, Harry’s cousins Bea, Eugenie, Zara and Autumn, Harry’s aunt Sophie as well as her daughter Lady Louise, and the girls from our friend group (mine and Harry’s) were all there. The guests were given cards when they arrived, with lines and two options (J and H) to circle the person who had done said thing. The options were: ‘I initiated our first kiss’, ‘I said I love you first’, ‘I paid for our first date’, ‘I met the future in-laws first’, ‘I cooked our first dinner’, etc. the guests turned in the cards after filling them and whomever got more points won (it was Monica, who knew us far better than I was comfortable with).

Around the party the girls had set up giant versions of jenga and connect four (with mine and Harry’s faces on the pieces). The games had a ‘Jen twist’, as Alli and Taylor had called it: the loser had to do a shot of vodka. Then the girls got everyone together (and sat me in a flower throne in front, to make us all play ‘guess who?’ about the characters I had played once.

“This girl was a bit bitchy, sarcastic, and liked to punch her way out of problems.” Taylor read from a card, allowing our guests time to guess.

“Jen!” Ophelia shouted.

“You’re supposed to guess the character she played, which we’re describing.” Alli explained.

“Okay, but tell me that doesn’t perfectly describe Jen too?” She asked, grinning, and I gave her a sarcastic look. “There! See?!”

James and Craig – who had demanded invitations – were tied for the final score. The other game was ‘princess racecourse’ and they managed to convince Kate, Beatrice and Eugenie to compete against me. We had to walk across the room with books in our heads and make a perfect low curtsey (to the floor! In heels!). There was also a big picture of me and a prop tiara so that guests could play ‘pin the tiara in the Jen’.

The big finale was a pinãta with the (redacted) faces of my ex-boyfriends for me to beat the crap out of, which felt pretty great.

The day had been so much fun I didn’t even want it to end, but we had a long week to come – including checking out wedding vendors with Ophelia for her wedding and the final fitting of my wedding dress, so at some point I just had to say goodbye to my guests.

Camilla smiled as she gave me a kiss in the cheek goodbye – something she was doing a lot more often these days, now that she seemed to actually like me.

“Do stay calm, Jen.” She told me, sweetly, right before she turned to leave. “I’m going to Buckingham right now where Harry and Charles are talking it over with Her Majesty. I’m sure it’ll be fine.”

“I… uh. Sure.” She left, and I was left behind feeling confused. “You know, she’s the third person to say something weird to me today.” I commented, walking to my bedroom with Monica at my
feet. “I mean, when Eugenie got here today she said I shouldn’t read too much into it. And Lizzie said I should be glad. I was so excited about the shower I didn’t read too much into it, but now it seems like they’re talking about something I don’t know about.”

I looked back when Monica didn’t answer, to see she had stopped walking. She was biting her lower lip, nervously.

“Can Edward fire me?” she asked.

“What?”

“Edward. Lane-Fox. Is he my boss?”

“Well… He’s training you. But no, I’m your boss, I think.”

“Cool.” She sighed. “Here’s the thing, something leaked early today.”

Faster than I enjoyed, I started to understand.

“Is that what Camilla, Lizzie and Eugenie were talking about?”

“Yes.”

“Edward said he would fire you if you told me?” She didn’t answer. “What’s it about?”

“Your prenup.”

“We don’t have one.”

She sighed again. “Exactly.”

“I don’t understand.”

Monica typed away in her phone, and walked over to show me a story on the Daily Mail, claiming the Royal Family was pressuring Harry to sign a prenup out of fear our relationship wasn’t as strong as we claimed.

“This is… it’s just tabloid garbage. It doesn’t make any sense.”

“Sure. Yeah. I agree.”

I gave her phone back and started walking back to my room. Then I stopped, and turned to her slowly. She hadn’t moved yet, probably waiting for me to come to a painful conclusion.

“But if it was just a rumor, why would Camilla tell me Harry and Charles are talking it over with the Queen in the palace?” I asked. “And why would Edward threaten to fire you if you told me just because of a rumor?” She didn’t answer again, which told me more than I wanted to know. “Unless it isn’t just a rumor.”

I let out a long breath and turned to my room again.

“What are you gonna do?!” Monica asked, noticing me murder-walk my way to the closet.

I took off my dress and heels – and the flower crown -, and put on a royal blue pleated skirt with daisies print, a lace, high neck white top and white Tom Ford sandals, using the fashion to try and calm the sudden burst of rage inside of me.
“You know, this isn’t about you.” Monica said, soothingly. “Edward said they like you. They just
don’t have much thrust in Harry’s personal choices after Chelsy… so they’re trying to protect the
family and his inheritance.”

I distracted myself by picking a loose white blazer and transferring my stuff from one purse to
another, smaller, a Dior handbag. I took off the fuchsia earrings and picked another pair.

“And it’s not even so much about money as it is about future children you may have.” I looked at
her, appalled, and she tried to explain quickly. “They say Harry should ask you to sign a waiver
giving him parental custody in case of divorce.”

Without another word, I marched out of my closet and bedroom to the kitchen, where I found Eddy
and Johnnie.

“We’re going out?” they asked, surprised. I didn’t answer, but I suppose my expression said
enough, because they quickly got their jackets and followed me to the elevator, with Monica
breathlessly doing the same.

“You should wait for Harry to come back and talk to him about it.” Monica said, in the elevator.
“He’s in Buckingham! You can’t just walk in there!”

We would see about that.

Monica didn’t say anything else until I got in the car – in the driving side. She must have known
then that I was really angry, and I was. Driving helped me focus on something instead of simply
raging the whole way there, and I didn’t usually drove in London. I still hadn’t gotten used to the
different side of the road, so if I was willing to do it to take my mind of the rumor, that was proof
my rage was reaching brand new levels.

The guards at Buckingham Palace were usually warned when someone would be coming in – they
didn’t get drop in visitors. But when I stopped the car in front of the gate and honked, one of the
guards saw who I was and said something to someone else (probably ‘that’s Prince Harry’s
fiancé!’). They opened the gate and let me in, probably just trying to avoid letting me where
paparazzi could easily spot me, and I enjoyed that to drive all the way inside.

“You should have stayed there until they cleared you, I think.” Johnnie said. He must have known
what he was talking about, because he and Eddie had done remarkably well in the royal family’s
security protocol course.

“Miss Silva? Good evening-“ the butler greeted me, surprised, when I stepped out of the car as a
guard dressed in red opened the door for me. “Can I help you with-?” he tried to ask, but I was
already walking past him and up the steps inside, to the place I now knew quite well.

Thank God British people are so polite or else they would have tackled me to the floor right as
they noticed I would not be stopping no matter how many times they gently asked me to.

It was interesting to think back to the last time I had been at Buckingham, for Trooping the Colour
in the previous month. Back then I was wearing a longer dress, a hat and feeling nervous and
overwhelmed to be part of such tradition, of such a historic family. But today I had a problem with
that family. Because that family was messing with mine.

I walked quickly to the place I imagined Her Majesty would be – where I knew Harry, his father,
and Camilla would be talking to her about this. He had told me that morning he would go see his
father during the bridal shower to ‘talk some things over’ to let the place to me and my friends, but
I struggled with the idea that he had been keeping from me that his family was pressuring him to make me sign a prenup.

“Jen, for the love of God.” Monica begged, practically running to keep up with me, with the butler and a couple of guards after her. “This is Buckingham Palace, you can’t just walk in!”

“I just did.” I said, without looking at her.

I had my head held high when I reached the hallway of Her Majesty’s study. There was another guard in a red uniform at the door and Edward Lane-Fox was nearby.

“Jenifer?!” He asked, surprised.

“Is it true?” I asked, calmly, giving him a pointed look.

He looked at Monica, then at me, and sighed. “It’s not about you.”

“Seriously?”

“It’s about the Prince of Wales.” He said, whispering. “And his brother, Andrew. And the Princess Royal. They all got divorced after their first marriages, it was the first time it happened to the monarchy, it was a big scandal. And then with what happened with Harry and Chelsy, they’re just taking precautions to make sure you won’t be a problem if you and Harry get divorced.”

I looked away from him, and turned to the door. Edward held my arm, gently, but firmly.

“You can’t just walk in without being asked.” He warned. “Jenifer, please, understand this isn’t about you. It’s about Harry-“

“Don’t you see?!” I asked. “That’s the problem! He doesn’t deserve this!”

I pulled my arm from him, and walked to the door.

“Jenifer-“

“I’ll deal with you later.” I told him, opening the door and walking in before the guard could ask my name and if he should introduce me.

I slammed the door shut in his and Edward’s face without even looking at them.

It was hard knowing which of the people in the room were more surprised to see me. Harry standing by the fireplace, looking tired, William not far from him. Their father shared a sofa with Prince Philip, Camilla and the Queen were in armchairs.

“Hi.” I smiled, forcefully.

“Jen?” Harry asked, confused. “What-?”

“Is that it?” I interrupted, noticing the thick block of paper in the coffee table. “The prenup you all think it’s so important that I sign?!”

“Jen,” Harry started, already sounding apologetic. But he wasn’t the one I was mad with.

I had known him for almost six years now, I knew he wouldn’t do something like this behind my back. I knew if he didn’t tell me about this was to try and save me from being angry at his family. But I was very angry at his family, for two particular reasons.
“You know, as surprising as it might be for you all to understand, I actually have more money than Harry.” I told them. “I know it’s hard to believe considering I’m just a promiscuous latina actress whose parents were an electrician and a teacher who descend from slaves and indigenous peoples in a third world country, but it’s true! Which is the reason my team of accountants suggested I signed a prenup the minute I got engaged. Did you know that?!"

They were silent, still as shocked as the moment I walked in.

“No, you didn’t. Because I’m sure it’s inconceivable to you that anyone would see marrying into this family as anything but a blessing!” I breathed, heavily, trying to contain my voice from going too loudly. “But, you see, if I wanted people dictating what I should or shouldn’t do with my life I would have stayed in Hollywood!”

I threw the prenup back in the coffee table, angrily. The thick block of paper hit the wood with a loud noise.

“So imagine my surprise when I find that there are more people on top of my accountants trying to make my decisions for me and my fiancé…” I smiled, bitterly. “Let me say this very carefully. I understand what I’m marrying into. I like and I even respect the work you do and I will conform to your rules and protocol, even the ridiculously outdated ones, because I want to help. That is a decision I made! But only two people have a say in what will be decided in my marriage, and those are me and Harry.”

Prince Philip was grinning cheekily now, giving his wife disconcerting funny looks, which she ignored. Her Majesty looked awfully calm. Scarily calm, almost. I was pleased to see Camilla still looked appalled, and Charles had his mouth dropped open. Will was covering his eyes with a hand, seeming distressed.

I didn’t dare look at Harry.

“You want me to sign a paper saying I won’t ask for your money if we get divorced? Fine. Sure. Give me a pen. I would love to protect my money because, unlike you, I actually had to work for every penny in my bank account!”

I had blood running fast and hot in my veins and my heart was beating so furiously I barely heard anything at all, even my own voice, but I hoped I still sounded calm and poised. I had a feeling I didn’t.

I remembered how Harry had told me that in his family, they didn’t always talked about their problems. They didn’t fight. They passive-aggressively ignored issues and pretended things were okay, so I knew as I spoke that this was as scary for them as it was for me, but for everything I held dear, I could not calm myself.

“…no offense.” I mumbled to Harry, quietly, who was watching this unfold wide-eyed. I thought I saw him smile before I returned my fury to his family. “But when you start trying to make decisions about our future children, we’re gonna have a problem! And when you put Harry through lectures like this like he’s a child, we’re gonna have a problem! Because you are delusional if you think you will ever be able to take my kids away from me and you are even more delusional if you think this man-“ I pointed to Harry, dramatically, “is anything but responsible and intelligent! And if you think he would be inconsequential with something this huge you don’t know him at all and it is offensive you would blame him for a decision that was ultimately Chelsy’s!”

All I could hear now was Harry’s words back when he performed Kit and Beezus’ wedding, his words when he quoted his mother, saying when you find someone who loves you, you must
“So here’s the thing.” I sighed. “I will follow your rules as long as I understand and agree with them, but don’t think for one minute you can shape me or tell me what to do, because I know when I’m being manipulated. I had to stand up for myself countless times before to people a lot more scary than all of you, and I will not hesitate to do it again.”

I waited, calming my breath, holding my head high as Richard had taught me to do in negotiation meetings.

“I accept you have rules for my wedding,” I told them, “but stay out of my marriage.”

Turning on my heels, I marched out.

“What the hell did you do?!” Edward hissed the moment I stepped outside.

“I went against my better judgement hiring you to handle my life, Edward, because I thought you would have my back and if that’s not gonna be the case I might have to rethink that choice.” I told him. “You’re not fired yet. But threaten to fire one of my people again and you will be the one out of a job.”

Just as quickly as I made my way upstairs, I made my way back. Monica and Edward were silent as they followed close behind. I was still not hearing much, but I had a stress headache now and I just wanted to get home and cuddle in bed with Vodka and a Parks and Recreation marathon.

I had just started wondering if Harry would be mad at me for exploding at his family when he caught up with us in a hallway almost by the exit.

“Hey, hey, hey.” He called, running after me, holding my arm so I’d stop walking. Taking a deep breath, I looked at him. He looked just as distraught I imagined I did when he sighed. “Jen… you have to know… I didn’t… I’m sorry I didn’t- I didn’t have anything to do- I didn’t want-“

“I know.” I told him. “You will notice it wasn’t exactly at you that I snapped upstairs.”

We were silent. He caressed my arms, stepping closer, and it was almost as if I could see how hard he was trying to think of the right thing to say.

“I’m sorry.”

“You didn’t do anything wrong.” I told him.

“I didn’t tell you they asked it.”

I nodded. “Yeah. You could have said something.” He sighed. “Will I have to apologize?” He looked at me. “If I will, just tell me now so I can start mentally preparing myself.”

He stared at me for a long minute, as serious as I had ever seen him.

“As long as I’m alive you will never have to apologize for standing up for us.”

I let the blue of his eyes calm me, knowing he meant his words. Knowing he stood by me, he agreed with my outburst. I remembered the time he said he wished he could have leave-me-alone speeches.

“Do you want a prenup?” I asked. “I won’t just give you custody of our future kids, but we could talk about a financial prenup if you want. Maybe it would make things easier in case we, you
know…”

He smiled, slightly, and took a step closer. He kissed my forehead, gently. “We won’t need one.” I smiled. “Besides, how am I supposed to scam you out of your money if we sign a prenup?” he added, playfully, making me roll my eyes, giggling, which made him laugh.

He passed an arm over my shoulders, kissing my forehead again, and we made our way out like we did everything else those days: together.

Chapter End Notes

fun fact: I wrote this chapter when I was staying with my grandma in the hospital, I was so excited about it I stayed up all night until it was done. I love it soooooo much!!!!!!!!!!!! WHAT DID YOU THINK?????? LET ME KNOW!

NEXT CHAPTER: THE WEDDING STAAAAAAAARTS! ITS HAPPENING! ITS ALL HAPPENING!

Hope you're well!
A Bachelorette, a baby and a bridge

Chapter Summary

Jen is taken through the craziest bachelorette party ever

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

My secret bachelorette party was something out of a movie. The girls and I drove into a fancy restaurant in central London, the Chiltern Firehouse, a hip place we knew would be swarming with paparazzi. We let them see us walk in, and immediately walked out the back door into a black van with tinted glass, which drove us straight into the airport. There, my private jet had already been prepared and was only waiting for us.

The moment I walked in, I knew the girls weren’t my only guests. The group of about twenty girls inside was all also wearing black dresses and seemed ready to party. They all had cocktails in their hands and threw their arms up when they saw me, cheering and yelling ‘surprise!’ I spotted my Heathers friends - Emma Stone, Anna Kendrick, Carrie Hope Fletcher -, my former Mediator cast-mates Anna and Claire, Jennifer Lawrence, Karlie Kloss and Gigi Hadid.

But I was happy to see the girls had been paying attention while I spoke, because they had not only invited old friends, but also the ones from Britain, such as the wives of Harry’s friends or his childhood friends themselves, like Zoe, Lizzie, Natasha, Susannah and Melissa. They also had gone all out and invited the girls I told them I wanted to get to know better, like his cousins, Princesses Beatrice and Eugenie. Not only that, but they weren’t the only cousins aboard, as in the back sat the three blondes I had been introduced to since meeting Harry’s mother’s side of the family, Lady Kitty Spencer and her twin younger sisters, Lady Eliza Spencer and Lady Amelia Spencer, both equally as blonde and beautiful.

“You guys are just determined to be everywhere for this wedding, huh?!” I asked, amused, James and Craig, who seemed to have managed an invitation to the all-female event.

“You excited for your last hoorah as a single lady?” Craig asked, smiley.

“A little.” I told him. “A lot scared of this whole secrecy here, though.”

“Okay, ladies, settle down! Here are the rules!” Taylor said, loudly, so we would all settle down after greeting each other excitedly. “As we had explained to the bride, she has to spend the first twenty-four hours of the weekend only with that she’s carrying right now, in her body and clutch!” they girls all cheered, amused, making me laugh. “The second rule is, the bride is not allowed to say the words wedding, marriage, married, wife, bride, groom, husband, fiancé or Harry!”

“What?!?” I laughed, loudly.

“If she breaks that rule, she has to do a shot of vodka.” The girls cheered again, appreciatively, and Taylor smiled. “The third rule is none of us are allowed to call her anything but bride or princess.”

The group laughed. “Okay, that’s ridiculous.” I protested.
“Shut up, princess.” Lawrence shot, making me laugh.

“Rule number four!” Alessa said, loudly, calling out attention again, reading from the paper in Tay’s hand. “From this moment on, J-“ she stopped herself, cleaning her throat. “The bride will be given this-“ from her back, she raised a shining, plastic tiara. “This tiara represents the bride’s self.”

I raised an eyebrow, as the girls giggled. “Excuse me?” I asked, mockingly.

“The tiara represents what the bride must protect as she gets married, her previous life, her single life’s friends, her identity.” Alessa added, solemnly, struggling against a smile. “And so, from this moment,” Taylor carried the tiara to me, placing it in my head, “the bride will not be allowed to take off the tiara. The bride must care for the tiara throughout the weekend against damages or losses.”

“Alright.” I giggled, adjusting the tiara in my hair, only then noticing it wasn’t plastic, but actual metal.

“Seriously though, that’s made of Swarovski crystals, very pricey, so please don’t lose it.” Alli added, more seriously.

“Okay, so, keep the tiara safe, don’t say matrimonial related words, make you take shots if you call me by my name and use only what’s in my bag.” I recalled. “Got it.”

“You catch up quick, my head is still spinning.” Ophelia joked.

“Honey, it’s just a myth that you have to choose between having brains or getting married.” I mocked, teasingly.

“Married!” Echoed a chorus around the plane, as they all were quick to point out my mistake.

“Fine, fine!” I laughed, as Alessa brought forwards a bottle of vodka to make take a shot. “This will be a long weekend.”

When we hopped off the plane, I learned we were in Prague. Taylor and Alessa’s’s plan was to move us around to faraway places so the press wouldn’t be able to find us. I suppose Czech Republic was a good enough choice.

We got there at sunset, and the girls insisted we stopped around the old looking town to take pictures all together. Then we had dinner at a fancy restaurant and took off for a nightclub called Sasazu. It was a big place, over 5 thousand sq. ft. inside, with a stage in far end where a DJ was playing and two large balconies on the sides serving as VIP areas. Taylor and Alessa had closed one of them for our use, and so we were left alone inside – with only our security teams, of course.

All through the night, the girls kept trying to get me to say the words I wasn’t supposed to, which after a few drinks wasn’t so hard. I had no luck getting them to call me by my name; they were all disconcerting comfortable in calling me ‘princess’.

I didn’t remember having so much fun before, laughing, talking and dancing the night away with some of my closest friends, enjoying the music, dancing to the beat without caring who was watching or what tomorrow would bring.

My only concern was the tiara in my head, which I managed to make sure would stay put by
finding complementary bobby pins in the bathroom, which I used to stick the shining Swarovski tiara tighter to my hair.

We partied loudly all through the night, and left the club when the sun was already rising. Soon enough, we were at the hotel, where the girls had reserved our rooms. They were all sharing, except for me; they rented me the honeymoon suite, so I’d ‘get used to it’. I looked around the room for hotel complimentary stuff like robes or hair brushes since I was still living off my Bride clutch, but Taylor and Alessa were perfectionists, and they had made sure there was nothing I could use.

Sober me, however, had been smart enough to wear comfy underwear, so I took off my dress, and the clothes I was wearing underneath for next day, and slept in it. I was a little scared the tiara would fall off my head, thinking the girls would barge in in the middle of the night to make sure I hadn’t taken it off – for some reason I couldn’t remember how paranoid drunk me could be.

I was almost dozing off when the door was opened; my new protection officer, Maisie – whom I guess had night duty that day – let Beezus in.

“Yes, she’s here.” She was whispering on the phone. “She’s fine. A little drunk. Still looking beautiful as always, which is a mystery to me… Hey, Jen?” she called, sitting in my bed, and I raised my head to look at her. “Here she is.” She handed me the phone, which I took, seeing the caller ID said Kit.

“Hello?”, I said, confused.

“Hey, babe.” Harry’s sweet accent, soft as velvet, ringed in my ears calming the striking headache I was starting to be pained by.

“Haaaaaaaarryyyyy.” I heard my own voice, drunkenly. “You’re here!”

“Well, not really. I’m in Madagascar, remember?”


“I miss you too. Are you having fun?” He sounded amused. I was happy he was amused.

“I am…” I smiled, closing my eyes. “Hey, why are you calling from Kit’s phone?”

“Will took mine away when we got on the plane.”

“Ugh. What’s up with that?! The tyrants!” I groaned, hearing him laugh. “I like the way you laugh.”

“Thank you? You sound really drunk. Are you being careful?”

“Yeah, I’m not even drinking too much.” I told him. “Except for the shots, but that’s not my fault. It’s very hard not to say your name all the time.”

“I… what?”

I smiled; he sounded confused, and in my head I could see exactly how his brows were probably furrowing in his forehead.
“I wish you were here.” I said, hearing him sigh. “Prague is so pretty.”

“We’ll have to go after we’re married. There, and here to Madagascar.”

“Deal.” I smiled.

We let some silence pass; I didn’t know what he was doing, but I was smiling as I remembered the smell of his pillow next to mine. “I love you.” I heard.

“I love you too, Mr. Prince.”

“Give the phone back to Beezus, will you?”

I handed Bee her phone back, and turned to the side happily to hug the pillow, which didn’t smell as nicely as Harry’s.

“You’re welcome.” I heard Beezus’ voice. “Sure, call the same time, I’ll make sure I get her alone.”

I was almost asleep, what felt like hours later but probably was just a few seconds, when Beezus touched my arm.

“Jen?” I raised my head to look at her. “Don’t tell the girls I let you talk to him, huh? It’s against the rules and I don’t wanna have to take a shot.”

I giggled. Trust Beezus to be worried about a fictitious bachelorette party rules.

—

Because my room was the biggest, the girls – plus James and Craig – all came around to have brunch with me the following day – or, should I say, a few hours later. We ate, all groaning about headaches from the previous night’s alcohol ingestion. I had spent the last two years barely ever drinking after the ulcer problem, so I guess my tolerance to alcohol had taken a nose dive and I was now facing a worst hangover than I had ever had before.

“Alright, everyone. Time to go get ready.” Taylor called out. “We have a plane to catch in one hour.”

“Where are we going?” I asked.

“Another country, shake off the press.” She told me. “And you have another seven hours before we give you your bag, so good luck with that.” She grinned.

She wasn’t grinning when I met them in the lobby to go for the airport, wearing black and white shorts, a cream, silk top and the Balmain blazer from the previous night.

“How did you get that outfit?!” Alessa asked, astonished.

“A future princess never reveals her secrets.” I said.

“Princess!” the chorus startled me, and I rolled my eyes in frustration.

“Seriously?! Guys, it’s barely one in the afternoon! I’m still a little drunk from last night.”

“No excuses!” Selena conjured a bottle of vodka from what looked like thin air and handed me a shot.
We got into another tinted windows van and drove back to the airport bidding Prague goodbye, and soon enough we were saying bon jour to Paris. There, our first stop was the Maison Francis Kurkdjian, a perfume shop where the owner helped us each find a scent that ‘represented our essence’. After the loud, messy night of partying that we were still trying to recover from, the calming smells of that place felt like heaven.

From there, we set out to our hotel, where a team of manicurists and hair and makeup stylists would come later to get us all ready for the night. We were staying in the Shangri-La Hotel, a place that actually looked like a palace – which it probably had been. The white walls and ceilings were all adorned and filled with gold, the furniture mixed the old and the modern and I could have spent hours admiring the painting in the walls.

Before the manicurists and hair and makeup artists hired by the girls got there, we all changed into our bathing suits and wend to the indoor pool to freshen up – except for me, who still couldn’t have access to my bag, and had to swim in my underwear. Luckily, knowing this would be problematic, the girls had reserved the pool area, so we were left alone from the thousands of tourists enjoying France that summer.

My twenty-four hours with the Bride clutch weren’t over until it was time to go out for dinner that night, after our mani-pedis and hair and makeup sessions – Craig and James had fun getting French tips and their hair perfectly styled. We had been eating macaroons and drinking Champagne all afternoon, so we were already a little tipsy when Taylor ceremoniously and dramatically faked sounds of horns with her mouth to bring me my bag. That night I wore a pinkish salmon, off-shoulder, knee length, pleated Zac Posen dress to go out, and the girls gave me another clutch.

“This is your promotion.” Alli told me. “After being a bride, you’ll become a…” and then she showed me the same model of Edie Parker clutch, but this one pink with pearl white cursive letters spelling out the word:

“Aw, princess!” I said, touched.

“Shot!” They all yelled at, erupting in fits of laughter, and I cursed myself as I downed the vodka.

Just as the sun was setting, and we were all ready, we got together at the big balcony of my room – which had an amazing view of Paris, including the Eiffel Tower so close it looked like we could touch it – and took a number of photos that would probably never see the light of day. We moved on to have dinner at a place called The White Room. The gourmet restaurant was located at Avenue Montaigne and had big bay windows and terraces with the best view we had all seen before – including the Eiffel Tower, of course. I thought we had arrived pretty late for dinner, but it made sense when, after midnight, the restaurant quickly was turned into a nightclub. It was a classy place, and it felt like it as we danced the night away to the view of the Eiffel Tower in the background.

Then we moved on to a place just out of Champs Elysée, called Chez Rasputin. It had low ceilings which, like the walls and floors, looked as if it was all red velvet. It had shred upholstery, chandeliers and exposed wood beams. It also matched our mood a lot better, as we were all dressed up, and this place was much fancier than The White Room. The men were in bow ties, the woman in cocktail dresses, and the ultra-trendy clientele was filled of businessmen, politicians, celebrities and golden girls and boys frequenting this chicest of Parisian nightclubs. My favorite part was it had a Russian feel to it, which meant they were serving shots of ice-cold vodka all night long – which I needed since I couldn’t even remember the words I wasn’t supposed to say anymore.

The girls started making me do extra shots every time someone hit on me – which happened quite a lot. With the dim lights, I guess it was hard for them to see who I was, considering if they did,
chances were they would know I was getting married in a week.

When I felt like I couldn’t stay on my own two feet anymore after dancing so much, Taylor let us all know it was time to go to a different place. Most of us were so drunk out of our minds we didn’t even protest. Well, to be fair it was mostly me, Lawrence, and Anna Kendrick. The others seemed to be keeping it classy – someone had to. It was fun seeing the royals unwind, though, as Beatrice, Eugenie and Amalia Spencer had suddenly decided I was their new best friend – isn’t it amazing what alcohol can do?

We hopped on a car to Port Debilly, where Taylor and Alessa had rented a boat for us to finish the night in.

“The Eiffel Tower is so close I can touch it!” I shouted, excitedly, spinning around in my own heels before we walked into the boat, watching amused the way my skirt formed a disc around me.

“Welcome my friends to Paris…” Craig started singing in his West End voice.

“Here, have a flower on me!” I completed, as Alessa and Taylor started pulling and pushing us into the boat.

The shabby looking boat – which was also known as Yatch Josephine - looked like a hotel inside. It had a Jacuzzi, complementary champagne, and a double staircase that led to a fancy lounge room underneath that we immediately took over.

I hopped onto the square, wooden coffee table and started singing again.

“Welcome, my friends, to Paris!”

Craig grabbed a rose from a vase nearby and hopped onto the table after me. “Here, have a flower on me.”

“Forget where you’re from… You’re in France, children, come!” I sang, holding the rose and spinning on the table to point it at my friends. Then Craig joined me, and we sang together. “I’ll show you that French joie de vivre!”

He held on to my waist, and we started to waltz together dramatically. “Paris holds the key to your heart… And all of Paris plays a part! Just stroll two by two, down what we call “la rue”. And soon all Paris, will be singing to you!”

He jumped down, and walked after James, who was smiling sweetly at him nearby, as I started to do my own version of a can-can on the table. James and Craig started dancing.

“Paris holds the key to l’amour!” I sang, excitedly, rounding them up as I danced alone. “And not even Freud knows the cure. There’s love in the air! At the Follies Begere! The French have it down to an art! Paris holds the key to your heart!”

As the boat started drifting ashore, a sudden move had me almost fall, and I had to delicately sit on Emma’s lap to avoid falling on my butt. On the next day she would inform me it was more of a ‘throw down’, but whatever.

We hanged about the boat like that, talking and spending time, and I laid my head on Alessa’s lap as she caressed my hair.

“Alright, Princess, for one shot of vodka,” Ophelia started, “why do you wanna marry Harry?”
I sighed, happily, not being able to control the smile on my face. “He makes it better.”

“He makes what better?” Asked Emma.

“…everything.”

There was silence around the room, and I only opened my eyes when Alli made a sudden move to get up. I let her, noticing she looked a little preoccupied. Thankfully, drunk-me was able to put herself together enough to go after her.

She found her way to the upper floor of the boat, and to the back, where none of our friends were. The chilly breeze was enough to wake me up a little, sobering me up, as I made my way after her. She leaned against the rails and I saw her start to shake. I thought she was crying, which was utterly rare for Alli, before I realized she was puking into the Seine.

“All!” I asked, worriedly, hurrying over to her. “Are you okay?!”

I held her hair up, caressing her back. She sighed deeply when she was done, cleaning her lips, and nodded.

“I’m fine.”

“Clearly not.” I giggled. “Relax, McKenna, we’ve all been there. I’ve seen you throw up times enough, if I haven’t left you by now, I clearly like that you can’t hold your liquor. Makes me feel stronger.”

She giggled. “Right. Come on, let’s go back downstairs.”

In some part of my drunk-brain, the engines started – at last – spinning like they were supposed to, and I realized something. We had been keeping tabs on who was winning and losing that weekend – or we tried to, as we all got too tipsy to keep up -, but I was pretty sure everyone seemed to agree that Alli was winning. She was the least drunk of us all weekend. Not only was she avoiding the mandatory shots by doing all she was supposed to, but I remembered in Prague and tonight, in France, how she had always started the night with a non-alcoholic drink. I didn’t think any of it then, because it had always been her way to start light and move up the drink chain. But I didn’t see her drinking anything else after it. She didn’t drink champagne, and she was always with a water bottle on her hand – like now. So why was she drunk?

I asked her all of this, and she sighed, hanging on to the rails of the boat.

“I can’t do this.” She mumbled.

“Do what?” I asked. “Are you… did you quit drinking? Are you, like, an alcoholic?”

She giggled. “Jen…” She took in a deep breath, and gave me a desperate look. “I’m pregnant.”

“You’re what?!” Alli sighed, silently. She bit her lower lip, waiting for me to catch up. “Is that a prank?! Is this like a bachelorette party prank?! ‘Cause it’s not funny, Alli!”

“It’s not a prank, babe.”

I covered my mouth with a hand, feeling I had it opened in pure shock. “Are you sure?!”

She smiled, slightly. “I took a blood test at the doctor, so… yes.”

“…and George?!”
Alli had been dating Harry’s friend George Percy for about a year and a half now, and though I was constantly teasing her about becoming a Countess one day – since George was an Earl -, I didn’t want to think that she might get herself into a lifelong relationship because of an unplanned baby.

“He knows.” She sighed, staring at the flickering lights of the Eiffel Tower nearby. “He asked me to marry him.”

I felt my own heart beat fast, as if it was happening to me – as I was the one getting engaged again. I struggled to think of what to say.

“What did you-what did you-?”

“I said I needed to think about it.”

“Okay.”

“Because I wanted to make sure if we did this, that it would be for us, and not because of a surprise baby, you know?”


“Don’t say anything about it to Melissa.” She warned.

Melissa Van Straubenzee, George’s sister, was downstairs at that exact moment, unaware that before she, herself would give her parents a grandchild, her brother was about to become a father.

“George hasn’t told his family, yet.” Alli explained. “He wants to wait until I say yes or no to his proposal, because he knows they’ll want to know what the plan is, and he wants to know what to say.”

I nodded. “Okay. Okay… that’s good. Okay… So… You are pregnant.”

“Yep.”

“You are having a child.”

“Yeah.”

“A real life, human child.” She giggled again. “Oh, my God!”

“Crazy, right?!”

“Oh. My. God.”

“I know.” She shook her head, disbelieving. “I still can’t believe my first reaction wasn’t to freak out about my parents. I mean, when did pregnancies stop being a big teenage scandal? I mean… I’m twenty-eight-years-old. I have a job. I can raise a child and it wouldn’t be horrible, you know?”

“Do you… do you want to raise a child?”

She inhaled deeply, and let out the air, smiling. “Yeah. Sorta.” I smiled. “Is that weird?! Am I insane?!”

I giggled. “No, honey, you’re not… Alli, you…” I sighed. “You will be a great mother.”
“Oh, my God!” She shouted, smiling. “Me! A mother!” we laughed. “When did we grow up??!”

“How long have you known?”

“About two weeks now. I’m five weeks along.”

“Why didn’t you tell me??!”

“Because…” She shrugged. “This is your big moment… I didn’t want to steal your thunder.”

“Alli!” I shook my head, disbelieving. “You are having a baby! Please! By all means, steal my thunder!”

She giggled, turning to me. “I’m sorry.”

I wrapped my arms around her, hugging her tightly for a long time, to make up for the two weeks when she had been carrying this around by herself.

“What are you gonna do about George?”

“I don’t know.” She said, her head still resting on my shoulder as I caressed her hair.

“Do you love him?”

“Yeah… I mean… the thought that I have a baby inside of me that is a little bit of him… it makes me so happy.”

“Do you wanna spend the rest of your life with him?”

“It’s not about wanting it or not…”

“What is it about?”

She leaned back, to look at me. “My only other serious boyfriend was Josh. I spent five years with him and I never wanted to spend my life with him… but with George…” She smiled. “I’ve known him for less than two years and I already cannot think of any other person I would like to spend my life with.”

“Then what’s the matter?!”

She sighed. “What if I just feel like this because of the baby? What if he just wants to marry me because of the baby? What if it ends badly and then we become those horrible divorced parents that put their kids through hell?!”

“Honey…” I sighed.

I knew where she was coming from. I knew because I had spent years there myself. I recognized that level of fear, of doubt… and I had no idea how to help her. Because unlike what had happened to me, Alli couldn’t just jump head first into her happiness. She had a child to think about. The child needed to be the focus now, I got that.

I remember the bit of bitterness I heard in her voice the first time we went to Ralph and Russo when she told the CEO that she wasn’t engaged. I remembered the way her eyes shone when she first started admitting just how much she liked George. I remembered the way he would laugh wildly when she was around, and they were cracking private jokes to each other. The intimacy in that look wasn’t fake or forced, and I knew it.
“You wanna know what I think?” I asked her. “I think you wanna marry him.” She didn’t deny it; she merely sighed, resolute and stared off into the starry French night. “And I think there’s nothing wrong with that.”

“I have to find out what I want.” She mumbled.

“Well, while you don’t… tell me everything!” I squealed in delight. “Do you think it’s a boy or a girl?! Have you thought of names?!”

Alli laughed, “No!”

“Come on, we have to think about this! We’re having a baby!”

“We are?!”

“Yeah, bitch. We’re in this together, you and me. Since freshman year of high school. With or without George Percy and Prince Harry, Alessa, it’s you and me against the world, okay?” We exchanged a smile. “Well, you, me and the baby.”

She hugged me again, tightly. “I love you, Jay.”

“I love you too, babe.”

—

After the sobering moment, I was more awake when we all took to the up part of the boat to watch the stars. We rode along the Seine river, laughing and talking and drinking champagne, yelling excitedly when we spotted famous monuments and places – like the Notre Dame Cathedral, right after which we reached a bridge called L’Archeveche. Even in the dark of the middle of the night, we could see the shining things hanging from the rails were the famous locks couples from all over the world had put there as a symbol of their undying love.

“Oh, Jen! Jen!” Shouted James. “Oh, yes, I know, I know, I need to take a shot!” He added, dismissively, as the others teased him. “Princess, you should totally go up there and lock one with your name and Harry’s!”

“Oh, that sounds so beautiful.” Craig added, dreamily.

“It does.” I agreed. “But I don’t even have a lock.”

“I do!” James intervened, pulling a metal, golden lock from his pocked and thrusting it into my hands with a black sharpie.

I was still a bit tipsy, so I didn’t think to question this at the time, as the bridge was almost over us. So I just ran to the captain and asked him very nicely, to the best of my French, if he could please park the boat by the canal’s rock sidewalk so we could go up to the bridge. He mumbled something about how these type of nonsensical traditions were running bridges in France, but parked the boat either way, and I ran excitedly to grab my sandals, which I had taken off to be more comfortable.

Most of the others ran after me, James and Craig as we made our way up the stairs in the canal to the bridge and, as we got there, I started writing in the lock with the sharpie James had given me.

‘Jen and Harry’. In the back, I wrote, ‘together or not at all.’
I locked it in the rails, finding a little spot available in the middle of the thousands of locks, and stared at it, happily. I got the key, which James had given me with the lock, and threw it in the river energetically, not missing the way Alli smiled as she watched me do all this. I wondered if she was thinking of adding a lock of her own, but before I could go talk to her, someone else’s conversation caught my attention.

“I wish we had a lock for us.” Craig told James, who was hugging him from behind sweetly as they both swayed slightly looking at the names inscribed in the locks about the bridge.

The usually overly confident James was looking awfully pale and nervous when I saw him let go of his embrace to reach for something in his suit jacket’s pocket.

“I got us one.” He told Craig.

“You did? Aw. I love you.” Craig smiled, turning back to look at his boyfriend, who was handing him a similar golden lock to the one he had given me.

I made to walk towards them to return his sharpie, but Craig’s look to the lock made me stop. I realized there was already something written in the lock, because his eyes were widened when he looked back up to James.

“Are you serious?!” he asked.

James smiled, finding something else in his pocket. A little box that he held open to Craig as he kneeled down on one leg.

I gasped, and with me I heard the gasps of all my friends around as we all fell into an excited silence. I saw Taylor point her phone at them to begin filming this.

“I love you.” James told him. “Will you marry me?”

“Oh, my God.” I hear Beezus’ whisper from my right.

“Do you mean it?” Craig asked James. “Like, an actual wedding? As in a real life, proper wedding?!”

James smiled. “Yes, Craig. I wanna marry you. Do you wanna marry me?!”

“Yes!” Craig giggled uncontrollably as he fell to his knees to kiss his boyfriend. “Yes! Yes! Yes!”

We screamed, cheering so excitedly I felt drunk again, even though I hadn’t really drank since talking to Alli. We watched James and Craig exchange wedding bands, amidst smiles and cries, and then they turned to us.

“I’m engaged, bitches!” James shouted, making Craig laugh excitedly.

We made to run to them, but I stopped when I saw the look on Alli’s face. I let the others go, happy they were smothering the boys for me.

“Are you okay?” I asked my best friend, as I saw the tears streaming down her face.


—

When we got back to the hotel, it was already morning, so we ordered room service and sat on the
big balcony of my room to eat together, with the Eiffel Tower at a distance and the sun starting to grace us.

We took a nap of a couple of hours, I walked to the bathroom secretly with Beezus to talk to Harry on her phone, and we exchanged unbelieving whispers about Alli and George’s big news – after I made him and Bee promise they wouldn’t tell anyone. I told him about James and Craig too, and we smiled as we wished we could be together.

“You two are adorable.” Beezus said, after we hang up. “You saw him less than two days ago, and you already can’t handle not being able to talk.”

I smiled. “I can’t help it… I see a nice place, I have fun, and I can’t help but wish he could be here to share it with me.”

We took a nap then, of a couple of hours, and by lunchtime we all got into the car again towards Martillac, in the heart of Aquitaine’s wine country. There was a spa there called Vinotherapie Spa at Les Sources de Caudalie, which had naturally warm water from a well 1,800 feet deep. There we got heavenly massages and treatments that fixed all of our hangovers and made our skin soft as baby’s and soon enough we all felt brand new, and energized to hop on the plane back home.

My apartment smelled of jasmines when I walked in. Vodka came barking her high pitched, excited barks at me, swaying her tail around happily. I picked her up, talking to her in a baby voice, and followed the sound of conversations back to the kitchen.

I smiled as I recognized the voices. I could hear Harry and Thomas talking about a game, and Edward and Monica going over what I understood as pre-wedding preparations for the final week ahead of us.

“You’re home!” Harry smiled, broadly, when he saw me in the door. His accent, his voice, the sight of him, it all made my heart swell with love.

I put Vodka down as he walked to me, and smiled wildly when he quickly wrapped his arms around my waist crashing us together in a hug.

I sighed, feeling absolutely filled with joy and peace. Sure, the weekend had been some of the best fun I had had in years, but nothing beat what I had right there: my friends, my home, and the man that in just under one week would be my husband.

Chapter End Notes

Alli is having a baby!!!!!!!!!!!! I’m so happy, I loooove Alli! I wanted her relationship with George to be unconventional and fast, because though Jen’s relationship with Harry was cautious and slow paced, that doesn’t mean fast and unconventional isn’t good too!

How did you like the bachelorette weekend? Isn’t Jen good at improvising with the clothes? Isn’t it cute how they couldn’t just not talk to each other???? AND WHAT ABOUT JAMES AND CRAIG??????
The Wedding of Mr. and Mrs. Smith

Chapter Summary

Jen gets ready for the biggest day of her life.

I woke up at three in the morning on my wedding day – third of August of 2018 – hours before I was supposed to. Everything was said and done, all the planning was over, all of the rehearsals had been walked through, my dresses had been delivered and now took up more than half the space of my closet. My family still occupied my guest bedrooms, my extended family had flown in and been placed in the Oriental Hotel, much like most of my friends from overseas. London was swarming with celebrities, paparazzi and tourists, who were there for the summer and for the wedding, all wearing British themed shirts and hats and buying merchandize with our faces on it.

Trying to make up for the time they couldn’t be present to help plan the wedding, Taylor and Selena had arrived straight at my apartment to stay with me, and since my parents and brother were occupying my guest bedrooms, they were sharing my bed with me. Harry had gone to stay with his father before the wedding, something that seemed like a good idea at the time, but now made me miss him more than I thought I would.

The girls had been good company, keeping my parents’ incessant questions away and making me laugh of the news’ coverage of the wedding instead of throwing up due to nerves like I actually wanted to. As of that week, special correspondents from every channel of every country had flown into the country to cover the wedding. More and more documentaries about me were being aired, and some channels were making marathons of every single movie and tv show episode I had done in my career. MTV even had a “Jenifer Silva Award Show Special”, with a montage of every award I had ever won, including all the speeches, skits and interviews from those ceremonies.

I had been able to avoid the nerves through all those days, filling my time with wedding rehearsals and hangouts with the girls, but when I woke up that night at three in the morning, I simply knew it was unavoidable.

I got up, jumping over Taylor’s body to reach the floor as silently as I could on my way out. I walked to the kitchen and made myself a cup of tea. I was pouring it into my cup when I heard the light, muffled sound of Vodka’s little paws on the floor until she reached me, wigging her tail happily as she sniffed my barefoot. I picked her up with one arm and held the cup with the other as I walked out to the terrace.

I pushed open the glass windows after punching in the security code and shivered slightly at the chill of the night air. London was such a weird place – it could make me so cold even in the middle of the summer. There were summer nights in Brazil – it could make me so cold even in the middle of the summer. There were summer nights in Brazil when it was impossible to sleep with the windows closed, when you could only find relief from the heat outside where it was fresh. But in London, even as of early August, I wanted a jacket.

I felt my feet cold as I walked towards the edge of the terrace. I stared off into the street right before Hide Park, which was now barely seen. All the way down, the sidewalk was taken over by campers. Most of the streets in central London were now closed for the wedding procession, including the ones around my building. From there to the cathedral, as well as Buckingham and Kensington Palace and Clarence House, people were already camped out on the streets to get good
views of us passing by when the time came – some of them had been there for days. Directly across
out apartment, I could see the news crews that had their cameras set up. They had all been doing
segments from there and reporting live all around the world with our home as the background. In
just a few hours, they would be livestreaming the sight of my house until I left if for the last time as
a single woman.

I walked over to a hammock, away from the edge, and laid down comfortably with Vodka by my
side. I took a few sips of my tea and watched the stars above.

It was a starry night in London, and the sight was very calming. It was hard believing the
pandemonium morning would bring when everything at that very moment was so peaceful. I
remembered another starry night Harry and I had watched together once – the night we met.

It was just a few miles away, in the private garden of Kensington Palace, after the Prince Trust’s
gala we had both attended that late 2012. We were both a little tipsy, and he had just beaten me at
poker and was then walking me to the car that would drive me back to my hotel. I had watched the
stars and taken in a deep breath, almost melancholically.

“London has pretty nights.” I mumbled, then.

“Nights are pretty everywhere, I guess.” He replied, indulging my drunkenness.

“No. In most big cities like New York you can’t see the stars because of skyscrapers and pollution.
But you can here. That’s nice.”

He didn’t disagree, and we paused watching the stars for a moment. I enjoyed the shine and the
silence and the thought that I felt at peace for the first time since breaking up with David a few
months earlier.

“Tell me, Mr. Prince. How is it being in love?” I asked him. “Being really in love and knowing it’s
not fucked up? Knowing you got it… this stupid thing everyone else is getting themselves fucked
up over.”

He grinned, slightly, and just as I looked back at him, I realized he had been watching me instead
of the stars. He shrugged.

“…Comforting?”

“Is that a question?” I grinned.

“I don’t know.” He laughed.

I watched, then, as he bit his lower lip, seemingly struggling to give me a good enough answer.

“Don’t worry, Jenifer. You’ll get there.” He assured me, apparently giving up on trying to get me a
proper answer. “You’re nice, funny, pretty… someone will be lucky enough to have the honor of
loving you one day.”

I smiled then, at his kindness over poor, brokenhearted, drunk me, whom he had just met.

“Your fiancé is a lucky girl, Mr. Prince.” I told him.

He smiled. “I won’t be able to get you to stop calling me that, will I?”

I returned his smile, and turned to my car to leave. “Nope.”
I smiled at the memory, striking Vodka’s fur gently as I felt my other hand warm in the hot tea mug. My phone buzzed in the pocket of my sweatpants, and I fished it to see an unread message from Harry.

‘Can’t sleep?’, it read.

‘How do you know???’

I waited as he typed back, smiling at the buffering three dots on the screen as I suddenly felt his company with me. Even though he was just across the park at his father’s house, and I had seen him a few hours earlier, I felt like he was so far. I missed him.

‘This will sound creepy, but I couldn’t sleep so I turned on the TV and there’s a livestream of the apartment. I saw a shadow in the terrace. The reporter didn’t recognize you in the dark, but I know that’s Vodka on your lap.’

I giggled as I typed an answer. ‘Gee! Stalking me much?!’

‘I’ll stalk you forever’, he sent back, making me smile.

‘I was just remembering the night we met, almost six years ago.’

‘It’s so weird that’s only been six years. I feel like I’ve known you my whole life.’

I smiled.

He was right. It was weird thinking I had only had him in my life for the past six years. I knew Selena, Taylor, Alessa and Ophelia way longer. I knew most of my friends for longer. But Harry felt different. He felt like he was there since the beginning. He knew all about teenage me, college me, drunk-ass me, Mediator me… I knew his party phase, his military career, the pain of losing his mother. As much as I loved the girls and wouldn’t trade them for anything, in many ways, Harry was my best friend. He was the first person I wanted to share everything with. He was the last face I wanted to see before going to sleep.

All those weeks before this night, I kept waiting for the moment when I would feel overwhelmed. When I would need to run. To go after Beezus and ask her to remind me why I was doing this – getting married. To calm me down. To slap me back to reality. And yet, it never came - I was nervous about a lot of things, but the bottom line was: I wanted to marry Harry. That was the one thing I knew with absolute certainty.

I remembered another starry night. The one under which we danced for the first time, on the night when we celebrated my 23rd birthday, five years before. We were in the terrace of his penthouse in Manhattan and it was just starting to rain. There was no music, so I sang Cold Coffee, by Ed Sheeran. I felt his arms around my waist and rested my head on his shoulder; we had kissed a mere hours before, so his protection officers wouldn’t suspect we weren’t really a couple, and I had felt my insides warm and twirl as his tongue touched mine. That was the first time I wished he was mine – something I told myself was platonic. I was so naive.

‘How did I ever think I would be able to pretend to be your girlfriend and not fall in love with you?’, I sent him.

‘I ask myself the same question every time I look at you. God, I was so stupid.’

I smiled as typed back. ‘I wish I could marry you right now.’
‘Do you want to? I can get the archbishop and meet you there in ten’, he replied, making me giggle.

‘I think both our families and half the world would be pretty upset they couldn’t watch’

‘Screw them, they never supported this relationship anyway’, he sent back, and I laughed.

‘Just a few more hours, Mr. Prince.’

I stared into my phone happily as he typed. ‘Okay, Mrs. Princess.’

I laughed. ‘That nickname is not gonna catch!’

‘Watch me.’

“Can you believe this dick?” I asked Vodka, who didn’t even look up at me from where she was almost asleep now.

‘I can’t wait to see you cry like a baby tomorrow at how pretty I look.’ I sent him, grinning.

‘I don’t cry.’, he replied.

‘Well, you haven’t seen my dress… I bet you will cry before I do tomorrow.’ I sent him.

‘Look at you, you’re barely British and is already betting your way around life.’ He wrote, making me laugh. ‘How much do you bet?’

‘Keep in mind I’m an actress before you take this bet, I can contain my emotions.’

‘You’re also a big crier. I bet fifty pounds you’ll cry before ten minutes have passed into the cathedral.’

‘Deal.’

I smiled, and drank more of my tea. It was now about half past three in the morning, and I was chilly and also a little sleepy, so I knew I should catch some sleep before it was too late. There was only so much concealer could do, after all, and I didn’t wanna have bags under my eyes for my big day.

‘I have to go to sleep.’

‘Okay.’

‘Try to sleep too’

‘Okay’

I smiled, not wanting to say goodbye. But I knew it was the last time. I knew I would go to sleep with him by my side tomorrow night, and every night thereafter. That was a comforting thought.

‘Marry me?’, I wrote him.

‘Yeah. Tomorrow. 4pm. St. Paul’s. I’ll be the one in the hot white uniform.’

I giggled. ‘Okay. I’ll meet you there.’

‘I love you.’
I smiled at the words that had once scared me so much.

‘I love you too, Mr. Prince. See you in a few hours.’

—

When I woke up a few hours later, Harry was no longer only ‘Prince Henry of Wales’, but a Duke. At ten in the morning of that August 3rd, his grandmother the Queen gave him a dukedom in celebration of his wedding, as it was tradition. Both Harry and Edward had spent some time over the previous months explaining to me that there were three available dukedoms that the Queen could give him. The first was Windsor - which had been created for Her Majesty’s uncle the former King Edward who abdicated to marry divorced socialite Wallis Simpson (something Harry knew as the most shameful period of his family’s past century and I knew from the King’s Speech, the movie with Colin Firth). Though it sounded romantic enough, Edward and Wallis had gone on to be a little too sympathetic to the Nazis, so it was unlikely that the Queen would drag attention back to that.

The second title was Sussex, and it was the favorite to be Harry’s. The issue was that for that very reason it was known that would have been Harry’s title if he had married Chelsy, which made him gently ask his grandmother to please avoid giving us that one now.

And that’s how he became the Duke of Clarence. The title was apparently from the town of Clare, Suffolk, which was owned by the first duke of Clarence, Lionel of Antwerp. His wife Elizabeth was a direct descendant of the previous owners, the de Clares, and the Manor of Clare was among the lands which she brought to her husband. I liked that our title was related to a wife more than to a husband.

There had been three previous Dukes of Clarence - the first two died with no descendants, making the title extinct until it was given again. The third time saw the guy being convicted for treason in 1478, and consequentially losing his titles - classy. After him, there a few Earls of Clarence and two Dukes of Clarence as well as St. Andrews and Avondale.

Hopefully Harry and I could give the title a better fame.

I woke up with a groan as my body was massacred by all four of my bridesmaids and Alli, my maid of Honor.

“Time to get married, Princess!” Ophelia shouted, excitedly, as she jumped on my bed.

“Don’t you have a house to, you know, be at?” I asked.

“Don’t be rude!” She said, throwing herself on top of me, instantly beginning to tickle me making me laugh loudly.

“Careful, don’t give her a bruise!” Selena warned. “The world will be watching today!”

It was now eleven in the morning, and I heard as they turned on the television, and suddenly the sappy voice of the ABC News hostess got my attention.

“…around 1200 guests are going to be arriving here at Saint Paul’s Cathedral in the following hours for the wedding that is scheduled to start around 4 in the afternoon. The Cathedral is, of course, where Prince Charles and Princess Diana got married in 1981. I can’t believe the day is finally here, Joan. Good morning.”

Another woman, sitting beside her in the improvised studio at a building that had a view of the
Cathedral smiled.

“Good morning, Michelle! The day is finally here! We’ve been talking about this the whole year and now, today, we are going to watch Jenifer Silva, the Brazilian actress who took Hollywood by storm, realize the dream of girls all over the world and become a princess.”

They went on as the image shifted to show the crowds around London, and I sat up on the bed to watch better. Closer to the nightstand, Beezus handed me my glasses.

The Mall in front of Buckingham Palace was filled with people, kept at bay by metal rails guarded by the police. I could see most of them were wearing big hats printed to look like the British flag, and I could spot quite a bunch of Brazilian flags over the crowds.

“It’s a warm day in London today, it’s 23°C outside and quite sunny. The royal family could not have asked for a better day for a wedding. Good chance we’ll be seeing the royal family in open carriages, then. Which is exciting, isn’t it, Michelle?”

“Surely will be nice for the crowds outside who’ve been camping for days to get good places in the hopes to spot some of them pass by. I met a woman last night who’s been sleeping in the street right in front of the Cathedral for five days! She had a sleeping bag and her husband was bringing her food and water, how insane is that?”

Joan laughed, delighted. “I don’t know, there’s a lot of excitement surrounding the royal family and there’s a lot of excitement surrounding, of course, Jenifer Silva. So many of her fans are excited to see her become a royal, I spotted a lot of them in the streets with posters of her movies and TV shows, they’re very excited. And not only kids, there’s a lot of adults, too!”

“Good morning, beautiful!” My mother smiled as she walked in, carrying a big tray of food.

“Mom, you don’t need to do that.” I told her.

“No worries, it’s no problem. You need to eat.” She said, laying the tray in bed in front of me as Taylor collected her long legs to make room. “You too, girls. Can’t have you fainting live to the whole world today, eat and eat well!”

“Thank you, Mrs. Ferreira.” Alli smiled, grabbing a fork to start getting some of the fruit salad in the tray.

In the TV, Joan and Michelle called a correspondent who was standing in the familiar street in front of my apartment building.

“We could literally go to the terrace and dump a bucket of water in his head.” Selena said, making me smile.

“I don’t think that’ll be a good headline.” I told her.

The guy in a suit, that was identified in the TV as Christian, was talking smiley and excitedly in front of a huge group of people who waved frantically behind him to the camera.

“Yes, Joan, we just got word a few minutes ago that at ten today the Queen made Prince Harry Duke of Clarence, which means as she marries him today Jenifer Silva will become Her Royal Highness, the Duchess of Clarence.”

“Oh.” My mother squealed. “My baby girl… a duchess!”
I struggled against a smile.

“Our royal expert informed us earlier this week that that is her correct title, but is there any hope we will be calling her that instead of Princess Jenifer, Christian?” Asked Michelle, cheekily, to which Christian smiled after the delay.

“Oh, Michelle, I’ll tell you what, we can ask the folks here at Knightsbridge, who have been camped in front of the apartment that Jenifer Silva has shared with Prince Harry for the last two years.” He turned to one of the excited people by his side, an older looking man with a fake black fur hat like the one the Queen’s guards used, who was smiling at the camera. “Sir, are you gonna refer to Jenifer Silva as duchess or princess?”

“Listen, I know she’s a duchess technically.” He told the reporter, as I noticed he had an American accent. “But I don’t think that even makes sense, she marries a prince, she’s a princess, you know? We’ll be calling her that!”

The woman by his side pulled the microphone to herself. “She’s always been a princess in America, she’s Hollywood’s princess, so we’ll call her that, she’s earned it!”

“Oh, God.” I rolled my eyes, as the girls giggled beside me.

The scene changed as the reporters laughed at the excited crowds, and now they showed a part of the rails keeping the crowds away right in front of the Cathedral. A section of it had a group of girls waving British little flags as their parents held them up on the rails from behind. They were smiling and had little flags drown on their cheeks, and I felt my heart swelling with affection as they waved at the cameras.

Another reporter, Macie, who was in front of the Cathedral walked to one of them and asked her what she was more excited to see that day.

The shy little five year old got her thumb out of her mouth to answer with an adorable English accent. “I want to see the princess!”

“Aaaaaw!” We all let out, together, laughing afterwards.

We took our time eating as Michelle and Joan talked a bit about the kids they would be seeing that day.

“We have, of course, Prince George and Princess Charlotte, the ones everyone is excited to see. They are five and three, respectively. And there’s Jenifer Silva’s nephew, Arthur Toledo Ferreira—” Joan struggled against my family’s last name. “Who’s also five, just a few months younger than Prince George. And then we have India and Zalie Warren, Prince Harry’s goddaughters, their father is Jake Warren, who was the godson of Princess Diana and a childhood friend of Prince Harry. They are also three. And we have, of course, the godson of Jenifer Silva, Kidd Artchet, who’s around four. He’s the son of her former manager Richard Artchet with her former publicist, Janine Merchant.”

“They’re married, that’s so sweet.” Pitched in Michelle. “We have heard, too, that Jenifer’s former personal assistant, Monica Williams, who’s been appointed her press secretary after the wedding is also in a relationship with Prince Harry’s aide, Thomas Hill, who will be their private secretary. That’s sweet, huh? They’re one big family.”

“How do they even know that?!” I wondered.

“Skye is here!” Clara shouted, walking into the room excitedly.
“Woah.” I let out, realizing she was all dressed up already. “You’re… ready?”

“Don’t judge me, I was too anxious to wait.” She admitted. “I just love this whole day so much!”

“Hey, bitch!” Skye said, as he made his way into the room.

“Hi, honey.” I smiled, getting up to greet him.

Skye had been my hair stylist for most of my career and, though he lived in Los Angeles and I would have to find someone else to do my hair in the future, I liked the idea to have him style my hair for the wedding.

We talked happily for a few minutes before he pushed me to the bathroom to take a shower. My mother had - and this isn’t an expression I use a lot - drawn me a bath, so I lounged on the bathtub until my skin was wrinkled and I felt as relaxed as I knew I would ever get, trying not to think of the thousands of people that flood the streets of London to see us get married.

When I came out, I put on my especially picked out underwear to go with the dress - so the bra wouldn’t be visible with the thin sleeves. I wore the short, white silk robe I had bought for me and my bridal party. My mom had a long one with the words ‘mother of the bride’ embroidered in the back. Mine said ‘bride’, and the girls, after their shower, would wear theirs which said either ‘bridesmaid’ or ‘maid of honor’.

Skye had me sit in one of my white armchairs, and when I complained about not having a mirror to check his progress, he told me it would be good so I would be surprised - which I didn’t like, but I didn’t complain as in that moment Arthur ran in excitedly wearing his mother’s ‘sister of the bride’ robe, and it was so cute I got distracted.

“What I like about this wedding, Joan,” Michelle was speaking in the television, “is that there is a really big feeling of friendship. Sure, it’s a celebrity wedding and royal wedding combined into what will most likely be remembered as the biggest wedding of the century, but you have all of these celebrities attending who are friends of the couple, and the families are all here, including, as we just saw earlier, the Spencers, Princess Diana’s family, and Jenifer Silva’s family from Brazil. I mean, sure there’s a lot of guests, but most of those are truly close friends of the couple, aren’t they?”

“They are, Michelle.” Joan agreed. “And they even invited their exes, as we can see. We saw Tyler Alvin arriving just now and to everyone’s surprise we just saw Earl and Countess Stweart arriving as well, that’s Chelsy Davy, everyone as she was known before she was married. Prince Harry’s former fiancé.”

“That’s right, as the day goes by the wedding guests are already pouring in. Let’s go to the Cathedral with Macie. Macie, we just saw Tyler Alvin and his girlfriend Stacey Havens arriving, as well as Ellie Goulding and her boyfriend Dougie Poynter. Who else can you see arriving there?”

The image cut to blond-haired Stacey, in front of the Cathedral. “Hi, Michelle. Ellie Goulding was wearing a gorgeous dress with a neck tie and a red headpiece, and I’m so excited to see what the other celebrities will be wearing. It’s truly a dream come true to put together the most fashionable people in Hollywood and a morning dress occasion, don’t you think? Just now we can see arriving here…” the image cut to the arrivals in front of the Cathedral, and my room fell silent as we watched to try and identify our friends in the crowd. “We can see mostly private friends of the couple, the ladies all sporting the most beautiful hats. The British sure know how to do it better! I think I see Amal Clooney coming right over there. Oh, I do Michelle and Joan! It’s George and Amal Clooney!”
Amal was in a tea length blue dress with a printed colorful skirt and blue hat, and George was wearing a proper tail coat, both looking as gorgeous as ever.

“Oh, I wish I was them so bad!” Skye complained, as he expertly messed around with my hair without even taking his eyes from the television.

I watched as my friends got their makeup done by two other makeup artists we had hired, who were just done doing my mother and Livia’s makeup. The look we had decided on for the wedding, though a delicate mere detail, apparently was of some importance. Everything about this day was noticed and commented on, as I had already heard Michelle and Joan make a big deal out of highlighting how different I was to Kate by not doing my makeup myself, but having a professional do it. Unlike Kate, who had a simple look for her wedding, ours would be a little more memorable, though equally as elegant. We had chosen a thin Adele inspired winged eyeliner over pale, goldenish nude eyeshadow and matte, pale pink, nude lipstick. The existence of the winged eyeliner and the filled eyebrows alone would be enough to make us look so different to Kate, but hopefully that would be seen as me being individualistic rather than attention seeking.

As the girls makeup was done, one of the makeup artists moved on to me, and so then I could only hear what was going on around the room, like the girls helping each other into their dresses and the arrival of our guests narrated by the ABC News hosts.

They talked a little about how we invited many members of our charities, and about the military guests – Harry had invited almost every friend he made when he was in the military, including a number of people he served with and a lot of wounded veterans he worked with at Invictus and a lot of the business types from his days working at Halo. They mentioned again how different this wedding felt to Will and Kate’s, as it felt like Harry and me were a lot more sociable than they were, since we had a lot more guests and a lot more people in our bridal party.

“Oh, my God! Look at Cara’s outfit!” I heard Taylor, and had to ask the makeup artist to give me a second so I could eye the TV.

Cara Delavigne was wearing a royal blue pantsuit with matching pumps, over a black, beaded shirt and big, round hat.

“She looks amazing!” I marveled. “Formal and… and…”

“Her.” Offered Ophelia.

“Yes, very her!” I agreed. “Fashionable and regal, like I wanna be. Uh! Goals!”

By Cara’s side, we quickly spotted Gigi and Karlie. Gigi was on a nude, pale pink dress practically the same color as my bridesmaids and maid of honor dresses, with a roses headpiece, and Karlie had on a cream with pink floral print dress and pink blazer on top, with a pink fascinator that spiraled up fashionably. Gina Rodriguez was arriving at that time, too, right behind them, wearing a tight purple dress and simple purple fascinator. By Gina’s side was Sofia Vergara and her husband, and I smiled at the thought of them speaking their way around unapologetically in Spanish. Sofia was on a tight yellow dress and a white hat. I spotted Jennifer Lawrence just a few steps behind, on a dark blue dress with white flowers and a white headpiece, talking excitedly to Anna Kendrick, who was on a simple yellow dress – looser around her body than Sofia’s -, and a white headpiece with little yellow flowers on it. Behind them I spotted Emma Stone and Carrie Hope Fletcher, respectively in red and green. I smiled at the realization they were wearing their Heathers’ characters colors, and was sure it had been planned. I almost wished I could wear blue.

“Okay, the tiara is here.” Clara announced, at some point. Even her voice sounded shaky, and I
could sense just carrying the big, velvet box made her anxious.

The fun, relaxed atmosphere around the room quieted down as she placed in the coffee table near Skye and opened it, revealing the shiny, diamond flowers of the Strathmore tiara.

“Okay. Okay. I am touching more than I will make in my entire life. But it’s okay. Because I can do it.” Skye mumbled as he took it from the box to place it on my hair.

I tried to ignore the hired photographer taking pictures of the moment, and my mother just two feet from me already starting to cry as I tried not to make too much of a big deal when the weight of the metal fell on my head.

Skye twisted sections of my hair around, placing bobby pins and spraying it so it would stay in place. Finally, there was only the veil left – which was supposed to be the last part -, so he let me stand up to see.

My hair was twisted in the lower back of my head in a loose chignon bun, leaving two big sections of my side bangs falling to frame my face. The tiara stood tall atop my head, shining like diamonds did, making me lose my breath – which I was sure was the appropriate reaction to it.

I turned to the others. “What do you think?”

“Oh, honey, you’re so beautiful!” My mom cried.

“Mom! Don’t mess up your makeup!” I said, smiling.

“You look great, Jay.” Ophelia smiled, as the others nodded.

“Okay. I believe you.” I smiled, shrugging. Their hairdos were similar to mine, all with a bit of hair falling on to the face, but just slightly different. Ophelia’s hair was in a big braid around her face; Beezus’ hair had been curled before going into a bun and Selena’s updo was vertical instead of horizontal, like the others.

They looked absolutely gorgeous on the different models of the dresses we had picked so long ago, all different shades of pale pink.

“Is it time for the dress?” I asked, feeling butterflies on my stomach.

Clara went to the living room and called in Tamara and Michael, from Ralph and Russo, who had come to help me into the dress and make sure all was well. They had been waiting in the living room to make sure we had enough room, and they walked in, I realized they were looking positively regal.

“You’re the one who needs to look that way today.” Tamara winked, as she and a styling assistant she had brought dragged the dress into the room after we pushed the chairs and table out of the way.

My train took up most of the room, so it was a good thing the girls were all done. I stripped out of my robe and stepped into the dress; Tamara and her assistant slipped the delicate, sheer tulle off-shoulder sleeves up my arms and I felt the sweet, soft embrace of my wedding dress as they started to close the buttons on the back. I heard a sniff and looked up; my mother was crying a little more uncontrollably now.

I smiled; she was wearing a dark blue overcoat and big hat, looking more formal than I had ever seen her, and instead of reprehending her again, I just raised my arms so she could come give me a
hug, which she quickly did – not before making sure she wouldn’t step on the fabric or let her tears on it. I felt her arms tight around me and, though I could tell Tamara and her assistant were done, no one said anything. I heard the familiar clicking of a camera as I assumed the photographer was at it again, but focused on my mother, the woman who had made sure our family stayed together; who had always done her best to assure my happiness.

“We’ll always be your home, you know.” She whispered.

I smiled, leaning back, and pulled my neckline just a bit so she could see the inside of the fabric, right over my heart, where I had asked Tamara to make a small embroidery of the shape of Brazil – in blue string.

“I know.” I told my mom. “It’s right here where’s supposed to be. In my heart.”

“Your something blue.” She realized, emotional.

I dried her tears delicately and told her to go fix up her makeup. When she was gone, Tamara went back to work.

“Oh, look, the Obamas are here!” Alessa said, smiling, turning up the TV volume, where ABC News was livestreaming the arrival of the former president of the United States and his wife, who were both quite close to Harry after working together with Invictus on his last term as president. “I miss them.”

“Me too.” Tay agreed. “Hilary is just not the same.”

“Told you to vote for Bernie.” I joked, remembering how much I had opinionated over the American elections even though I didn’t get to vote.

“The people are cheering loudly for the Obamas!” Macie announced from the Cathedral. “The former president and first lady of the United States are looking pretty elegant here, and stopped to wave at the people across from the Cathedral, a lot of Americans cheering. But to be fair, everyone is cheering. And everyone is cheering for pretty much anyone, actually. Earlier today a cleaning crew stopped by to set up the white carpet covering the steps into the Cathedral and every step was cleaned with a vacuum cleaner before they let the carpet in, and the crowds that were already here cheered them on for their good job, because they’re so excited.”

“Now, talk about fastidiousness!” Michelle laughed. “They cleaned the steps of the church with a vacuum cleaner? They really go all out, the British!”

“And the flowers too, apparently, actually.” Joan added. “There were reports that the flowers inside the church, which appear to be a large arrangement of white orchids, calla lilies and sweet peas, were all dusted off to make sure they would be looking spotless for the big moment. And doesn’t it look great?”

“It does, Joan. I find it amazing how they match the white walls of Saint Paul’s Cathedral. All the white is elegant without being too overwhelming as the church is already pretty adorned in itself, so I like how delicate the flowers and the white carpet look there… Now, let’s go back to Christian whom, I see, has found his way to Hyde Park. Chris, how is the mood over there?”

“Hi, Michelle and Joan, the mood over here is unbelievable! People are pouring in, it already looks pretty crowded but there’s still people arriving. I met some people here who traveled all the way from South America, India, Australia and, of course, Brazil just to watch the wedding and maybe catch a glimpse of the royal couple.”
“Don’t people have jobs?” Beezus wondered, making us giggle.

“It is a bank holiday.” Tamara argued.

“Here.” She shrugged.

“In the commonwealth realms too.” I explained. “So, technically Australia and India. And they made it one in Brazil as well. People seem pretty happy.”

“You gave them a long weekend… they are.” Selena said, then suddenly widened her eyes at the TV. “Is that James and Craig?”

We all looked at the screen and, sure enough, the image of the Cathedral clearly showed my two handsome, recently engaged, friends arriving in matching tail coats.

“Oh, they look so handsome!” I squealed.

“I’m gonna text them.” Beezus smiled, finding he phone.

“…it’s really a party mood all over Britain today, guys. It’s very cool to watch.” Michelle went on. “I mean, we’re seeing footage of the military bands playing down the closed streets this morning, people have been camping out and the mood is happy and excited, you know? The government website estimates there’ll be about six thousand street parties all over the country today to celebrate the occasion. Even the Prime Minister made an announcement when the engagement news broke that he truly hoped the country would celebrate and rejoice together, and celebrating they are!”

Michael found my shoes, that they had designed as well and helped me in them. They were simple white pumps in the front, but the heels had golden flowers around them. In the back, Michelle and Joan went on on their excited conversation.

“I like that they appear to be really close to the Spencers, Michelle.” Joan said. “We just saw them arrive, and we see in the seating chart that the palace released that they will be seated just next to the bride’s family, kind of like how it was in the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge’s wedding.”

“Yes, they do seem close. The daughters of Earl Spencer, who’s Diana’a brother, Kitty, Amalia and Eliza were seen in Jenifer Silva’s bachelorette party in France last week, so we can assume they’re all good friends, which is good to see.”

“The fact she had a bachelorette party! That is so incredible to think about!” Joan squealed. “We wouldn’t even know if it weren’t for the engagement picture of their friends, James Johnson and Craig Mathur, after all, where they mention getting engaged during a friend’s bachelorette party.”

“I love the picture of the locks in that bridge in France!” Said Michelle. “You can just see a lock under the couple’s engagement lock on the corner that says Jen and Harry, which is so sweet!”

“Damn it, James.” Beezus whispered. “We should have put him in royal training.”

“Michelle, Joan, I’m sorry to interrupt,” cut in Macie, “but after just seeing the Obamas and the Prime Minister arriving with his wife, we can now see the Clintons arriving as well, President Clinton and her husband, former president Clinton. The public seems pretty excited and, according to the palace’s schedule the next arrivals should be of the Brazilian president and other dignitaries and government officials, and then after that will be the foreign royals from all over Europe.”

“I’m excited about Prince Harry’s outfit. I hear he’s wearing his white military suit, that’s my
favorite I think.” Michelle said, making me smile. “Though some sections of the military were upset he wouldn’t be representing them by wearing their uniform. I wonder why he chose this specific one, since it is a tropical suit.”

“Maybe it has some personal meaning, Michelle.”

“I literally just think he looks the hottest in that one.” I confessed to my friends, who laughed.

“I love knowing that.”

Skye commented. “I’ll write about this day one day, you know, in my memories.”

“You can tweet us here at ABC News at the hashtag #RoyalWeddingABC,” said Joan, “twitter has just informed there’s an average of twenty thousand tweets per minute right now, people all over the world are tuning in to watch this, it’s a true worldwide wedding, Michelle.”

“I’m just very excited!” Michelle told her. “I wanna see the dress so badly! It has been kept a secret all this time, and very successfully. We should keep an eye on the bridesmaids’ dresses, and I mean the little bridesmaids, the flower girls. Usually their dresses are miniature, simpler versions of the bride’s dress.”

I looked at my off-shoulder sleeves, and smiled at myself at how wrong they would be.

The flower girls’ dresses were long and white taffeta, with short lace sleeves wrapping around their shoulders and a delicate baby’s breath flower crown to each of them. The page boys were in white suits made to look like Harry, sort of a different colored version of the suits the little boys at William’s wedding had worn.

Tamara and her assistant were still walking slowly around my dress, removing pins that had been keeping the lace and fabric in place so it wouldn’t slide too much apart from each other – a process that took a long time so they wouldn’t damage it. I stood there, listening to the television, trying not to take deep breaths as I got more and more nervous about the big moment.

I heard as Joan and Michelle commented about the arrival of Harry’s family, and watched as his uncles, aunts and cousins strutted into the Cathedral, amazed at their dresses and hats, taking notes for the future.

At this point in the day, Arthur had already been driven out to meet the other children in Kensington, where Kate was doing me the favor of getting them all ready – Arthur, George, Kidd, Charlotte, India and Zalie.

“Okay, we have to go.” My mother said, walking in hurriedly. She looked at me again and sighed, deeply. “I love you.”

“I love you too, mom.” I smiled. She gave me another hug before grabbing her handbag to make her way to the car with Lucas and Livia.

“Good luck, Ro.” My brother said, giving me a quick kiss on the cheek before following her out.

“You look beautiful. Just don’t trip!” Livia said, as she did the same.

“Thanks for putting the idea in my head.” I replied, sarcastic.

After Tamara was done removing the pins from my dress, they helped pull my train so I could sit again to wait for the time to leave. We watched, on the television, the coverage follow the car
leaving our building with my mother, brother and sister-in-law inside. They waved timidly to the crowds outside and I smiled at the sight of them politely greeting all the bishops in the Cathedral and being guided to their places in the front.

“So, Joan, tell me, what are you the most excited about seeing today?” Taylor asked, faking a British accent, making us laugh.

“What are you most excited about today, Joan?” Michelle asked, in the television.

“Woah!” We laughed, astonished.

“Drinking game alert!” Selena joked. “Shot every time they ask something kinda dumb.”

“Please, don’t do shots before my wedding.” I asked. “I don’t need anyone tripping their way down the aisle.”

“You’re no fun.” Ophelia teased, and I gave her the tongue.

“I think I’m the most excited about the kiss in the balcony, Michelle!” Joan replied, in the ABC News studio. “It’s such an iconic moment, and since they are such a younger, adventurous, more fun couple I’m hoping we’ll see a bit of a more interesting kiss than William and Kate’s, which was sort of shy, I think.”

“Right. The people who barely allowed me to wear short sleeves today will let us make out in public.” I said, sarcastic.

“Oh, my God. There’s just so many people…” Selena marveled, as the TV showed an image of the big group near Clarence House. “And they’ve all been standing there for so long, that’s so weird.”

“They love them.” Alessa uttered, and I felt butterflies flying about in my stomach.

Suddenly, the background sound of the image on the television grew louder, and Michelle announced what was happening as they closed up on the gates of Clarence House.

“Ah! Here’s the big moment! Or one of them.” She said. “We can see cars exiting Clarence House, just in schedule, Prince Harry is most likely in it. No, no. That’s his groomsmen as we can see. You have, I think, Guy Pelly, Jake Warren and Thomas Van Straubenzee.”

“There’s another car in the back there, Michelle.” Said Joan. “Yes, I believe Prince Harry is in it. I can see the white uniform I think. He’s with Thomas Inskip, known as Skippy by his friends, and Prince William, of course, who’s his brother’s best man. Who’s wearing a tail coat as well, like the groomsmen instead of a military uniform, probably to match the others, right?”

“Yes, I think he wouldn’t want to be the only one of the men in a military uniform like the groom.” Michelle said, but I wasn’t listening to her anymore.

I saw the two cars leaving the House I had grown to know so well, with a security car following close behind and a policeman in a motorcycle leading the way in the front, but my eyes eagerly tried to focus on Harry. Luckily, so did the cameras.

I couldn’t blame them – of course they did. He looked so absolutely handsome and joyful, sitting by the window in his black hat with the red stripe in the middle, and white suit with the golden stash across his chest, and all his military medals hanging from it. He was clean shaven for the first time in months – his cheek looking smooth, soft. The car made a turn, and the image focused very clearly on him, smiling happily to the crowds as he waved… my fiancé. My future husband.
I sighed, and before I knew why, I stood up and took a couple of steps closer to the television with my heart filling with... some inexplicable amount of overwhelming love.

“Oh, Michelle they’re getting here!” Joan squealed.

“Yes, they are! We can tell by the roar of the crowd even though we can’t see it yet.” Michelle laughed. “Oh, my, they look so handsome!”

The car parked in front of the Cathedral, and out stepped Harry, followed closely by his brother and friends, and now I could properly see him. I had seen him in that uniform before, but it felt so overwhelming to see him in my television stepping out on it to our wedding. The handsome smile, the big shoulders; he waved at the crowd around and talked to the others as they climbed up the steps of Saint Paul’s. He greeted the bishops by the doors and an assistant collected his white gloves and hat, and they made their way down the white carpeted isle I’d be walking down in less than an hour.

I felt my heart beating harder on my chest and a knot on my throat before I realized what was happening.

“Are you crying?!” Asked Selena, astonished.

I dried my cheeks delicately, trying not to mess up my makeup. “I can’t help it.” I complained, giggling at myself.

The others smiled; Taylor passed an arm around my shoulders.

I saw Harry wave at friends as he made his way down the aisle until almost the dome, where they had put the altar. He stopped to greet his family happily, and the Spencers as well, before being guided to a separate private area backstage to wait for me to arrive. My tears wouldn’t stop falling as I all I wanted most in that moment was to see him. Hug him. And be his wife.

“Delivery for the future princess.” Clara announced, walking in with Eddy – dressed in a smart suit -, both carrying the biggest bouquet of pink roses I had ever seen.

“Oh, wow.” Beezus marveled. “I didn’t even know they made those that big.”

I smiled, remembering all the times Harry had sent me a similar bouquet. When Thomas had made him when we were still pretending to date, and then later to ask me out, and every day I had an award show or birthday. I knew they were from him before I even reached for the card.

‘Pronta pra dominar o mundo, Jenifer Silva?’

“What does it say?” Clara asked, curiously, looking over my shoulder.

I smiled at the words in my native tongue. “Ready to take over the world, Jenifer Silva?” I translated.

“Well, that’s fitting.” She teased.

Harry had made me that very question before our first kiss ever; he asked me that question the day we broke up. It was only, Clara was right, only fitting he asked me again before I became his wife.

And I knew the answer to that question was still the same one I had given him all the times before. I was born ready.
“Oh, I believe we’re seeing the foreign royals arriving just now, Joan.” Michelle said, and the image on the TV was now showing the front of the Cathedral again.

On my wedding day, it felt like most of the world was walking into Saint Paul’s Cathedral. Inside, I felt a little bad that I would be the last one in. I had a huge desire to be there already, taking control of the situation, but I had to tell myself to let go.

This was not the day to be in control; I wasn’t the wedding planner – I was the bride.

“I can spot the King and Queen of Jordan, and the Crown Princely couple of Denmark. The prince of Denmark also married a foreigner, the crown princess is from Australia, I believe.”

“Damn right.” Ophelia smiled, before high-fiving Beezus.

“Oh, I love the princess of Sweden’s dress!” Joan added. “Princess Madeleine and her husband. She looks so beautiful, and that hat, too. They say she is a close friend of the couple, too, as she lived in New York about the same time Harry did when he started dating Jenifer.”

“And there’s the King and Queen of Spain.” Michelle added. “And the King and Queen of the Netherlands. And we have Belgium right there, too.”

“This is insane.” Alli giggled. “You have royal families in your wedding. How crazy is that?!”

“Time to get ready.” Clara said, waking in again. “Stefania called. There’s just Prince Charles, the Duchess of Cornwall and the Queen and Prince Philip left. You need to be ready to leave.”

Stefania, our superhero wedding planner, had been in the Cathedral running the show the whole day.

Tamara got my long, almost transparent, cathedral length veil that went almost all the way down to the end of my train to place it in my hair. Skye helped her and soon enough they were pulling it over my face.

“Okay, we should go then.” Alessa said. “We need to be there at the same time as the kids to-“

“Oh, I can see now the Duchess of Cambridge, Michelle!” Joan squealed on the television. “She’s leaving Kensington Palace in the same car and Prince George and Princess Charlotte and the other kids are on the car behind, I think. She’s dressed in blue, like the bride’s mother, and she looks stunning!”

“Great. Now we’re late.” Alli sighed.

“Relax, it’ll work out.” Clara said. “We just gotta get you out there before the Queen! Everybody to the elevator, now!”

“Okay, let’s go.” Alli said, and the girls made to leave.

Maybe because it felt too sudden, I started panicking. “Wait!” I called, feeling like I needed some more time before they all left me alone in that dress and tiara. “Just wait. Give me a minute.” No one said anything as I stood there taking deep breaths. I raised my veil up. “Give me a hug.”

They walked back to me, wrapping their arms delicately around my dress, under the veil in a group
hug. I let their scent, they touch calm my nerves. I knew I would be fine, because even if I didn’t, I’d have them. Right there. With me. Today and always, every step of the way.

“See you soon.” They said, before walking out.

Tamara, Skye and Michael said their goodbyes too, as they needed to get to the church, and Clara went to help them into their cars.

Suddenly, I was alone in my bedroom, in my lace dress, big veil and tiara. I walked to the coffee table to start putting on the jewelry Clara had laid out for me. A simple yellow diamond bracelet and yellow diamond earrings shaped like a rose, that had been a gift from Richard and Janine – who were already at the Cathedral with their kids as well.

“Princess Jenifer has been trending on twitter all day, which I find answers the question we asked ourselves earlier about her title.” Michelle joked. “Royal Wedding, too, of course has been trending. And, oh, I can see now we have visual on the Queen leaving Buckingham Palace. She’s wearing a light tone of blue, Joan. I wonder if the family planned this. She looks very pretty.”

“She does, Michelle. Her hat is beautiful as well. And we also have confirmation the Prince of Wales and Duchess of Cornwall are leaving Clarence House right now.”

“They say Jenifer has a good relationship with them, and the Queen has complimented her work with the United Nations in the past, so we can understand it is true.”

“Also who can forget Prince Harry in their engagement interview saying Jenifer would marry Prince Philip if he was single and a few years younger?” Joan asked, and they laughed.

I watched as my soon-to-be in-laws waved at the crowds and arrived in the Cathedral, saying hello to the kids waiting by the doors with the nannies for my bridesmaids. They proceeded to join Kate and walk down the aisle for their assigned seats in first row, just under the Cathedral’s big dome.

“We can see Taylor Swift, Selena Gomez, Ophelia Callis, Beatrice Quin and Alessa McKenna arriving at Saint Paul’s Cathedral right now.” Michelle said, as the image showed the girls in their pretty dresses climbing up the steps, smiling and waving to the crowd across the street happily. “Stay tuned, folks, we shall be seeing Jenifer Silva in just a few moments. She’ll be living her apartment in Knightsbridge to drive down to the Cathedral with her father. She’ll arrive as a commoner and leave as royalty.”

“I mean, this is a girl who is the daughter of an electrician and a teacher.” Joan marveled. “Who got a big break in Hollywood and made it big, endured a lot of manipulation and abuse and bad relationships before meeting a Prince one day in a charity gala. Little did she know, mere months later, they would be dating, and six years later, she’d become his wife.”

“I can’t help but wonder what her night was like.” Michelle added. “Knowing this big day was ahead of her.”

“Jen?” Clara called, making me turn to her, taking my eyes from the television. “It’s time.”

I thought of Michelle’s question, how my night was, and remembered hearing Harry’s voice – the last time that I did. Just a few hours ago, and I already missed him. I knew there was an easy way to fix that problem, of course… I just had to drive to the Cathedral and marry him in front of the whole world.

“Are you ready?” Clara asked, looking concerned.
I smiled, remembering Harry’s handsome smile and blue eyes, and the question in the card he sent with the bouquet; the question he had asked before. So I gave Clara the answer I had given him all the times before.

“I was born ready.”

A whole new kind of nerves took over my body that third of August of 2018. It was a clear sky, a relatively warm day, and the streets of London were full of people because on that day, at precisely four in the afternoon, Prince Henry of Wales was marrying Jenifer Silva.

The bells of Saint Paul’s Cathedral could be heard from miles away as they had been chiming for hours now.

I stepped out of my bedroom in my white pumps, holding delicately two fistfuls of my dress, the white, handmade Brazilian bobbin lace covered dress, sheath cut in the front with a ballgown skirt in the back and long train, with short, tulle, off-shoulder sleeves. I already felt my legs weak as I walked across the apartment. I didn’t understand why. Sure, the world was watching, but the world had been watching before. The world was watching when I became the first Latin American actress to win an Oscar in a leading role category, and the world was watching all the times I told my exes to either kiss my ass or suck it on my speeches. So why was now different? Why did this feel bigger? More important?

I knew the answer, of course. As much as I tried to pretend I didn’t, I did. It was Harry. It was the adorably tall, blue-eyed ginger that had gently eased his way into my heart against my better judgement and walls. I wanted him. I wanted to be his wife, and walking towards it felt tremendous. It felt like the beginning of what I knew was best decision I had ever made.

We walked out of the apartment – me, Clara and my three bodyguards. I had told them we could hire other people to help me that day, since they were supposed to be guests at the wedding, but they insisted on working. I loved them for it, as having them there felt natural. It made it feel like a normal day.

It felt almost too mundane to stand in an elevator – as Clara and Johnnie struggled to carry my long train in their arms – making the way down as I had countless times before. Everything was insane outside of that apartment - the streets were closed by metal rails, protected by the police, keeping the thousands of tourists and well-wishers at bay. Union Jack flags hanged from every pole. Hide Park was taken over by people watching the ceremony on big screens and special correspondents from all over the world were narrating every aspect of the day in their own languages. But inside my apartment building, everything was comfortably normal. The elevator was the same as always. Mr. Reynolds, our concierge, smiled and waved excitedly wishing me ‘good luck’ when we made our way out to the parking lot. My father was already at the car after walking my mother out, and he placed his hands over his heart when he saw me.

He didn’t say anything, but I saw him struggling not to cry as he smiled at me.

“Not you too.” I complained, smiling, remembering my mother trying to keep it together right before she left.

I didn’t give dad any time to try and make a big moment out of this, I already felt like crying and I had a bet to win – I just needed not to cry within the first ten minutes of being in the church and I would beat Harry. I stepped inside, the photographer snapping every one of my movements, and Clara adjusted my long train to rest by my feet so my father could find his way in.

“If you change your mind, I can get you out of the country in, like, twenty minutes.” Dad told me.
I looked at him grinning, wondering if he was joking. I knew he wasn’t. I held his hand and squeezed it delicately. “I love you.” I told him. “But I’m not changing my mind.”

“Oh, okay, then.” He smiled.

I overheard Clara’s radio from where she sat on the front seat, besides the driver, as my security took their seats in the car in the back. It was something about the Queen already being in the church. “It’s show time.” She told me.

I knew by now the trumpets were playing in Saint Paul’s Cathedral as the Queen, Prince Philip, Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall made their way to their seats. And as the car turned on to the drive out of the privacy of my building, I felt the butterflies in my stomach flapping away in excitement.

As soon as the gates opened, the roar of the crowd were so loud I couldn’t help but smile widely. But my father, whom after accompanying me to my first Oscars had become known for his genuine excitement and smile, was quick to wave to the onlookers as he showed them his teeth.

I could see their faces, all their broadly happy faces as we drove slowly pass them. They were wearing Union Jack hats and waving flags – British, American, Brazilian -, holding their phones up and holding signs. I remembered this feeling – the feeling I got in premières and award shows when I saw the fans waiting, some who had waited for hours just to get a glimpse at us. That devotion, that joy when they saw us always felt overwhelming, but now it was much bigger. I wasn’t promoting a movie. I was getting married. They were just there because they were happy that we were happy.

I waved at them, smiling kindly, trying to make eye contact with as many of them as I could so they could all say they had a moment with the bride later on. As long as we drove, the crowd never looked smaller. It seemed to even grow bigger as we made our way around London, and they never looked bored or tired, only extremely excited to see us as they shouted as loud as they could. As much as we drove, they only sounded as wild as if it was the first time that day they were seeing what they came to see – which, I realized, was in part, true.

They were mouthing too. Not mouthing, I’m sure – they were probably speaking, only I couldn’t hear it. But I could make out a few things – ‘she looks so pretty!’, ‘good luck!’’, ‘hi, Jen!’ I waved. It was all I could do really, wave. Smile. Try to show them in my smile how happy and thankful I was that they were being so nice. After so many years fearing this moment – or fearing that I may never have a chance to get there – to have them smiling at me felt… welcoming. It felt like a hug after struggling to find ways I could love Harry pass the expiration date I kept seeing in our relationship.

We drove around London, to the sound of thunderous cheering from the crowds, until the sound of the bells got louder than them.

“I’m gonna throw up.” I mumbled, taking in a deep breath.

Clara turned back, struggling to keep her polite smile in her lips. “Please, don’t.” She begged, on a desperate tone, making me giggle nervously.

“They are so happy for you!” Dad said, smiling excitedly as he waved at the crowds, looking almost as happy as when I had won my first Oscar. They were happy. They looked it. They looked as happy as I felt, and all I could do was smile and wave. I felt like crying harder than I ever did before as I struggled to keep it together. Inside I had
nothing but disbelief that we had made it; that after six years of not knowing if we could, we were there.

It was a weird feeling, to be so at peace and so excited at the same time. I felt like I was exactly where I was supposed to, but having the eyes of the world on me made me feel very aware of the magnitude of the moment.

The car made a turn, and we found ourselves parked in front of the Saint Paul’s Cathedral. The magnificent church was decorated with a mixture of white calla lilies, orchids and sweet peas, and the carpet down the aisle all the way from the first steps in the entrance was white as well – all matching the Cathedral’s white walls which, with its golden detailing, was already decoration enough.

Stefania, our wedding planner, was waiting for me. A guard in a red uniform opened the car door and saluted, looking straight ahead. “Thank you.” I said, only after remembering he couldn’t talk to me. He smiled, though.

Clara walked out of the car to help Stefania with my train and, slowly, they got all of it out as my father made his way around. The crowd was still screaming from where they stood, watching, all around the cathedral.

Upon their sign, I started walking ahead in the white carpet in the general direction of the steps. I held on to my dress so I wouldn’t trip, and braced myself for the climb and Stefania and Clara carried my train. My father walked by my side, his hand on my lower back in case he needed to push me.

I stopped in the first section of the steps to look around. The crowd waved, excitedly, cheering, so I raised a hand and waved to as many of them as I could. I looked to the other side, spotting, at a distance, the little girl that had been interviewed earlier on ABC News. I tried to look at her, hoping she would know I knew who she was, and waved. My father waved even more excitedly than me, and I had to remind him to keep walking.

Finally, we reached the entrance of the Cathedral, where the gigantic doors surrounded by thick, ancient columns were opened waiting for me. The girls were there, in their nude pink dresses, keeping the kids calm, but there was nothing they could do when they saw me.

Arthur, Kidd, George, India, Zalie and Charlotte all raced to me at the same time, making the girls and their nannies follow close behind. I squatted to reach their eye level, smiling at the sight of my nephew, godson, Harry’s goddaughters and soon-to-be nephew and niece-in-law. The boys were in white suits similar to Harry’s, and the girls in taffeta white dressed with short lacey sleeves and flower crowns.

“Hi, Aunt Jenny!” They all said, almost at the same time.

“Hi, guys!” I smiled. “Are you excited?”

“There so many people!” George said, looking down the steps at the crowd.

“I know, right, buddy?!?”

“They’re waving at us. They were screaming when we drove here.” Arthur told me, matter-of-factly.

“That’s right. They’re happy to be here.” I said.
“Time to go, guys.” Stefania said, helping the nannies take the kids back to their positions.

“Aunt Jenny?” Charlotte called, walking towards me out of the reach of her nanny.

“Yes, baby?”

She gestured with her finger for me to come closer, so I pulled my veil up so she could whisper in my ear.

“I have to pee.” The little three-year-old princess said, and I struggled not to laugh.

“Can you maybe hold on a little?” I asked. “We just have to walk down into the church, and then someone will take you, okay?”

“Okay.” She said, before walking into the church to where the others were.

Alessa would be in the front, holding Charlotte and Kidd by their hands. Behind her would be Taylor, holding the hands of India and Zalie, whom, like the first two, were also only three. Behind them would walk George and Arthur whom, at five, could keep themselves together enough not to run away excitedly – or so we hoped. And behind them would come Bee, Ophelia and Selena, in a single line.

In front of all of them, of course, would be me, which meant I had to walk in before they could so we could take positions. I looked back at the crowd one last time, taking in a deep breath, and waved. Then I held my father’s hand, and stepped into the Cathedral, to change my life forever.

The doors were closed and suddenly the world was quiet. They euphoric atmosphere of the street was shut out with it. Inside, it was formal. Quiet. Calm. I took in a deep breath as I walked to where I was supposed to, so my train could be put into place by Stefania and Clara. At this point, people knew what my dress looked like. The statement with the designers was being released. They knew the tiara I was wearing. They knew I was unapologetically showcasing my arms – and tattoo.

Dressed ceremoniously, the Bishop of London, Richard Chartres, greeted me at this moment as I could already feel the eyes of my guests on me.

“How do you do, Miss Silva?”

“Trying not to shake too much, sir.” I told him.

“I would have thought this crowd is little compared to what you’ve seen.” He smiled.

“I would have thought so, too.” I joked. “I think I’m just excited.”

“That’s good.” He said. “Excited is good.”

“Jen?” Clara called, after she was done helping Stefania make sure my train and veil were straight at my back. I looked at her, and she handed me my bouquet, which she had been holding for me – a set of almost ten calla lilies of different sizes.

“Thanks.” I smiled. “Go find your seat.”

“Good luck.” She whispered, smiling, before making her way out.

I looked around at the happy faces smiling back at me and didn’t feel a stranger in a foreign place. I could see a lot of staff I recognized – members of the security team and general staff of the Queen and Prince Charles. In the first rows, I could see some friends already, the people that worked with
us in our charities and some of Harry’s friends.

“All set.” Stefania said, and the Bishop turned to the front to lead the way down the aisle.

‘Is this really happening?’, I wondered. ‘Did I make it?’

The climax scene of the movie of my life started with the most beautiful score. The Cathedral’s orchestra began playing the first delicate notes of I Vow To Thee My Country, slow and steady, as I was told to wait. I knew at this first part of the song, Harry was walking out back to the altar in the front of the church, though I still couldn’t see him.

Suddenly, after the first forty seconds or something of the song, the violins turned the notes into something more classical, sweeter, and the Bishop started walking very slowly forward. As the notes grew higher, I felt my father holding my hand tightly as he waited until I took my first step to follow me on.

The melody died down just enough to come back in a thunderous sound of drums which brought forward the cellos in what felt like a song from a movie. I held my head high as I walked, the only thing the song made me feel like doing. It sounded too much like a victory march not to.

I saw a small camera in the ceiling hanging from a chord, getting a panoramic view from upside, turning to showcase the whole cathedral. I knew Harry had thought this wasn’t the wedding of my dreams, but as I saw the flowers that we picked together, the white carpet, the sweet melody of the beautiful song his father had recommended, and the smiling faces of our friends, I knew it was. That was the wedding I wanted – that was all I wanted.

The song talked about patriotic love, and I hoped Britain would see it as my love letter – as my vow to make this my country as well. In a way, I hoped Brazil would know it too. I hoped they would always be where my something blue was: in my heart.

The song was made more special by the knowledge that it was Harry’s mother’s favorite hymn – something his father told me when he suggested it for the ceremony. I had found it so beautiful I couldn’t help but chose it to walk down the aisle to.

It was hard not to smile at my friends – directors I had worked with until very recently, studio executives, Jimmy Fallon and his wife, Seth Meyers and his wife, Ellen DeGeneres and her wife. I saw James and Craig – both crying adorably -, and Sofia Vergara, Gina, Karlie, Gigi, Hailee Steinfeld, Oscar and Adam, Orlando. I saw Tyler and Stacey, smiling happily, and Jennifer Lawrence, Angelina Jolie and Brat Pitt, David and Victoria Beckham and suddenly, George and Amal Clooney.

I smiled at George, and he nodded at me, very slowly. I knew we were thinking back to the same moment: his wedding day, when he had told me to simply jump into love head first, which was the only way sometimes. I hoped he knew how glad I was for the advice.

I saw the Artchets, sitting near my family – all of them, smiling proudly at me, making my heart calmer in a second.

Closer to the end of the aisle, it was harder to focus on my friends’ faces – though I knew I saw the Zoe looking at her little girls more than at me, Lizzy and the others by her side. I ignored the foreign royals sitting just behind Harry’s family, I ignored the Spencers in front of them, and I even ignored my own family. Because as we got closer to the dome, I could see Harry.

He was facing the altar, as tradition demanded, but I could see the white of his suit and his ginger
hair. I saw William by his side, smiling back at me before he whispered something to his brother. I saw Harry raise his head, and his shoulders raise as he took a deep breath. I didn’t even remember to smile at the Queen or Prince Philip as I walked for, as soon as I reached the dome – just as the melody slowed down delicately -, Harry turned back to look at me.

His blue eyes met mine and I knew there was nowhere else I would look that day. The joy in them was so bare I couldn’t look too long, I looked down, feeling myself blush as we finally reached the altar. My father and I came to a stop by his side – he and William were looking at me, much like everyone else. The groomsmen were sitting in the first row, my bridesmaids took their seats, helping the kids down. I saw as someone took Charlotte away – glad she would get to pee, but even her couldn’t hold my attention too long.

Harry was smiling as the song came to a dragged, delicate ending; I could smell his aftershave and cologne, the smell that made me feel so at home. I wanted more than anything to hug him, but I had to keep myself together.

“Hi.” I mouthed, whispering so low I was sure he couldn’t hear me.

“Hi.” He said back.

We smiled at each idiotically for what felt like a long time. I turned to my father, and bended my knees a little so he could pull my veil over my head, to fall down my back delicately. I struggled to adjust it, and Harry raised a hand to pull it straight.

I smiled at him, as we both knew he wasn’t supposed to touch me until my hand was given to him by the Bishop.

“You look…” he sighed, longingly, “gorgeous.”

I smiled at him, trying to look serious, but unable to resist a joke. “I know.” I said, cockily. He laughed, just as the organ started playing the first hymn, which muffled the sound of our laughter – thankfully.

I was impatient as the church sang, and couldn’t even pretend I was really seeing the words in the program they had left for us at the altar. I looked around, at the way the white walls and golden corners of the Cathedral seemed to shine under the sunlight. I made sure my – already too fleshy – sleeves were in place. I held on to my bouquet tightly. I felt Harry looking at me. I looked at Harry. We exchanged a grin.

“Dearly beloved,” started the Bishop of London after the song was done, in the fanciest, most proper British accent I had ever heard. “We are gathered here in the sight of God and in the face of this congregation, to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony; which is an honorable estate, instituted of God himself, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church; which holy estate Christ adorned and beautified with his presence, and first miracle that he wrought, in Cana of Galilee…”

I didn’t really hear much more after this, which I immediately felt guilty about. He spoke about how marriage is holy and it’s supposed to be a vow not to be taken lightly – which, sure, I agreed. But it was very hard to focus. I just wanted to hug Harry. I just wanted to hold his hand. I just wanted to roll my eyes at him, exchanging a joke about all this pump and circumstance. He was right there, and it pained me I couldn’t really talk to him.

I just wanted to be his wife already.
I hated that I couldn’t touch him. I hated that I couldn’t hold his hand and that we’d have to wait until we got to Buckingham to kiss. I hated that I could barely talk to him.

The Bishop of London was then replaced in the altar by the Archbishop of Canterbury, who began:

“I require and charge you both, as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgement when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, that if either of you know any impediment, why ye may not be lawfully joined together in matrimony, ye do now confess it. For be ye well assured, that so many as are coupled together otherwise than God’s word doth allow are not joined together by God; neither is their matrimony lawful.”

I felt pathetic; I had talked to him just hours before, and I missed him so much. He was right by my side, and my heart ached with not being able to touch him. Finally, the Archbishop got to the part that we all really wanted to hear:

“Henry Charles Albert David, wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife, to live together according to God’s law in the holy estate of matrimony? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honor and keep her, in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all other, keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live?”

Harry was still grinning when he replied, “I will.”

The Archbishop looked at me. “Rosangela Jenifer,” he said, and I tried to keep my smile to a polite level instead of a giggle at my birth name, “wilt thou have this man to thy wedded husband, to live together according to God’s law in the holy estate of matrimony? Wilt thou love him, comfort him, honor and keep him, in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all other, keep thee only unto him, so long as ye both shall live?”

“I will.” I said, smiling, holding my head up high, proudly.

The Cathedral was filled by the sound of cheering coming from outside, and I had to giggle. I looked at Harry, who was doing the same, and we avoided each other’s look so we wouldn’t fall into a fit of laughter.

“How giveth this woman to be married to this man?”

Ceremoniously, my father held my hand again to give it to the Archbishop – as now was supposed to have been the first time we actually touched, hadn’t it been for the veil adjustment. My father kissed my hand before handing it over, and as soon as he did, he touched under his eye and gave Harry a teasingly - I hoped - warning look.

We laughed, because at this point we just couldn’t keep it in anymore. We had been cracking jokes about the absurdity of my laid back, casually fun father in that traditional Cathedral for too long not to. The Archbishop held my hand over to Harry, and my heart beat fast at his touch. We switched on our feet to face each other, still trying to contain a fit of giggles.

“I, Henry Charles Albert David,” started the Archbishop, and Harry repeated after him.

When his eyes met mine, they didn’t leave anymore.

“I, Henry Charles Albert David,” he started, in his guttural, deep, heavily accented voice, “take thee, Rosangela Jenifer, to my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse. For richer, for poorer. In sickness and in health. To love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God’s holy law. And thereto I give thee my troth.”
The intensity of his eyes were almost unbearable, and I wasn’t laughing anymore. I didn’t look away either, I embraced it. The happy ending that had scared me for so long.

He squeezed my hand before letting it go, and the Archbishop made sure I held his right hand now, so I could repeat after him, which I did, trying to keep my voice as steady as possible. That part wasn’t hard; though I felt an intense excitement inside, my voice wasn’t nervous. When I spoke, it came out confidently, as a promise.

“I, Rosangela Jenifer, take thee, Henry Charles Albert David,” I couldn’t help the almost daring smile that came onto my lips, as I stared into his blue eyes so he could see I meant every word. “To my wedded husband,” I felt the knot on my throat as I uttered the word husband, and my voice broke as I continued to repeat the words; “to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse. For richer, for poorer.” I started crying, trying to keep it in as best as I could, but unable to stop the tears from rolling down my cheeks, so I raised my free hand to dry them quickly. “In sickness and in health. To love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God’s holy law. And thereto I give thee my truth.”

We smiled widely at my final words, as Harry knew the last sentence had been worrying me on the previous days to the wedding – my second-language-English kept making my tongue curl at the words ‘thereto I give thee’ and I kept getting them wrong, so I took to rehearsing it under my breath at the most unsuspicious hours of the day, which Harry found very amusing.

William handed the Archbishop the two yellow gold, thin wedding bands we had been wearing on our right hands to this day since getting engaged, and he prayed for them.

“Bless, O Lord, these rings, and grant that they who give it and they who shall wear it may remain faithful to each other, and abide in thy peace and favor, and live together in love until their lives’ end. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

He handed the smaller of them to Harry, who slid it down my finger delicately, before repeating:

“With this ring, I thee wed. With my body, I thee honor. And all my worldly goods with thee I share. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.”

I adjusted the ring in my finger before holding on to his, which I proceeded to slide down his finger.

“With this ring, I thee wed. With my body, I thee honor. And all my worldly goods with thee I share. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.”

We smiled at each other, as the Archbishop took off his hat, before saying, “Let us pray.”

We took to our knees in the cushioned stand that had been placed in front. He prayed, and I tried to listen, but my heart was still beating too excitedly in my chest to hear anything. I heard the congregation utter ‘amen’, and knew I could open my eyes.

At the sign from the Archbishop, we joined our right hands again, and he said, “those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder.”

“Forasmuch as Henry and Rosangela have consented together in holy wedlock, and have witnessed the same before God and this company, and thereto have given and pledged their troth either to other, and have declared the same by giving and receiving of rings, and by joining of hands, I pronounce that they be man and wife together, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.”
“Amen.” We all repeated, in the Cathedral, using our indoor voices.

Outside, there was more excited, loud cheering.

Harry and I were officially married; husband and wife. I was officially Her Royal Highness, Jenifer, The Duchess of Clarence.

Though as a royal I joined the church in my indoor voice to utter a delicate ‘amen’, inside I felt like cheering.
There isn’t much to do at a wedding after bride and groom are declared man and wife – even a royal wedding. Maybe especially a royal wedding, considering after all the main parts are done – the vows, the ring – there’s still a lot of important clergy members to please by allowing them to read a passage or say a prayer. Will and Kate’s wedding had been almost one hour long, we managed to cut ours by half of that. Still, we spent our first half an hour as a married couple sitting in the two chairs that had been placed for us on the other side of the dome.

Getting there was tricky because of my train, but Alli and Taylor came up to help me move it around. As we moved to sit there, the church – or part of it - was singing a hymn we had chosen to honor my heritage, one called Ó, Vinde Adoremos, in Portuguese. Mostly it was my family singing, but I hoped some people watching in Brazil was too. We had made sure the livestream would have translations to English, as we did so that the English service would be translated to Brazilian Portuguese in my home country.

I had chosen that hymn because it was my parents’ favorite. It said ‘Come near, O believers, come jubilant, let us follow the star in the sky of Bethlehem! Behold, he is born Christ, King of glory! O come, let us adore him! O come, let us adore him! O come, let us worship the King Savior!’

When I finally felt comfortable enough that I wasn’t about to sit wrong in my long train, I took to my chair, and the girls made their way back. Harry moved to sit by my side, and I realized his chair was too far from me, so I pulled it closer and he gave me a grin.

He gave me a questioning look as he sat and, as an answer, I just laid my hand on his tight with the palm up, which he quickly took. I immediately felt better; the nerves, the fit of giggles I had been suppressing vanished at his touch. It was like suddenly being reminded the reason we were there. For each other. That’s what mattered. That was the reason we were enduring the whole over-traditional Anglican service.

As we approached the end of the song, I saw as my uncle Adriano make his way from his seat to the wooden stand by the right of the altar and smiled at him as he did. I had told Harry, years before, that I wanted my uncle to officiate my wedding someday. Because of the Anglican traditions surrounding royal weddings, we knew that wouldn’t be possible, so we found another way to have him be a part of it, and that was to have him deliver a short message.

On Kate’s wedding it had been her brother who did a reading. My brother, however, was very shy and did not want to stand in front of all those people to do it. So we asked my uncle, and he was happy to oblige. He even had been practicing his English over the last few months.

“Love is patient, love is kind.” My uncle started, reading from Corinthians, in the microphone. “It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.” He smiled ahead, taking in a deep breath. “I’ve often wondered, ladies and gentleman, about the time of the Lord. That which He says is the right one, even if we don’t know or comprehend it. I’ve wondered about it when I think of my daughter, who’s now nine, and how soon should I start warning her about the dangers she’ll face in the world when I’m not by her side. I’ve wondered about it when I say goodbye to dear ones, wondering if I’ll see them again, and I wondered about it when, a few years ago, I watched Jenifer, my niece, shed tears of sorrow during trying times.”

He paused, letting his words sink in, and I had to admire his stance. It was like just another sermon,
for him, as if he was in his little small church back home, instead of addressing royalty in perfectly fluent English for the whole world to see.

“Let me offer some background. For years, my wife and I had trouble to conceive – yet another part of my life during which I wondered about the time of the Lord. During those times, we grew very close to our nephews and nieces, caring for them, spoiling them as if they were our own. I still remember,” my uncle smiled, “a time during Christmas when Jenifer was only four, after eating a particularly large amount of desert, when she cried out to her mother that she thought she was dying.”

There was a barely audible sound of chuckles around the Cathedral, and I smiled to myself at the grin on Harry’s face, remembering how loudly he had laughed when he heard that story the first time.

“Because I’m a pastor, Jenifer called me closer and asked, in a scared whisper, uncle… what happens when you die?” I heard Harry chuckling a little louder and pinched his hand on mine so he’d stop. “Now, she was four, and I didn’t think her parents wanted me to be too technical about it. So I just told her, honey, you don’t have to worry about it. God has his time for everything, he’ll know when it is yours.”

He looked at me, from where he stood, and smiled.

“We watched Jenifer grow into a beautiful, intelligent, capable young woman who made her parents, family and country proud over the years. But there were a lot of times when we watched her suffer, during which we wondered about the time of the Lord. Me and her parents alike wondered in prayer, when is she gonna have her happy ending?” He sighed. “Then came a day, in April of 2013, when Jenifer came to visit bringing… a friend. She walked Harry around, introducing him with no pomp or circumstance. He ate our southern barbecue, he played football, and endured a lot of questions our concerned family asked to make sure he wasn’t the wrong one for her. That was the day, brothers and sisters, we stopped worrying about Jenifer.”

Harry held my hand with the two of his and we exchanged a smile.

“That is, of course, because as we saw them together, we saw the personification, even so early on in their relationship, of what we read in Corinthians. When we looked at them then, as when we do today, we see they have found in each other that which so many spend years looking. They have found what they hadn’t before. They found a love that is patient, and kind. They found a love which does not envy or boast, which isn’t proud. They don’t dishonor others, they’re not self-seeking, not easily angered, and keep no record of wrongs. Their love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. And as we have witnessed time and time again during the last few years, their love always protects, always trusts, always hopes and always perseveres. Our prayer today is that their love will like so continually grow. And never fail.” He smiled at us, pausing. “Deus abençoe a jornada de vocês.”

God bless your journey, he bid, before looking at the congregation again. “Let us pray.”

After the prayer, we stood to sing another song, led by the Cathedral’s choir. I avoided Harry’s look so I wouldn’t be tempted to make a joke – or worst, kiss him.

The Archbishop took to the stand again to deliver the second short message, which he was more casual than I had anticipated. He talked very happily about our journey as a couple, and how it would be shaped by how we were as people and, how since we were good people, we would be a good couple. He urged us to confide in each other and trust each other, and together help others along the way. He prayed when he was done, and the choir sang another song.
As they sang, the staff brought forward the kneeling support to be placed in front of us. That was so that we could kneel for the next part, when we uttered the Lord’s Prayer, after which the bishops and archbishops read a number of prayers so that we would be blessed and supported in Christ, which sounded nice, but as previously stated, a little tiring after so long.

Then there was another hymn, a Methodist one, though in English, which I chose to honor my previous faith, which was more emotional than I thought it would be. It hit me, finally, what I was leaving behind that day, and it made me understand why it was a good thing that the service was so long. I needed the time to understand what this wedding truly meant. I was Harry’s now, and he was mine – all mine. We were each other’s, but more than anything, I wasn’t Brazil’s anymore. I wasn’t a Methodist. I wasn’t my parents’. I had to remind myself, with some melancholy in my heart, that I hadn’t been that in a long time. For my own choice, as it happened now, I had been my own. Still, the ceremonious way of saying goodbye, of making it official, started to feel more emotional than I had predicted.

“The blessing of God almighty,” started the Archbishop, blessing the congregation, “the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, be amongst you and remain with you always.”

The choir then, dramatically and formally, sang a beautiful amen, after which the congregation sang the national anthem.

When the fanfare started, I could feel a renewing jolt of energy on me. It gave me a feeling of belonging, of appreciation, as I sang the words that was now my national anthem.

“God save our gracious Queen. Long live our noble Queen. God save The Queen. Send her victorious, happy and glorious, long to reign over us. God save The Queen.”

The strong choirs, the orchestra playing enthusiastically, the cathedral singing as one – it was energizing and beautiful. It made me forget I was bored. It made me feel a little British – and proud. I smiled to myself, realizing, as I had a number of times in the past, that I would be just fine.

Then came the time to sign the Marriage Registers. In their wedding, Will and Kate, along with their witnesses, had moved to a shrine in the back of the altar to do it privately. The Cathedral was very open, reason why we chose it, but it also meant it had no shrine close enough that it wouldn’t take us too long to walk there. So we decided to do it in the altar.

As the choir got ready to sing another song, the staff moved forward a small, golden table where stood the big book of registers. In a rehearsed order, our witnesses moved towards it.

The orchestra started slowly, as a soloist – a young girl of about eleven – sang the words to Harry’s and mine’s favorite Beatles song:

“Hey, Jude… don’t make it bad. Take a sad song and make it better. Remember to let her into your heart, then you can start to make it better…”

First, came my mother and Camilla – they each stood up together and walked together side by side from their side of the church to the altar.

“Hey Jude,” as she got into the second verse, the choir joined her and their harmonized voices made the popular song seem like it belonged in a centuries’ old cathedral. “Don’t be afraid, you were made to go out and get her. The minute you let her under your skin, then you begin to make it better.”

My mother and Camilla signed the book, testifying to having witnessed us get married, and smiled
at each other when they walked back to their seats, just as my father and Charles walked side by
side towards it.

Harry kept stealing glances at me, and I remembered the day when we had chosen that as the last
song of our wedding. He had said he used to sing that song to himself when he was trying not to
talk himself out of pursuing me – don’t be afraid, you were made to go out and get her. The minute
you let her under your skin, then you begin to make it better. And it did – he said. It made it better.
As it did now, as he held my hand.

“And anytime you feel the pain, hey Jude, refrain. Don’t carry the world upon your shoulders.”

My brother and William walked to the altar and took their turns signing their names to the Marriage
Registers, as I tried to rest on the words the choir sang now, as the orchestra expertly accompanied.
‘Don’t carry the world upon your shoulders, Jenifer Silva’, I told myself, just after realizing that
wasn’t my name anymore. Jenifer Clarence? Jenifer, Duchess of Clarence? Jenifer Mountbatten-
Windsor? I had too many to choose from now.

“For well you know that it’s a fool who plays it cool, by making his world a little colder.” The
choir sang, now harmonizing a little more, as the orchestra grew more energetic.

Livia and Kate were next, and they walked up exchanging some very smiley small talk to sign their
names. Soon enough, there was only Harry and I left. So we stood up, and he held my hand as we
walked back to in front of the altar, right under the highest part of the dome.

The Marriage Registers stated the date of our wedding (3rd of August of 2018), our names (Henry
Charles Albert David and Rosangela Jenifer Ferreira), our age (34 and 28), our condition (meaning
marital status) and rank or profession. Harry’s rank read H.R.H. The Duke of Clarence. As we had
just officially been married, mine read H.R.H. The Duchess of Clarence. It felt weirdly exciting to
read my title for the first time, and I smiled to myself as I held the pen from Harry.

“Hey Jude, don’t let me down.” The song echoed through the cathedral. “You have found her, now
and get her. Remember to let her into your heart, then you can start to make it better.”

“An autograph?” He asked, cheekily, to which I smiled, sarcastically.

Harry signed only his first and middle names, so I did the same. Rosangela Jenifer, it read, and I
realized it felt both weird signing Rosangela – which was a name I never used – and Jenifer
without the Silva after it.

I rested the pen in the book and took a deep breath. That was it, really. We were married –
officially. I saw a camera from the ceiling zooming into the book, and waited until Alli and Taylor
had come to turn my train to the opposite side – the back of the church, behind the altar, so we
were facing the congregation.

“So let it out and let it in, hey Jude, begin. You’re waiting for someone to perform with. And don’t
you know that it’s just you? Hey Jude, you’ll do. The movement you need is on your shoulder.”

After that, they went back to their seats to get the kids ready as it was time to leave. Harry held my
hand, and I could feel his bones as I crushed his in mine.

“Hey Jude, don’t make it bad. Take a sad song and make it better…”

The congregation stood up for us, and we started to walk down the aisle, not before turning to Her
Majesty in first row for the traditional bow and curtsey. I bended my knees as low as they would
go, smiling kindly at her and Prince Philip, who did the same in return, before we turned to the
aisle again – not before I gave Prince Philip a wink, which made him chuckle.

“Remember to let her under your skin, then you’ll begin to make it… better, better, better, better, better, better!”

The choir’s voices reached a harmonizing climax and the orchestra’s sound stopped suddenly. Only the choir’s voices were left now, louder than before and more profound, as they sang the Beatles’ famous nah nah nah nah nah nah nah, nah nah nah, hey Jude. Their voices overlapped as part of the choir sang one and the other after them, in beautiful different tones. They started clapping as they did, rhythmically, which echoed through the cathedral without the orchestra’s sound.

I thought it was funny now, knowing Paul McCartney and his daughter, Stella, one of my favorite designers, were in the audience watching, and wondered if he was singing along. That was definitely something I had to remember to google later on.

As we walked, though the song was more classical in this arrangement, it was hard not stepping in the rhythm, and Harry and I smiled widely as we saw that most of our guests were swinging to the song and singing along – as it was very hard not to. Admittedly, it was mostly our American guests who were a little more casually clapping along to the choir and singing enthusiastically, as I think the British were wondering if this was proper for a church – we had asked the Archbishop and Her Majesty beforehand, so we were good.

As we approached the doors, this had been going on for a while, and I noticed the clapping only grew louder, but right before I could try and notice if more guests were clapping now, the orchestra slowly started playing again, and the song filled the cathedral sweeter and more beautifully than before.

They opened the cathedral doors, and the sunlight sprang forward illuminating our path. As our eyes adjusted, we started to make out the crowds outside.

“I forgot how many people there were.” I told Harry, who smiled.

“I didn’t.” He replied, nervously, making me smile.

A staffer handed Harry his hat and white gloves as we stepped out into the tall, glorious doors of the cathedral, and it suddenly became clear where the loud clapping was coming from: from the crowds. As the ceremony was being streamed everywhere, even the crowds waiting outside the church had been watching, and so they were enthusiastically singing to Hey, Jude and clapping along with the choir inside as they waited for us to come out.

Then the song dimmed down just a little, when they started cheering as they saw us. The bells of the cathedral were ringing again now, loud, and along with the congratulatory cheering, it was all we could hear. We stopped before the stairs and looked around.

“You okay?” Harry asked, looking at me.

I smiled at him, and nodded happily, so he looked back at the crowds and waved. I waved my bouquet so they would know I was saying hello as well, and we started to make our way down.

“Do you need help?” Harry asked, eyeing my dress worryingly.

I grinned. “After you climb down Award Ceremonies’ stages enough times you learn a few tricks.”

I knew to kick my dress before stepping, so I wouldn’t step on the fabric and fall, and so I didn’t need to hold the dress up and we walked and could hold his hand and my bouquet as I was
To the incessant, restless sound of cheers and bells – and still Hey Jude -, we reached the sidewalk, where the procession of carriages awaited, all pulled by four perfectly white horses each, mounted by guards in red uniform.

I finally risked a look back, to see the others walking down behind us at a distance. Taylor still held the kids’ hands, and George and Arthur still walked as two perfect gentlemen behind them. They had been behaving wonderfully that whole time, which was a miracle for anyone who knew them, honestly.

Behind them, I spotted William and Alessa, arm in arm, leading the way for the wedding party, being followed by Alli and Guy, Selena, arm and arm with Skippy, and Beezus, who held the arms of both Jake and Thomas (since Taylor was with the kids). Behind them I saw my brother, who walked in between Livia and Kate, holding his arms. Behind them, there were Charles and my mother, leading the way in front of my father and Camilla.

After putting on his gloves and handsome hat, Harry helped me approach the carriage again, and the guards saluted as they held open the door to it. Harry stepped up first, and turned back to help, but by now I was a lot better at climbing into carriages – a thought that surprised me.

I handed him my bouquet and held up my dress, as the girls brought my train forward with me. I turned in place as I walked in, so the train wouldn’t be in the way to the door to make it easier to get out when we arrived in Buckingham Palace. The girls struggled against all the tulle and lace of my long train, but it was finally all in, and so the guards closed the door, and Harry and I let out sighs of relief almost at the same time.

“I’d like to know how we’re supposed to get out.” Harry commented.

“That’s a problem for future us.” I told him, who smiled.

As the guards got the horses ready to go, Harry looked at me, and sighed, as we both realized this was the first moment we could actually speak since talking on the phone the night before.

“Hi.” He smiled.

“Hi.” I smiled back.

“Your Royal Highness?” The carriage’s coach asked, to which Harry nodded, and so we were moving.

The crowd cheered louder as we did, glad to finally see some action after waiting there for hours – and some, days. I was still hearing the overlapping choir singing the Beatles’ ‘nah, nah, nah, naaah’ as we rolled out of the Cathedral, turning around to drive up Saint Paul’s Churchyard.

The street was surrounded on both sides by ancient looking buildings and modern ones, and the sidewalks were, too, full of people. The street had never looked so different; Union Jack flags hang from the posts above us, and the police kept watch over the rails and military personnel here and there stood, saluting. Above us, the sky was blue and wide, and the cheering crowds were excited as they frantically waved and smiled, pointing their phones at us. We smiled and waved back, trying to look at all of them at once; If I had directed this scene for a movie it wouldn’t have looked so perfect.

For a long time, that’s all we did. We had no way to talk during this, because all those people had been waiting to see us, and we had to give them a chance to. So we smiled and waved to as many
of them as possible. The slow speed allowed us to look at each of their faces, their excited smiles so touching and emotional it was hard to keep it together.

This ordeal continued as we drove into Ludgate Hill and then as we turned into New Bridge Street. We passed the Blackfriars Underground Station and the big Unilever building and just before the bridge, turned right into Victoria Embankment. Here, we had the buildings in one side and the Thames to the other.

The large, four two-way streets marched into two two-way streets, sprinkled by trees here and there. Here, there was only police and military personnel by the riverside and the public and press were all by the side of the buildings. As an actress, I knew this had been a good strategy. The cameras would film us from the side of the buildings with the river, sky above and the buildings across it serving as a marvelous background. We passed by the Inner Temple Gardens, the Temple, the King’s College and the Somerset House.

I suddenly pulled Harry’s sleeve and pointed, laughing, at a person holding a literal, life-size, cardboard cutout of his meme – himself, in his black military suit, looking extremely confused with his shoulders and arms up, shrugging. His reaction was to do exactly the same thing again, completely naturally.

“You just did it again!” I told him, laughing.

His face fell, and he sighed. “Oh, no. I’m gonna hear about this later, aren’t I?”

We continued to drive down Victoria Embankment, and passed the Waterloo Bridge the Victoria Embankment Gardens, and passed right under the Golden Jubilee Bridges towards Whitehall Gardens. The amount of people never seemed smaller. Their cheering never faded – and some of them were still singing ‘nah, nah, nah, nah, naah’.

Harry touched me and, smiling, gave a look towards the other side of river Thames, where we were now passing the London Eye. We smiled at each other, and at the memories. We had stood in that part of the riverside a few times before – it was where I asked him if he was still in love with Chelsy – and he almost said he loved me –, one day before our first real kiss. It was where I told him I didn’t want to be an actress anymore. I still remembered how it felt to have the breeze on our faces when we ran across the bridge to the other side, thinking of the Doctor and Rose. There was also where I had shot the last scene of my career – for the exact same show, Doctor Who. That’s where I uttered the words ‘I’ll be fine’. And I was so fine – I was amazing.

As we reached the end of the street now, we could see the Big Ben coming by as we still smiled and waved. The Westminster Bridge was closed – and full with people looking to see us through, as this was where both sides of the street now had people on it. I knew the press would be dying for a picture of us with the Big Ben in the back, but with the Boudiccan Rebellion Statue and the parliament, this is where Harry had to start saluting, as it was the traditional protocol, and so I lowered my head and waited until the curve was done and we were on A302.

“There.” Harry whispered, so I knew I could look up, and we went back to trying to make people happy by giving them the best hello we could.

“Is it still far?” I asked, moving my lips as little as possible without flickering my smile.

“Just a bit more.” He told me. “You okay?”

I sighed, and gave him an almost desperate smile, leaning in so he would hear me. “I really wanna kiss you.”
He smiled so widely for a moment he was all I could see – before we both remembered the thousands of people who had waited for hours and days to see us, and – both sighing – we gave our attention back to them.

We passed another few military monuments, and proceeded to do the same thing again - Harry saluting, my head down. The people were always there; the people were always screaming. Woos of excitement, shouts of ‘congratulations!’, their smiles were so contagious I started to get emotional again. I could see their faces as we were driving somewhat slowly, and they were all so absolutely happy. They didn’t even know us, but they were so extraordinarily happy to see us happy.

“You okay?” Harry asked.

I nodded. “They’re so happy.”

He smiled. “Don’t go crying on me, Silva.”

Without missing a heartbeat, I grinned. “Haven’t you heard? It’s Clarence now.”

He smiled down, blushing, and winked at me before waving at everyone one last time before we turned to ride into the Horse Guards Parade. Harry saluted as we did, and I bowed my head again. For a short while, the sound of horses was all we could hear as we went pass the small tunnel in the building, which led to the same sand soiled area where we had watched the Trooping the Colour ceremony. Here, too, the large, wide area was filled with well-wishers, and a military band was playing the national anthem. This time, I knew before he did that Harry was going to salute, and bowed down my head as we passed the military monument right before turning into Horse Guards Road.

“A lot of Brazilian flags.” Harry smiled.

“I know!”

I had been trying to waved particularly enthusiastically at the people with Brazilian flags. My waving routine – trust me, I didn’t think I would ever need one – was to do the ‘royal wave’ as I had been thought: rotating my wrist so my arm didn’t shake too much. But time and time again I’d see a smiling child, or someone with a sign with something sweet written, or a crying teenage girl, and I couldn’t help but wave more energetically so they would know I saw them. So they would know that I cared, and how much it meant to me that they were as happy as I was.

“I still have Hey, Jude on my head.” Harry noted, as we waved.

I laughed. “It was good, wasn’t it? The service. I think it was good.”

“It was really good.” He nodded. “I liked your uncle’s message.”

“You just liked he embarrassed me to the whole world.”

He laughed. “No, I liked he said they stopped worrying about you when they met me. That was sweet.”

We exchanged a smile. There was so much I still wanted to talk about – including every detail of everything that had just happened -, but we still had a lot to get done before we could be alone to chat.
We finally turned into The Mall; the large street was covered with people on both sides, one of which was Saint James Park.

“Okay, my arm is getting tired.” Harry complained, on a child-like tone I hadn’t heard from him that day as he had been too worried about me so far.

I giggled. “Be strong, we’re almost there now.”

“The only thing keeping me going is the thought of the menu for the reception.” He added, making me laugh so hard I almost forgot to wave. “I’m very excited about the lamb farofa, you don’t even know.”

Buckingham Palace was now in full view, and it astonished me as we rode around the Victoria Memorial to realize that place was now starting to feel a lot more familiar to me. I knew a lot of its rooms, I had been to sitting rooms, libraries, the dining hall, the throne room – a lot of which to prepare for today. I had almost thought of home when I saw it, realizing that’s where we would be for the rest of that day.

“One last time.” Harry reminded me as we rode inside.

There were two lines of red uniform guards saluting, and he did the same as I bowed my head. A band behind them played the national anthem. There’s nothing like riding into Buckingham Palace on a carriage with the Queen’s guards playing the national anthem.

Riding into the palace also felt like getting home as I now felt like I could relax. I knew - because it was a royal training rule - that wasn’t actually true. I knew I was now always supposed to be on. Especially considering I knew there was a camera broadcasting our arrival just as we parked inside. But still, without the physical, literal thousands of eyes on us, I now felt safer, at home.

The horses stepped into the cement coming out of the courtyards rocky soil, and the sound echoed, reminding us waving time was over - for now. The guards at the palace’s entrance opened the carriage door and pulled out the little steps for us.

“And breathe. You can relax now.” Harry said.

“I am relaxed.” I replied.

The experience hadn’t exactly been my regular Friday, but it wasn’t as nerve wracking as I had prepared for. Not as nerve wracking as making a speech for the UN general assembly, for example.

“I’m talking to myself.” Harry explained, making me giggle.

I was however, feeling emotional. I couldn’t stop thinking of all those people’s happy expressions. They knew it was unlikely they’d get to see us for a long time, or talk to us, or greet us personally, still they came. They stood outside for days, hours. They traveled the world to be there. Why? To watch us role by on a carriage. To watch us get married. To watch us as we said our final goodbyes to the sorrows of the past and welcomed the future - bright and joyfully.

That meant more to me than I could ever express.

Harry stood, and stepped out of the carriage, while I found my way around the train to do the same. He saluted the guards who were doing the same, and turned to help me. I noticed the camera nearby, sending the private arrival all over the world. Behind us, the other carriages were just arriving with our bridal party, the kids, and our families. I handed Harry my bouquet and stepped out, holding two fistfuls of my dress.
“Hello. Thank you.” I greeted the guards, who now tried to help me pull my train. “It’s a bit long, isn’t it?” I joked.

They pulled it out successfully, and we managed to step up into the entrance where we were greeted by a staffer in a blue military uniform. “Your Royal Highnesses.” He said, bowing his head. “Congratulations.”

“Hello, thank you.” Harry smiled.

Just then, the kids were all safely taken out of the carriage and ran their way to us excitedly.

“Tiiiiiiia!” Arthur shouted as he ran to me, his light brown hair kept in place by the hair gel. “Eu nem corri!” he said, bragging that he didn’t even run during the ceremony, like we instructed him to.

I crouched down to him, smiling. “Você nem correu mesmo, meu amor! Muito bem!”

You really didn’t even run, love, good for you!, I told him.

“Hey, guys.” Harry was greeting the others with a smile, who now joined us. “You did great, high-fives!”

India, Zalie, Charlotte, Kidd and George high-fived him happily, and Charlotte quickly threw her arms up so he’d pick her up.

“Did you have fun?” I asked Arthur, who looked away in an expression that very much said ‘meh’, making me laugh loudly.

“What?” Harry asked.

“I asked if he had fun and he was like… meh.” I explained, and Harry laughed.

“Well, it’s over now, huh, bud?” Harry asked, and Arthur nodded. He understood some English, as his parents had been teaching from since he was a baby, but he couldn’t speak much of it.

“I want mummy.” Zalie complained.

“You’ll see her soon, okay, honey?” I told her. “But, look, daddy’s right there.” I pointed at where Jake was just stepping out of his carriage with Guy, Skippy and Thomas, behind another one with Beezus, Ophelia, Selena and Taylor.

In front of them, there were the now empty carriages that brought the boys with Will and the girls with Alessa, who were waiting for the others to walk to us.

Impatiently, Zalie ran to her father, her pretty dress bouncing as she did.

“Let’s race to the throne room!” George suggested, euphorically and, before any of us could stop him, he ran off into the palace. “Let’s go!” He shouted back at the others.

“Race!” Kidd tried to explain to Arthur, by mimicking a running motion. I translated and Arthur looked back at him, smiling, and they were off after George.

“Can I get this off now?” India asked, holding her flower crown. “It’s itchy.”

Amused, I tried to remain serious. “Uh. Sure, I’ll hold onto it for you for now, but you have to wear it again for the balcony and for the photos, okay?”
“Okay.” She smiled, handing it to me.

“What about you, Charlie? Did you have fun?” Harry asked his niece, still strapped around his lap, looking a little sleepy.

“I peed!” she told him, and he seemed confused.

He checked her skirt. “On your dress?”

“No, in a bathroom!” She explained, sounding as if his question was ridiculous, and I giggled at how even more confused Harry looked.

“Oh, my God, you guys. It was insane!” Taylor said, now walking to us with the others.

“You nailed it, babe!” Alli smiled, before looking around realizing the kids were missing. “Where-?”

“The boys ran off to the throne room, Zalie is with Jake.” Harry explained, just as Charlotte threw her arms at William, who picked her up.

Alli sighed. “And why do you have that?” She asked, holding on to the flower crown I was holding before walking fast inside after the boys.

Beezus gave me a funny look. “She’s going insane. I think it’s the maid-of-honor pressure.”

“Or hormones.” I shrugged.

“Ophelia, can you give me a hand?” Selena asked, from behind me, and I saw as the two of them started folding my train so it would be easier to carry it inside.

“I feel like we should re-watch this later and make a drinking game out of it.” Skippy suggested, making us laugh.

“You do know they can hear us, right?” William asked him, signaling at the camera.

“No, that’s just visual. Right?” Skippy asked.

“No, pretty sure it’s audio.” Will explained, and Skippy sighed, blushing.

“Well, now I know.” He said, making us laugh.

The entrance was now getting crowed as our families were just arriving, so we decided to walk in. The Palace’s staff was all there, in a line, smiling as we walked in and we took the time to say hello to all of them, thanking them for their best wishes and apologizing for mess.

“Say, how did it feel?” Harry asked, when we were climbing the big staircase to the upper floor.

“Being called an H.R.H. for the first time, I mean.”

“I wasn’t.”

He smiled. “When we got in? The staffer in the blue uniform?”

“He meant you and-“ I stopped, realizing William had been too far for the man to mean him.

“Me?” I asked, and Harry chuckled.

“I guess it felt so weird you barely noticed.”
When it happened the second time, I did notice.

The Buckingham butler guided us to where we would take our wedding portraits, where our staff was waiting for us. We had chosen Buckingham’s White Drawing Room, it was smaller than the throne room used for Will and Kate’s portraits, but it had white walls with intricate, golden detailing and ancient, magnificent furniture. In the back of the room, across from the windows, which allowed the place great lighting, there was a white and gold fireplace, and it was in front of it that we posed.

Before I could even wonder how on earth they had managed to get there before we did, Monica’s arms were around me in a tight hug. “You look so beautiful! I was crying the entire time!” she told me, and I had to stop myself from crying just to hear that.

“Congratulations!” Thomas smiled, as he gave Harry a quick side-hug, and Edward approached us.

I was expecting him to do what he always did – immediately start talking about work, and tell us how long we had to take the photos before doing the balcony appearance. Instead, he stopped in front of us – of me, as Harry was still talking to Thomas -, and very formally bowed his head.

“Your Royal Highness.” He said, smiling. “Congratulations.”

I smiled, and was quiet for a while as I tried to both memorize the sound of my new title and appreciate how far Edward and I had come.

“I thought I told you to call me Jenifer.” I reminded him.

“Right.” He smiled again. “Now, as you know, the guards are slowly letting the people into the perimeter since most of the guests have already been transported to the palace in the shuttle buses. I think we have a good time for the portraits.”

And he was back to normal.

Brandon, our photographer friend from the Humans of New York project, quickly congratulated us and started setting up for the portraits, organizing us around with his assistant. Clara and Monica, Edward and Thomas were all there as well, shouting orders and getting stuff done as if it was just another day in the office. They had tried to say hello, exchange a few words, but we were on a schedule, so sentimentalism would have to wait – which was why I still hadn’t managed an actual moment with Harry.

We stood side-by-side, in front of the fireplace, my long train and veil perfectly adjusted to remain in front of us, showcasing its size. Behind us, Brandon placed our wedding party – Will, Jake, Skippy, Thomas, Guy, Beezus, Selena, Ophelia, Taylor and Alessa – and we stood posing for a while, which took longer than necessary as we kept stopping to talk.

They added our families then, asking for the bridal parties to step back so they would be in front. Her Majesty and Prince Philip were sat by our left, with Prince Charles, Camilla, Kate and Will beside them. George and Charlotte stood in front of their parents. By our right, stood my parents, Lucas and Livia, with Arthur, Kidd, India and Zalie in the front.

“It was a good service, I think, wasn’t it?” The Queen asked, conversationally, as Brandon set up his shot. “I liked the music a lot. Even The Beatles.”

“Yes, I loved it. I was very emotional the whole time.” I confessed.

“Very giggly as well.” Philip joked, making me chuckle.
"I was emotional and happy. I was a mess, really." I joked, and they smiled.

"Alright, everyone look here!" Brandon called, and the chatter around our big group ceased shortly as we smiled at him.

"Let’s do just the family now?" Brandon asked, and our friends stepped out, except for Will who, of course, was family.

We took some more pictures, and another with just our parents, and just the Queen and Prince Philip before they sent them all away to prepare to walk out to the balcony, and brought in the kids.

Both to be on their eye level and because we were starting to get tired, Harry and I decided to sit, so they took away the chairs the Queen and Prince Philip had used and brought back one of the classic looking, golden fabric, matching sofa from the room. We sat in the middle, and Harry sat Kidd on his leg, since he was the youngest; Arthur sat by his side and George sat on the floor below us. I took Charlotte in my lap, as she was the youngest of the girls, and Zalie sat by my side as her sister sat on the floor next to George.

"Here, will you hold this for me?" I asked, when Charlotte got a bit too unrest, and she stared at my bouquet, amazed enough to quiet down for the pictures.

The kids all smiled with us, and Arthur leaned his head on Harry’s arm as he was starting to get bored.

"Okay, let’s go." Clara called them, and we started marching into the balcony room.

"These look great, guys. Good for you." Brandon smiled, as he followed us to get a picture of us in the balcony from inside the palace, with the people outside in The Mall, as he had been dying to.

Harry held my hand as we walked, Charlotte still had my bouquet, and I enjoyed it to hold his hand with both of mine, as I walked resting my head in his shoulder.

"Are you tired?" He wondered.

"I’m happy." I explained, making him smile.

Our family, friends, the kids and the staff all stood about the balcony room waiting for us to go outside first. We could hear the crowd, that by now had been led to fill The Mall, all talking or still singing Hey Jude. They were also chanting something and, after a few minutes of attentive hearing, I realized they were shouting 'Harry! And! Jen! Harry! And! Jen!'.

"That’s… creepy." Harry joked, and we giggled.

"Shall we give the people what they want?" Edward asked, as he signaled the guards by the doors to the balcony to get ready to open them.

We stepped before the doors, ready to greet the world.

"Ready?" said Edward.

"One last thing." I asked.

Before I could think too much about it, I turned to Harry – to my husband, Harry -, and kissed him. His arm wrapped around my waist, bringing me closer, and the truth is, we didn’t care both our families were in the room. We didn’t care the world was waiting.
Because now we were married, and we would be damned if we wouldn’t kiss when we damn well pleased.

“Ready.” I whispered, pulling away, smiling at Harry, who had his eyes closed, still resting his forehead on mine.

And like that, we held hands, and got ready to face the world – and our future.
Dear Harry

I could hear the roar of the crowd with the doors closed as we stood about to walk out into the Buckingham Palace balcony to greet the well-wishers who came to watch us get married. There was irregular excited shouting and chatter that, though far and muffled by the palace’s thick walls, seemed louder to me than the one from inside the room – probably because I knew what it meant.

I knew the amount of news crews outside, filming and broadcasting all over the world in different languages – including mine. I knew there were thousands of people, most of whom had been standing in the streets for hours, some for days; some who had traveled across the world to be there. I knew the same people who watched my movies and TV shows in the past, the same teenagers that had made me cry with their dedication and love, were excitedly watching their televisions or online streams to make sure they wouldn’t miss anything.

“Hi.”

I turned to Harry as he spoke, and smiled, immediately feeling a thousand times lighter, as that was the effect he had on me. “Hi.” I replied.

“Your Royal Highnesses?” Edward called, wondering if we were ready. Unlike what had happened the first time, this time I noticed it. And it made my heart beat faster in my chest.

We smiled, and Edward signaled for the staffers at the doors, who opened them for us.

The sound was almost physical as the doors were opened and the crowds saw us. Harry held my hand and guided me out as he had done last time we were there, for Trooping the Colour.

“Oh, wow.” Harry said. “It’s completely full. Look at that!” he pointed at the far end of The Mall, which was taken over by people.

Prince Philip was right during Trooping the Colour; it was far more crowded now.

I was a mixture of so many feelings I wasn’t sure in which one to focus. I was excited, ecstatic, happy. I was emotional, I was struggling against tears, I was a wreck.

I took deep breaths as we waved at the crowds, and Harry leaned on.

“Everything okay?” he asked, resting his hand on my lower back.

“You’re my husband.” I smiled at him. “Everything’s perfect.”

He smiled at me for a long time. “Kiss me.”

With his arm around my waist, he pulled me closer and I cupped his face with a hand right before we kissed, smiling widely for the longest time as we heard again the thunderous sound of cheering grow louder. I was blushing when we stepped back, and went back to waving trying to pretend nothing out of the ordinary happened.

From the doors, the kids were now told to come out to join us. They opened the side doors of the balcony as well, and our families and bridal party stepped out, joining us in the waving and marveling at the infinite crowd ahead taking over the horizon.

“I think there’s a thousand!” Said Kidd.
“I think there’s a million thousands!” George added.

“Yo, Ro.” My brother called, and I looked back to see he was standing behind Harry and me by the doors. When I looked, he faced the doors and raised his phone up, which had the camera opened on selfie mode, as I realized he was trying to take a selfie with Harry and me in the background, plus all of the crowded Mall. “Smile.”

I did as he said, nudging Harry to do the same, and that’s how my brother took what would soon be one of the world’s most famous selfies – he even managed to get the Queen in the corner of the picture.

Soon enough we saw the string of colors in the horizon, and the airplanes quickly approached with deafening sound as they flew above Buckingham. The sky was blue, the weather was nice, the crowds and my family and friends were all smiling, and I held my Harry’s hand feeling my heart full of joy and love.

Harry looked at me. “What?” he asked, grinning at the look of happiness on my eyes.

“We did it.” I shrugged. “We made it.”

He smiled. “I told you we would.”

I wanted to kiss him so bad it felt weird to have all of our families’ there. As if they could hear that thought, led by the Queen, they all started making their way back inside.

Harry and I stood there, smiling and waving at the crowd for another couple of minutes before chuckling at the chorus of ‘kiss! Kiss! Kiss!’ they now uttered. I looked at Harry and, with a smile, we both agreed on one last kiss before leaving.

I leaned on, and his hand on my lower back got a steadier grip on my waist as his other arm came to pass around my neck. Before I knew what was happening, Harry had turned me to face him and held me close, dipping me by my waist to kiss me strongly in a fifties-movie worthy shot that had the world screaming with excitement.

He helped me on my feet again, and I was laughing so hard I hid my face in my hands as I rested my head on his shoulder, still hearing the thunderous roar of the crowd. I risked a look into the palace, where Monica, Thomas and Clara were giggling as they looked over at us. Harry’s face was red, but he looked at me with almost distressing joy, amused by being able to catch me so off guard.

I breathed in and out deeply, and looked around, trying to burn that scene, and all that feeling, in my heart for the years to come. Then I looked at him.

“Come on.” I told him. “Let’s go party.”

—

The world’s best ice cream was from a handcrafted shop in southern California and that’s what we were having a few hours later, as we sat on the handsomely decorated ballroom of Buckingham Palace. The ceilings held big flower arrangements, shaped in squares and rectangles, all orchids and lilies, the same flowers as the church. Most of the gold from the walls were covered behind small decorative trees by the walls, which stood in front of mirrors, making the room look less palace-y and more like a diamond-filled wonderland. The tables and chairs were all transparent acrylic, the formal dinner place settings were all in silver with crystal glasses, and the tables sported big flower arrangements at the center, which rose far above eye level amidst candles and
Hosting a dinner for almost a thousand guests was no easy feat, but if anyone could do it, it would be the Queen, and so they were hosting the dinner in our honor. We sat in a long table in the far end of the ballroom, me and Harry in the center, with his family to one side and mine to the other, facing our guests, whom we had greeted earlier as soon as we had arrived to the ballroom after the balcony appearance.

Harry had changed into a handsome tux with a white jacket over a black vest, and I was now wearing a much lighter Marchesa gown with flowery embroideries. My hair was still on a low bun, and the Strathmore tiara still stood in my head – from where I had a feeling it would hurt to get it off, as I was now feeling emotionally attached to it.

Greeting our guests was fun – they had been served drinks as they waited for us downstairs, talking to the royal family and my family before they opened the ballroom doors. We stood by then, and greeted them one by one as they walked in and were guided to their seats. We greeted all of the foreign royals, who were kind and chatty, and all of the political guests who had made the cut for the dinner – mostly the current leaders of commonwealth countries, Brazil and the US. Harry gave me an uncomfortable smile as we saw the Prime Minister of Canada arriving, and we both chatted excitedly to Barack and Michelle Obama when they came to give us a hug.

Our friends were just as exciting to see – from the Clooneys, to the Knowleses, the directors that had been my bosses, talk show hosts whom I had grown fond of, the actors that had grown into close friends over the years, every single one smiled excitedly as they congratulated us, and made us laugh before walking in, looking marveled at the place.

The Arcthets were almost emotional to greet, just as much as my family was nerve wrecking (I kept silently praying they wouldn’t try to sneak in with their phones despite the rule not to and post pictures on Instagram).

Finally, we greeted every single person we knew and held hands as we walked in to the sound of Cold Coffee, which tonight was being performed live by Ed himself, and that was our first dance.

After that we sat down to enjoy a seven course dinner, which had been prepared by Brazilian chefs, mixing the culinary of our both countries, the same thing we did with our deserts, though that was more Brazilian than anything. We had a brigadeiro buffet, which was followed by the ice cream madness, right before we cut the cake – seven layers of chocolate filled with Nutella and paçoca, a Brazilian peanut-type goodness.

The gentle sound of glass was what somehow brought everyone to silence, even though the chatting had been so loud I didn’t know how any of us had heard it. This was when my father stood up and was handed a microphone by our wedding planner, Stefania – it was time for the speeches.

My father had grown used to crowds after being my date to his fair share of award shows, but he stood in my wedding with a trembling hand and when he spoke in the microphone, his voice was shaky. I knew, even though he had developed a fame in Hollywood as being laid back and fun, he hadn’t expected he would need to make a speech – that was not a tradition in Brazil.

“Your Majesty, Your Royal Highnesses, honorable friends and family, as we say in our home country, boa noite.” Good night, he greeted, to smiles from our guests. “I’d like to start by thanking all of you for coming, I know apart from the few lucky British of you, most of us have traveled across the sea to be here, and that really speaks volumes about how much you care for Jenifer and Harry, and that truly means the world to me and her mother, to see that, so thank you. Either that or you came for the food, though even that comes at a cost, because now you have to listen to me.”
There was a loud sound of laughter across the room as I think we were all surprised this nervous man managed to get a joke out.

“No, but genuinely, I would like to thank each and every one of you for…” he sighed. “So many reasons. My wife and I are truly overwhelmed with gratitude tonight, as we have been since Harry and his wonderful family walked into our Jenny’s life.” He looked, affectionate, at Harry, and I had to stop myself from scorning amusedly, remembering how much he did not seem to like the idea of Harry and his family at the beginning of our relationship. “Jenny was always an independent, strong girl, from very early on, really. When she was little she used to insist she wanted dessert every night, which was not something me and her mother condemned. So to try and talk her out of it, we managed to convince her that is she ate all of the salad, she could have desert. Now, mind you, this was a six year old child who did not like lettuce at all. And as soon as she understood our terms, she grabbed that salad bowl and did not stop eating until it was all gone!” I felt myself blush at the memory as our friends giggled. “And she continued to do that every night for months and every night we had to give her desert, because we had made a deal. And we kept thinking she would grow tired of it, and she never did. We could see it in her face how much she hated that lettuce, but I’ll be damned, she ate all of it. And then she’d eat her ice cream or pudding looking at us all smug.” He looked at me, and grinned. “There was never stopping her when it came to getting what she wanted, never. Not when it came to food, not when it came to learning piano, not when it came to acting. That made us wonder many times about what kind of trouble she would get herself into if she didn’t slow down a bit, and thankfully she mostly got herself into a lot of really great things. She achieved more than we had ever dreamed for her, and most impressively, she found herself a man who was not only absolutely okay with her overwhelming energy, who admired her for it.”

Dad took his eyes from his notes, to smile at Harry, who in return smiled coyly at his lap before holding my hand in his.

“I won’t sugarcoat this, as most fathers of girls are aware, meeting a man your little girl has chosen is no easy task. I have loved this girl since before she was real, I have held her tiny head on my palm, I have woken up at night to soothe her crying, and all of a sudden a person I have never met thinks he is allowed to come around and take her.” He paused, giving the crowd a shrug. “So for a long time I feared the day I would have to meet a man my daughter had chosen, because I feared I wouldn’t approve, and I knew if I didn’t, there wouldn’t be much I could, since, well, you remember I mentioned her resoluteness, right?” the crowd giggled. “Thankfully, when he came around, the first thing we noticed about Harry was his kindness, his politeness… the adoration on his eyes when he looked at Jenny, and the patience he showed when she would go on and on about whatever it was that time. He would take a deep breath and simply follow her in whatever crazy new endeavor she had her mind set on this time, and he never asked her to slow down, he never criticized that part of her, and the truth is, we love him for that. We love him because he loves our little girl like we do, the way she is. And by loving her so patiently, he taught her about that patience, and she started to slow down in her own will. We saw her begin to be more patient, and it warms our heart to see this happen, because it truly is beautiful to see how a good marriage brings the best out from each other. I believe that as they carry on their journey together, they will each continue to learn from each other. Much like Jenny, I think marriage will teach Harry some new things as well, such as self-restraint and control and even a lot more patience… along with various other qualities which he wouldn’t have needed if he hadn’t met Jenifer.” The crowd laughed. “I’m sure his life would have been a lot simpler if he hadn’t met Jenifer, but we are very glad he did, because now we have Harry and his family in our lives, and that brings us as much joy as we have always known to expect from the little girl who always brought us so much pride and happiness.”

He raised his champagne flute. “So here’s to my amazingly patient son-in-law, and my amazingly beautiful daughter, and their amazing future together.”
“To their future!” The room echoed and, as they drank, I stood up to hug my father, as did Harry, looking as blushing as I had ever seen him.

The next toast came from Charles, and from the moment he stood up, the room fell to solemn silent which I suspected followed the future king whenever it was that he wished to speak.

“Good evening, ladies and gentlemen,” he began, rather informally, “I’ve tried to memorize this speech, but forgive me if I resort to my notes every five seconds. I did ask for an autocue to be set up in front of me, but the wedding budget doesn’t stretch that far. And, unfortunately, neither does my eyesight.” We laughed, and he smiled before going on. “I was thinking to myself how wholeheartedly I agree with Jorge’s speech, as I know for a fact Harry has, indeed, started taking on a lot of new qualities since meeting Jenifer. For one thing, from when he was very little, Harry was never a very patient boy.” He exchanged a look with my parents, who seemed surprised. “He wanted things and he wanted them now, and he went for them with distressing determination for a toddler.” He joked. “Luckily, that rubbed off on him as he grew in good ways as well, and he developed a restless sense of purpose and the kind of work ethic and passion for what he does which anyone who knows him truly admires. But from the moment he met Jenifer, and this is true, it was like he had a new found admiration for the world he lived in. Jenifer I believe is the reason he has become a lot more open minded about our family’s relationship with the press, about seeing the world, and somehow he has become more eager to do what he must, which I believe might be an attempt to keep up with her.” He smiled at me. “And we love that this happened, we love that our amazing boy became such a respectful young man whom we are so proud of, and just as he has always done, or almost always done, he has also made us proud with his choice of wife. When we look at Jenifer we see another great decision, and we feel so extraordinarily proud of our Harry, because truthfully, we could never have pictured a more beautiful person to welcome into his life.”

I exchanged a smile with my father-in-law, and Harry was grinning when I looked back at him.

“I can’t help but mention Harry’s wonderful mother.” He sighed. “As I know the earth is round and the sun will come out tomorrow, I know Diana would have given anything to be here with us tonight. I know, much like Camilla and I are, she too would have been so excitedly proud of our two sons and of our beautiful, lovely daughters-in-law, and I know she would have loved Jenifer as she always loved anyone who stood proud and tall to fight for justice in the world, something we are excited to see Jenifer continue to do as a member of this family.” He smiled at me, before raising his champagne flute. “So here’s to my new daughter, Jenifer.”

“To Jenifer!” The room echoed and, emotional, Harry and I stood up to hug his father.

As the best man, William was next, and Harry was grinning from the moment he grabbed the microphone and shot us a wicked look before he began speaking.

“Hello everyone.” He greeted. “What Harry asked me to do for this speech was ‘be amusing and dazzle them with your wit’. The trouble is, I’m not that funny so the best I can do is dazzle you with the light that reflects off my head.” He leaned forward, showing the guests his growing bald head, making everyone laugh. “As some of you may know, Harry was my best man a few years ago when I married Catherine. As surprisingly not a lot of people know, he is also my younger brother. Not a lot of people believe that because he is ginger and I am… bald.” We laughed again, and William waited, smiling, for silence to continue. “I wanted to get those jokes off the way straight ahead so Harry doesn’t have the chance to make them in his speech later on as mocking my lack of hair has always been one of his hobbies.” He cleaned his throat as we laughed again, before continuing. “Anyhow… Harry was my best man and so he made a speech that night, which some of you may remember…” he gave Harry an annoyed look, to the sound of excited cheering from the table of the groomsmen. “Yes, so now according to tradition I will do my best to give Harry the
most uncomfortable five minutes of his life.” The crowd giggled. “For the record, the most uncomfortable five minutes of Jen’s life will be coming later tonight, courtesy of Harry.”

There was a drum beat right as he finished his joke and smiled smugly as our friends laughed – and Harry and I exchanged a desperate look as we fought and lost against our own disbelieving laughter.

“Like our friends, the groomsmen, I have known Harry for most of his life.” He paused. “Well, technically I’ve known him for all of his life, but I like to pretend I didn’t know him back when he had that weird, spikey hair.” The room laughed again. “Imagine then, the shock I got when Harry calls to say that he had gotten engaged, the things that go through a brother’s mind… Mostly about mail order brides, one-way tickets from Thailand and subscriptions to Gay Connections Monthly.”

“Oh, my God.” I let out, amidst laughter, hoping my family would lose the joke on the translation.

“Then when I heard that it was Jen, I was filled with much relief and happiness.” Will added. “No, truly, so much relief and happiness.” He emphasized. “Like most of you, when I heard Harry and Jennifer were together years ago, at first I thought it was just a ridiculous tabloid rumor. I mean, let’s take a minute to look at her.” He paused, gesturing to me. “And then to my brother.” He gestured to Harry, to the laughing guests, and a few wolf whistles from the bridal party table. “I mean, I don’t think anyone actually believed this was real at first.”

Harry and I exchanged an amused grin, as only we knew it actually wasn’t.

“The first questions I asked when Harry told me they were dating was, is she blind? Is she aware of your snoring?” The crowd laughed. “And when I met her, I made sure to get her alone for a second to ask if she was there of her own free will, or if she was being kept there against her wishes. Could I call someone? Should I call the police? Is Harry blackmailing her somehow? I mean surely this gorgeous, intelligent, well-spoken, Brazilian actress isn’t actually interested in my brother!” he dramatized. “Are gingers considered holy in Brazil or something?” he asked, mockingly. “I have sat here listening to my father and Jennifer’s father talk about how much better she has made him over the years and the thing is, I don’t know about better, but I will attest for how much more amusing Harry is after falling in love with Jennifer. The lengths he will go to impress her are incredible to watch. My brother used to come by unannounced to raid our fridge, and all of a sudden he’s cooking Sunday roasts for the whole family. I saw him attempt backflips from ridiculous heights just because she told him to live a little.” The room laughed again. “Jen, in agreeing to marry Harry, has reinforced what he’s always thought and lived by. That stalking, harassment and general unpleasantness will eventually pay off.”

We laughed, as Harry shook his head giving his brother a death stare as he blushed. I leaned in, resting my head on his shoulder as we watched Will, caressing his back comforting as he held my free hand.

Will smiled at us. “Look at them sitting there… If they were any happier we’d have to throw a net over them. And just look at that contented smile on Harry’s face. It’s that same look I’d see when I’d find him late at night in the kitchen finishing off the chocolate ice cream…” We laughed. “Or just having won a poker hand with a pair of threes. Until we met Jennifer, we thought you were bluffing, Harry. But you really are holding aces.”

“Aw.” I let out, a similar sound that echoed across the room.

We watched as Will fiddled with his notes, nervously, and heard as he cleaned his throat a couple of times before going on.
“We were raised as most brothers are. As the older one I was to look after Harry and protect him and keep him from messing up, sorry about failing you there, dad.” He joked. “And I was taught to be someone Harry could look up to, whose footsteps he would wish to follow onto… but the truth is, he…” he cleaned his throat again. “I’ve always looked up to Harry. There’s-“ he paused, sighing, and cleared his throat again. “God, he’s gonna tease me about this for the rest of our lives.” He added, as his voice broke ever so slightly as he got emotional. “There’s no one else who understands the pain we went through when we lost our mother, there’s no one else who understands how hard it was to come into our own, to make our family proud and to find a way to be who we wanted to be in a world that had so many expectations for us… but Harry has always been such a strong man, he is the strongest person I know, and he… he was always the one I thought of when I considered giving up, and over the years, he was the one I wanted to impress. He’s just one of the funniest, smartest and nicest guys I know, and having him in my life means more to me than I will ever be able to say. So I feel honored to be his best man, to be his brother, and to be a part of the best decision he has ever made, which is to marry Jenifer.” He held on to his champagne flute, and we all did the same. “So because I’m his older brother and I have a reputation to uphold I won’t toast to him, but I’ll toast to Jenifer, whom has been like a sister for long before today. To Jenifer, ladies and gentlemen. May their children have her hair!”

We all laughed again, and William quickly made his way to us for a quick hug, which I suspected he didn’t want to drag on as to not give Harry a chance to tease him about getting choked up.

After we had all settled down again, I watched as Alessa stood up, from the bridal party table, holding the microphone they now handed her. Her baby bump still wasn’t showing, but her face was pale and I knew the morning sickness and the hormones had been plaguing her for far too long.

“Good night, everyone, I’m Alessa McKenna, and I am Jenifer’s maid of honor.” She explained. “Now, before I start, the palace’s security has asked me to request that, for reasons of health and safety, none of you get up on top of the chairs and tables during my standing ovation, thank you.” She joked, cockily, before moving along. “Now, I realize as the maid of honor it is my duty to roast Jenifer and tell you all her terrible and embarrassing stories, but let’s face it, if you want to know that you can just google it or buy her book.” I giggled. “I have known Jen since we were fifteen years-old, and she has always been one of my favorite people in the world. She’s beautiful, intelligent, talented and so I just can’t come up with anything shitty to say about her.” She shrugged. “So I’ve decided to just roast Harry instead.”

The crowd laughed, and Harry gave Alli a desperate look.

“How is that fair?!” he asked.

“Let me first say this, though, don’t the bridesmaids look absolutely amazing today?! And only rightly outshone by Jen, of course. No surprise there, we all know she has modeled in the past… And, I’m sure you’ll agree with me gentlemen, today is a sad day for single men, as another beauty leaves the available list. And ladies, I’m sure you’ll agree that today’s passing by without much of a ripple.” We laughed with our guests. “Since Harry and Jen started going out together you can see the great effect they’ve had on each other. Harry no longer wears that crappy cap or the same blue sweater everywhere he goes… And as for Jen, over time she has managed to lower her expectations to avoid disappointment.”

“Jesus…” Harry mumbled, laughing, and I hugged him.

“I’ve known Jenifer since we were in high school, and back then people didn’t like us very much. People always think I’m lying when I say this, because she’s Jenifer Silva and all, but trust me, that
didn’t mean much back then. Back in high school people didn’t like how confident and strong she was, and I am just so glad to have met her, because through all the bullying and hard times, that never flickered and she has taught me to be stronger and confident no matter how many people might dislike that about you… I was talking to the girls, the bridesmaids, to write this speech, and all four of them in one way or another said the same thing. Jen is like a sister to me. Of all of us, I’ve known Jen the longest, but I love how she became like a sister to all of us equally, because that truly is who she is as a person. She wants to help, she wants to be there, she wants everyone to be happy and to have a chance at getting what they want. Since she was fifteen years-old, Jen has been a beautiful, smart, charming person and by falling in love with Harry she truly proves the old saying, opposites do attract.”

“Oh, my God.” I let out, laughing with the others, as Harry shook his head.

“I mean, we all know they are made for each other.” She added. “Back when they had just started dating Jenifer told me Harry was her best friend, to which I replied… excuse me, bitch?”

We laughed at her offended tone, loudly.

Alli smiled. “No, in all seriousness, I’m only joking. I know I speak for all of Jen’s friends when I say that we are truly happy that she found in Harry someone who loves her and threatens her the way she deserves. And I wanna tell Harry’s family and friends who might just be getting to know her now, what kind of person she is, so allow me to tell you a story.” She cleared her throat. “I went to college in New York, and Jenifer was living across the country in California for work, and we spoke maybe every weekend because of her crazy schedule, but we texted all the time. And that’s how I told her one day that I had had a fight with my boyfriend at the time. Not satisfied with that, fate decided that was a good week to have a professor fail me in a final, and my childhood dog to pass away, so let’s just say I was not in good shape. What Jenifer did was to pack a bag, tell her bosses she had a family emergency, and fly straight to New York on the first flight she found.” She smiled at me. “She got there, hugged me, and asked me what I wanted, and I told her I wanted a doughnut.” We giggled, together, reminiscing. “She made me dress up, and we went out on a hunt across Manhattan for the best doughnuts we could find. We bought a bunch and went back home and spent the entire weekend eating and watching Disney movies until she had to fly back.” Her voice broke, slightly, and she sighed. “I know for a fact, Harry, that is she’s half as loyal and dedicated as a wife as she is as a friend, you are the luckiest man alive. And all I ask of you today is that you take care of her for the rest of your lives as she has taken care of us thus far.” She smiled, reaching for her water glass. “So join me in toasting Jen and Harry. We love you, we admire you, we are honored to call you friends, and we will gladly take second place as you become each other’s best friend. To Harry and Jen!”

“To Harry and Jen!”

—

“Ladies and gentleman, good evening. Ah…” Harry smiled. “It’s truly funny to be here after hearing all these jerks speak, I feel like this has been very unbalanced.” Our guests laughed. “I’d like to firstly thank you all for coming, I know so many of you traveled for so long, and I know many of you had issues deciding if the whole circus outside with the people and the press would be worth it, so thank you for being here. Thank you for being with us and offering your friendship…” He sighed. “I would like to thank Jen’s parents for everything they have done for us, and especially for welcoming me into their family so warmly. Although I was a bit worried at first. When I asked them for Jen’s hand in marriage they told me to leave my name and number and said they’d call me if nothing better turned up.” He paused, to allow the room some time to laugh, which we all did, as my parents blushed.
“It’s not true!” My mother said, giggly, to no one in particular.

“No, that’s not true. They have always been kind, even when my legs were attacked on the day we met and I was pulled into a football game to prove my worth.” They laughed again. “I remember Jen apologized for how hard her family was on me at first, and I also remember sincerely telling her she didn’t have to, because the truth is I absolutely understood. I understood then as I understand Alessa’s toast tonight, because anyone who knows Jenifer, loves her, and anyone who loves someone is right to protect them with all they have, so I knew I would be doing the same thing.” He paused. “I also wanna thank my family for their support, today and for my whole life, and especially my father and Will for their kind words today. Dad, you have kept us from spiraling into a mess, and I am so sorry we gave you so much reason to worry as we were growing up. Will,” he sighed, “The great advantage of being bald on a day like today is that, when the photographer calls for a wedding shot, all you have to do is straighten your tie.” Will threw his head back, laughing, as did everyone else. “See? I can always come up with baldness jokes.” Harry added, cheekily. “Anyhow…”

He stopped, for a long time, looking down. He didn’t have any notes, and I could see his restless fingers tapping away at his chest under his jacket, nervously.

“This is the part where I talk about Jen and I…” He sighed. “Honestly, I have no idea where to start.” He looked down at me, sitting by his side, and smiled, before looking back up at the room of people. “The thing you need to understand is… Jen didn’t just walk into my life, she… threw herself into it. She arrived. She forcibly landed her apache helicopter personality to the calmness that I had and suddenly everything was up in the air…”

I smiled widely, looking at him as if he was the sun and I was freezing – every word out of his lips made me breathless.

“She… She is flames, bright red and burning, non-stopping… all I could ever do was stand there and watch, mesmerized, wondering how could I ever leave her be, and the answer is, of course, I couldn’t. Hence why we’re here today.” He looked at me again, and smiled. “Actually, no, we’re not here today because I couldn’t get away from her. We’re here because on a twist of luck, I managed to convince her to want me back, and trust me, it was not easy.” He grinned at our friends again. “When we first got together, Jenifer insisted we were just friends, and on the day she finally admitted she wanted more, it was after we had a fight so ridiculous it involved both of us hiding away in the trunks of our cars to be able to get to each other without being seen.”

I laughed at the memory, and he followed, though most of our guests just looked confused.

“Jenifer refused to call me her boyfriend for six months after that. And it also took six months for her to let me tell her I loved her. That’s right, before then I had to pretend I said it by accident and take it back because she looked so scared when I did.” He looked at me, grinning. “I can now confess I didn’t really mean any of those take backs, Jay. I meant it from the very first time.” He winked, as I still smiled up at him like a pathetic idiot. “And we didn’t tell our families until three months after that. Then it was three more months before she told me that she loved me, which was an accident, by the way. All of this may help you understand why it took me another four months to work up the courage to ask her to move in with me, something she said yes to after thinking about it for a whole month. Then it took us another five months to actually move in together and another four for her to tell me she wanted to spend the rest of her life with me, which she finally agreed to when I proposed first eight months later.”

“Excuse me?” I interrupted, making our guests laughed. Harry ignored me.

“So that’s how we got here, and that’s what I wanna toast to tonight.” He sighed, pausing, and
stared around the room wistfully for a second. “Because, as sad as that is, there’s only one person who believed in this relationship from the start. There’s only one person who’s always known we were going to end up here, and that wasn’t our families, or any of you, our friends, or even Jen. That was me.” He sighed, chuckling. “And it was not easy, but we made it, and I feel like I deserve some credit for that. So here’s to me!” he raised his champagne flute in a toast, and the room erupted in laughter – and then in applause - as we followed his motion.

I stood up and laid a kiss on his cheek, making to hold the microphone to now make my toast.

“Actually, I’m not done yet.” He said. “If you’ll all take your seats I have one last thing to say as part of my toast… uhm…” He sighed, looking around awkwardly. “As I’m sure you all know, despite all praise from my Eton drama professors, Jen is actually the performer in our relationship. So… I wanted to dedicate her a song, but I don’t sing, so instead I asked my good friend Ed to help, so if you’ll turn to the stage across the room, I believe he’s ready.”

Across the room in the improvised stage area where a band had set up to serenade us through dinner, I saw Ed was now standing with his guitar, ready to sing.

“I mean, he’s ginger and British, we can all just pretend he’s me.” Harry joked. “Anyway, uhm… This is for my lovely wife.”

He smiled, before sitting down again next to me, just as Ed started streaming the chords in his guitar, beginning a nice song.

“What is this?” I asked. Harry merely smiled as he rested his hand on my thigh, but the confusion was still all over my face when Ed began streaming his guitar chords in a sappy, almost upbeat song.

“Was it all in my head?” He sang, sweetly. “In an empty bed… And I told you that I need you, baby, can’t you see I’m alone? Oh, oh…”

The band joined Ed, as the song grew faster, which sounded so foreign in the old palace. I kept looking at Harry, hoping he would explain what this was about, but he just smiled at me.

“I was lost in my feet… On an empty street… So I save your seat, infinity, forever figures 5 and 3, you know… oh oh. Cross my heart and hope to die, stick a needle in my eye… My mother said to pick the best, and you are it.”

As if someone had turned on the lights, I knew. I got it. I knew what this was.

“Hey!” Ed shouted, excitedly. “All our troubles gone like when we were young, take me back to where we all began… Here we are again, like we should’ve been, oh, my lady, can I have this dance? Hey!”

As he repeated the chorus, as the drums shook the ballroom, I heard a distinctive sound of low, melodic clapping coming from around – our guests getting into the unusual royal wedding song. Unusual, yes, but I knew it now – or I thought I did. I just needed to make sure.

“Was it hard to believe?” Ed went on, “Wear your heart on my sleeve. And I’ll hold you when you’re lonely, when you’re cold, ‘cause you’re the only one for me.”

Yes, I knew. I understood it. And at every word my heart beat faster and louder; my breathing grew harder as it became more difficult to pretend I didn’t want to cry. Harry was still smiling at me, and I knew. He knew that I did. As Ed sang the bridge again, I was sure of it.
“Cross my heart and hope to die, since you came into my life, my mother said to pick the best, and you are it.”

Harry had been worried I couldn’t have the wedding I wanted, so he was giving me – in the only way he could – two elements I had wished for. Modern music, and that we wrote our own vows. I wasn’t sure who had written the words Ed was singing, but I knew Harry meant them.

Was it hard to believe? Wear your heart on my sleeve. He knew how hard it had been for me after all I’d been through; he knew it had been hard to believe; I still remembered the first time he said he loved me, in Scotland, after we kissed for the first time without anyone watching. And I had told him don’t. Yet he stood by me. He waited. He tried again. He asked me out every day. He had wished to move to New York. He had gone after me in my hotel room in Brazil when we saw each other again. He asked for a kiss for his birthday gift. He gave me chance after chance and when I took it, he didn’t let me go.

I’ll hold you when you’re lonely, when you’re cold, ‘cause you’re the only one for me. I knew what this song was. My mother said to pick the best, and you are it.

Those were his wedding vows.

“Hey!” Ed shouted, excitedly, and as the upbeat chorus echoed through the room, as our guests now more excitedly clapped along, I felt a single tear fall down my cheek as I couldn’t hold it in anymore. “All our troubles gone like when we were young, take me back to where we all began… Here we are again, like we should’ve been, oh, my lady, can I have this dance? Hey! All our troubles gone like when we were young, take me back to where we all began.”

I was smiling more than I remembered I ever had while also having tears stream down my face. I gave Harry, who was still smiling, a knowing look, and he winked. I raised the hand with which I tried to dry my tears as the song slowed down and the beat became lower; Ed sang again, slower now.

”Hey, all my troubles gone, like when we were young, take me back to where it all began…” he sang, his fingers streaming the guitar chords slower now. The melody was more delicate, as I heard the only percussion following him was a very slight beat.

Then, I heard a chorus of high pitched ‘ooh’s from the back, like a choir. I felt my brows furrow in confusion as, along with everyone else in the room, I tried to find the source of the angelic sound.

Finally, as Ed started to sing the next words, everyone was able to see where the sound was coming from, because from the big doors on both sides of the ballroom, from both sides of the stage where Ed stood, stepped out a group of children, in choir robes, harmonizing to the song.

“Here we are again, like we should have been, oh, my lady, can I have this dance?!” Ed sang, dragging the last note as high as he could, and the kids took the chorus, singing melodically:

“Hey! All my troubles gone, like when we were young, take me back to where it all began…”

They harmonized in perfect synch, and Ed danced around the words expertly as he did. “Can I have this dance?” He sang. “My mother said to pick the best…”

To the chorus rhythm, the kids started clapping, and the sound echoed through the room only not louder than the beats of my heart.

“Here we are again, like we should have been, oh, my lady, can I have this dance!”
I noticed now, as they sang the word ‘lady’ their accents were different, and I knew where I had seen the adorable, joyful looking children before – they were the kids from Sentabale, the orphans affected by HIV Harry’s charity helped. I knew they had a choir, so I knew, now, he had flown them in to sing for us – for me. And I suddenly loved the song even more.

“Oh, oh, oh, oh-ooh… My lady, oh, oh, oh-ooh…” they sang, as Ed still sang, “Can I have this dance?!”

“Oh, oh, hey!” Ed started again, “all our troubles gone…”

“All our troubles gone…” the choir repeated, in a different tone.

“Like when we were young,”

“When we were young,”

“Take me back to where it all began!” Ed sang.

“Cross my heart and hope to die,” harmonized the children, “since you came into my life…”

Then the drums and band stopped playing, and only Ed and his guitar could be heard. “My mother said to pick the best…” he stepped back from the microphone, and the children finished the song.

“…and you are it!”

To say that I was sobbing at this point would be an understatement. At the sight of the kids, at the sight of just how much preparation Harry had put into this surprise, I simply couldn’t keep it together anymore. I had to let go of his hand to cover my mouth as I also tried to dry my tears. I tried to take deep breaths and keep myself together, but I knew it was useless. I could only hope I was an elegant crier.

At the sudden silence when the kids and Ed finished their song, the world erupted in applause as we all stood up to give them a standing ovation.

I wanted to clap, but what I decided to do instead was turn to Harry. I faced him and took a deliberate step to wrap my arms over his shoulders in a tight, almost desperate hug. I felt his arms around my waist as I closed my eyes.

“Thank you.” I told him, caressing his hair with my hand. His response was to hug me tighter, as I imagined he couldn’t think of what to say.

“Ladies and gentlemen, Lesotho’s Sentabale Choir.” Ed said, as the smiley children took a deep bow.

I watched as the guests took to their seats again, as did Harry. Chatter filled the room again as everyone commented on the beautiful song we just heard and I just took a deep breath as I stared around.

I stood there, watching our two families and all of our friends talking excitedly amongst one another; my Hollywood friends and his aristocrat ones; the people who worked for us and became friends through it and royal families from all over the globe. It was a beautiful sight to watch and it occurred to me how incredible that that huge day would not have happened and all those people may never have met if it wasn’t for Harry and me, and it filled me with such joy and pride and overwhelming love to see everyone we loved so dearly there, to celebrate with us the accomplishment of such a long journey.
I had been standing in silence for too long now, and the guests were quieting down as they waited for me to speak, so I thought I should start, though I was still so overwhelmed by the song and Harry’s speech and the memories of how hard our relationship had been to know what I should say, so I decided to start with the basic acknowledgments.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I’d like to thank all of you for being here today, especially since many of you knew that I’d want to say a few words… considering how dramatic my speeches usually go, it’s very touching that you still decided to come to endure one more.” They laughed. “I’d like to express my gratitude to Her Majesty and Prince Philip for hosting us tonight in this lovely dinner. When we got engaged and decided we wanted to have all of our friends with us we had no idea how many friends we actually had, and we would not have known how to throw such an amazing and elegant event for them all, so thank you.” The room erupted in applause as the Queen and Prince Philip nodded, smiling politely.

I took some time, in a pause, trying to know how to go on, but realizing I had no idea. I had given speeches so many times in the past, but this wasn’t like the other ones. This wasn’t on television and this wasn’t about an award, it was about Harry. And he was the greatest thing I had ever won and I had no idea how I even did, so I did not know how to express how amazing that felt.

I sighed, nervously smiling at the crowd as I tried to phrase my feelings in a way that would make sense.

“So…” I started, sighing nervously. I caught a look at Harry, was squinting at me, amusedly, most likely finding it interesting the sight of me at a loss for words for the first time in my life. “Here’s the thing.” I paused, for a long time, still unsure of what to say, “When Harry says I was flames, all I can think is of a burning building. I was… self-destructing when we met. And the saddest part is I didn’t even know. When he says he couldn’t look away, I think I was a little like a car crash in that sense. I was trying to hold my head up high, but inside I was a mess…” I looked at him, eyeing me now with a mixture of pride and sadness. “Harry says I arrived in his life, and in contrast he… he gently walked into mine. He politely knocked on my door, asked if his protection officers could do a sweep before coming in, and despite the alarming warnings to keep his distance, he still decided to stay with me.”

I smiled, feeling my eyes burning but deciding I needed not to cry. I needed to get those words out.

“I was not ready for him.” I added. “I was not sure I believed in happy endings anymore, and he just… waited. He stood by me and he smiled and he kept saying he loved me time and time again, and taking those words back until I was ready to hear them.” My voice broke, and I paused taking in a deep breath. “As cliché as that is, I fell in love with Harry before I knew it was happening. I grew used to his presence, to his smell, to his accent. I grew used to his endless mocking of my half-American, half-Brazilian costumes, to my restlessness and I started to slowly miss him at every minute he wasn’t around.” I smiled, remembering the crazy days in Manhattan when all I wanted was to come home to have dinner with my fake boyfriend. “Suddenly, having him there was what made my apartment feel like home and every minute I wasn’t spending with him felt empty and useless, but it took so long to acknowledge this. It took so long to be able to open myself up, because all the times I had done it in the past ended up in pain, and I was not ready for the possibility that this one wouldn’t.”

Harry reached out and held my hand, and I paused again, staring at our intertwined fingers, caressing his with mine.

“But this man, this wonderfully patient man, was ready to wait for me, and I honestly do now know how he managed it, because I was a pain.” I joked. “I was a mess. And frankly, this might be
the only rare time in which I say this, but Harry is right.” They laughed. “He is, he is right. There’s only one person who actually believed we could do this, and that’s him. There’s only one person who managed to bring this relationship here, and that’s him, because I know that I have not been as patient with myself. Harry… Harry never tried to fix me. Or be my salvation. He has only ever shown me that I was strong enough to save myself and when I did, I decided to be with him, not because I couldn’t live otherwise, but because I didn’t want to have to.” I smiled. “When you made me stronger, you helped me become abler to see and go after what I wanted, and here’s the thing… I want you.”

He smiled, holding my hand tighter in his.

“I have never been easy to love, but you stood there, and my God, I am so grateful that you did! I am so grateful for that one night we met, I am so grateful for the day you called me to ask about apartments in Manhattan, I am so grateful for every idiotic conversation and dumb ideas we had that brought us here. I am so, so grateful that I have you in my life.” I felt a tear stream down my face. “You are the most wonderful man I have ever met and I fully intend to spend every last day of our lives trying to make you feel as safe and happy as you have made me feel the past six years.”

Harry looked down, placing a kiss on my hand that he still held in his, and now there was only one more thing left to say.

“One time back in 2013 when we had just started dating Harry discovered these videos online from when I was in college and I used to do slam poetry,” I told them, “and after some endless teasing, he finally said he admired how passionate I sounded, and he made me promise I would write a poem about him one day, if I ever felt inspired to… and because we spent most of our relationship trying not to drag too much attention to us, I never did, but now that we’re married…” I said, suggestive, and a few wolf whistles and cheering erupted from around the room as they saw where I was going with this. Harry smiled at me, widely. “So, this is called Dear Harry.”

I held his hand tighter in mine, taking in a deep breath, and looking in his eyes despite the desperate will to fall in a fit of nervous giggles.

“How can I say your name without also breathing the words, ‘my god, I found you!’? How can I ever speak again with this mouth when it has found where it belongs?” I smiled, marveling, focusing in his smile, knowing he felt the same. “When you touch me I am a bed of calla lilies. I will make a house for you and fill it with evergreens. I will paint sunsets on every wall so you can only see beautiful things. How can I say ‘love’ without wanting to fold myself into you like a thousand paper cranes? Dear Harry,” I sighed, “I was halved the moment I was born. The other piece of me is inside of your mouth…” we smiled, together. “And I was found whole the moment you spoke.”
The party that followed was one for the history books – though amongst what we went on to achieve, it would come to be one of the least remembered feats said books would be dedicated to. After the food and the tear-jacking speeches, Harry and I took to the microphone again to announce a surprise in honor of my heritage. We had hired a Carnival samba drum school band to bring the dinner to a close and get the party started. They arrived loud, colorful, and joyful, and performed a medley of Carnival songs before a rendition of God Save the Queen in honor of our host – to thunderous applause. At this moment, along with most of our older guests, such as family, politicians, and some of the foreign royals, the Queen and Prince Philip excused themselves – they would be spending the night at Saint James Palace to give us some room, not that anyone thought there would be a lack of room if they had wanted to stay.

This was the moment Harry and I went upstairs to change, in the room that had been prepared for us to use for that night. He came back without his jacket and tie and his sleeves rolled up. I came back without the tiara and with my hair down the back of my velvet lace, off-white, short-sleeved Krikor Jabotian dress, which was shorter on the front, by my knees, and fell to my heels in the back – much more comfortable for dancing.

And dance we did – all night long. Our guests took off their jackets too, and hats, and the women enjoyed the nude ballerina flats we gave them as party favors. We laughed as they tried to follow us into the samba, which I believe was fun for them too, as it wasn’t so much about knowing how to do it as much as it was about enjoying the music and having fun. Then the drum school took off and we were left to enjoy Taylor’s boyfriend Adam as the DJ – though that night he was announced with his stage name, Calvin Harris.

We danced until there were no more modern songs left, and then we danced to old ones. We danced to every song we had ever seen significance in, we danced to most songs we knew. Then we danced to songs we didn’t know. We danced with our friends, we danced together, we slow danced. We laughed and talked and drank and then we enjoyed the middle of the night snacks the waiters brought in, and danced a lot more. We danced until Adam’s set ended, and then we danced to the second DJ we had hired. We danced until our feet hurt, until my makeup was ruined, until we were the only ones left in the Buckingham Palace ballroom.

Then we danced by ourselves, with Harry’s arms around my waist and my head resting in his chest. We danced until the DJ left and there was no music anymore. We danced until the staff of the palace started to clean up. We danced after we said goodbye to our own staff when they left, we danced until the photographers rounded up their stuff and went home, we danced our way through the hallway and pass every priceless painting until the bedroom we had left our things in. Then we laid in bed, still in our party clothes, and with our arms wrapped around each other we said goodnight, knowing we would wake up together – the first time of many to come.

At the edge of the Brazilian northeastern state of Ceará sits a small fishing village called Jericoacoara. The name was native Brazilian tupi for ‘lair of the turtles’, but people called it Jeri, for short. Since 1984 the area surrounding Jeri was declared an Environmental Protected Area, and in 2002 it was made into a National Park, which maintained the idyllic place almost frozen in time.

Up until about 20 years before, Jeri was still a secluded and simple fishing village with no roads, electricity, phones, TV’s and newspapers, and money was rarely used. There are still no buildings there, let alone skyscrapers. The small village sits on streets of sand, surrounded by palm trees,
with few small two stores houses, a lot of which serve as restaurants and inns. The small population lives of fishing and tourism and electricity only arrived there in 1998. To protect its fragile ecosystem, tourism regulations include building restrictions and street lighting is forbidden, making the whole place seem even more magical than its clear blue water beaches already did. Locals even joke travelers always end up deciding to stay for longer than they had originally planned, and if Harry and I were any indication, this was absolutely true.

There were a number of reasons I picked this place for our honeymoon, but mainly it was because it was beautiful. The other reasons included the lack of easy access, which meant it would be harder for paparazzi to find us, and due to the unlit streets at night, I knew the very few tourists who would be there in the middle of August wouldn’t recognize us. The locals were so friendly all we had to do was ask for them to keep our presence a secret, though not many of them recognized us either as we were always in sunglasses and hats because of the sun.

We left Buckingham Palace after our wedding straight into a helicopter which took us to my private place in a closed airport in the north of the country where we knew there would be no media. We took a car from the capital of Ceará to Jeri when we arrived, at night, and so our location was as much of a secret as we managed to make it. Harry had me leave my phone in England and, to be honest, this was the first time I didn’t mind it.

Jeri was heaven. We could almost feel like different people there. Besides the main street, there were only five more streets, two of which were so residential most cars barely fit. As it wasn’t tourist season, we were the only few in the streets most of the time, and our inn was completely empty except for us and an old couple in an apartment across from ours. We had rented three apartments in an inn in the village with a pool, most of which were colorful little houses in the shadow of coconut trees, with hammocks hanging before the doors and a colonial breakfast that had us barely hungry for most of the day, though we still managed to find the energy to gorge on all types of seafood later on.

Our inn was located in the narrowest of the streets, leading up to a couple of grocery stores, one of which was the only one with an ATM machine – there were no banks in Jeri. Our routine for the wonderful week we spent there consisted of waking up whenever we felt like, having breakfast with our new friends – the older couple in the inn -, covering ourselves in sunblock and heading off to the beach. After lunch, we would always find ourselves back in the same ice cream shop, Gelato & Grano, right in the middle of the main square, which served all kinds of flavors, including of specific fruits you can only find in south America, which Harry and our security team fell in love with. We quickly challenged each other to try the most number of flavors by the end of the week.

By day three, we already felt like home. We didn’t mind the sand everywhere we went, and learned to love how we simply couldn’t escape it as all of the soil in Jeri was made up by it. We loved the lighting around the village at night, where the only source of illumination was from the houses or the moon above. We loved the food – every bit of it, form the fresh fruit to the shrimp moqueca, a special type of Brazilian stew. At some point Harry even stopped bitching about his sunburns.

“It hurts, but I know I’m gonna miss it when we leave.” He said, making me smile.

He wasn’t as red as I thought he would get, though. After six years, he finally learned to listen to me and apply sunblock when I told him to, but he was still a white, British, ginger man, and there was only so much sun his skin could handle before it stopped being white and turned into a light shade of pink.

“I don’t mind the sunburn as much.” He complained, once. “What I hate is the fact that you
manage a perfect tan while I look like a tomato.”

Smiling, I wrapped my arms around his waist as we walked by the beach. “I’m Brazilian. The sun likes me.”

“Well, it hates me.”

“It doesn’t hate you.” I argued. “You’re too cute, nobody could hate you. It just… doesn’t mind you as much.” He smiled.

“Look at us.” He said, eyeing me to my toes, back to my hat and then at himself. “If I wasn’t me, most people wouldn’t understand how I managed to get you to marry me.”

“Oh, they would think I was a gold-digger, for sure.” I nodded. “Not that you’re not handsome, but Brazilians usually go for equally as tanned people.” He sighed, looking distraughtly upset, and I hugged him again, laughing. “I’m kidding! You’re so handsome, no one thinks that! You’re the world’s most eligible bachelor!”

“Not anymore.” He said, raising his left hand where his tin, yellow gold wedding band sat in his forth finger.

“Oh, that’s right, I guess you lost that title. Oh, well, sucks to be you.”

He chuckled. “Yes, you sound very upset.”

“I’m not complaining that I literally married the world’s most eligible bachelor.”

“Oh, can we stop using that title now? It’s cringe-worthy.”

“Do you prefer World’s Best Facial Hair?” I joked, and he rolled his eyes. “Most Handsome Ginger? Mr. Jenifer Silva?”

He threw his head back, laughing loudly, and I couldn’t resist the sound, or the sight of his smile, and joined in.

“Oh, look.” Harry said, suddenly very serious. “They changed the sail of the wooden boat. Told you we should have gotten the picture earlier.”

“They just replaced it. This one says I am in heaven.”

“Okay, that’s actually better. Let’s just get a picture before they change it again.” He hurried to the main square where a wooden small boat-looking bench stood for the tourists to take pictures, so we naturally climbed on top of it and pretended to be sailing.

One of the upsides to having a security team following us to our honeymoon was that we always had someone to take pictures of us together, hence why we ended up with so many good pictures from our honeymoon, including from the day we visited the only church in Jeri, a small one store building of exposed bricks, rudely built, looking like it had been standing in the sand for a lot longer than it probably was. Harry and I were a little obsessed with the place, as it was so contrasting to the church we had gotten married in. It was so absolutely simple and yet so important for the community that we felt drawn to it.

Our other favorite pictures from the trip included the ones from our capoeira class, which was a type fight-like dance originally created in Brazil by the slaves brought from Africa. It was forbidden by the slave masters when it was a fight, and then disguised as a dance, making it a
graceful semi-balletic battle. We discovered that every sunset in Jeri you could hear the distinct and rhythmic sound of the berimbau (a simple string instrument) which coming from the white dressed people moving with acrobatic grace and speed to the sound of music in the square or in the beach. Harry and I picked up a few lessons, and shared some good moments with the other dancers.

Over that week, we took a buggy tour through the dunes, the incredibly high hills of pure sand where we took up sandboarding and sat to watch the sunset in the only place in Brazil where the sun set in the water due to how the state of Ceará was shaped.

We then took another buggy tour to the Blue Lagoon, a particular pretty beach-like lake where a number of restaurants had hammocks handing in the water for people to hang around and freshen up – we spent a good amount of hours lounging in the hammocks, talking or enjoying the day – or the touch of our skin under water when we shared a hammock.

No matter how empty Jeri was at that time of the year, it was never empty enough. It’s not that we didn’t like the locals, or the few tourists we met, or our security team, but it was very hard to pretend we didn’t want to climb all over each other at any given time of the day, particularly when we were on the water, or at all the times Harry lustfully eyed my bikini. It was hard pretending we didn’t cut most of the days short so we could go back to our inn apartment to be alone, and even harder to pretend it was normal to have a team of six extra people with us on our honeymoon, which was supposed to be arguably the most intimate time of our lives. In a way, it was reminiscent to when we were pretending to be dating, as we had to mind all the times people could see us and act how we thought was appropriate.

Still, all the times the door to our apartment closed and we found ourselves alone, we could drop the pretenses and hurry to each other as we had wanted to do the whole day prior. I’d feel the knots of pleasure form in my stomach as Harry’s hungry hands found their way around my shirt to untangle my bikini top and kissed him with as much passion as I remembered doing the first few times.

The best part about it was that, unlike the first few times, when we needed to enjoy our time together because we didn’t know if or when we would see each other again, at our honeymoon there was no rush. Every time we kissed and touched we knew was just the beginning of a lifetime together. We knew we could take our time and enjoy every touch, every caress, every breath. We could enjoy every kiss, every bite, and because we had the time, we made every time different, we made every time whatever we felt like.

The first time was rushed and eager, the second slow and teasing, and every other option we could think of until we repeated the cycle; until we found new ways, new things we wanted to do or feel. We fell asleep in each other’s arms and drifted off until one or the other would slide a hand down an abdomen, under an underwear, to teasingly wake the other up to the best of feelings so we could go again.

—

For the next few weeks we were able to maintain the beautiful bubble of unawareness around us: it was like pressing mute on the world – we forced ourselves to enjoy the post-wedding bliss as much as we could without allowing anything else to penetrate it. Slowly, bit by bit, we started allowing other elements inside: first came work, as we were both aware it was highly important to us.

As soon we left Jericoacoara, we went straight south to the headquarters of my charity in my home state where I introduced Harry to everyone in a private tour – we didn’t even allow our staff to join us there, as we wanted to consider this still to be a part of our honeymoon. ‘It’s not work!’ , we
justified to a very nervous Edward on the phone, ‘we’re just getting to know people and getting a rundown of how we’ll spend the honeymoon fund money’.

With the efforts of our security team – now improved by Kensington Palace – and the leak that we were actually spending our honeymoon in Saint Barths, we managed to keep a total secret that we were there. The charity’s staff was alerted of our visit on a need-to-know basis and the families and kids aided by them were all surprised to see us. We took pictures with them, asking that they would wait before posting them online, which thankfully they did. By the time the press figured out we had been there, we were already on a plane to Lesotho.

In Lesotho, in the middle of the most beautiful mountains – which felt a bit like nowhere -, I was introduced to the staff of Harry’s charity, the wonderful kids they helped, including the ones who sang at our wedding reception, and the amazing work they did. We also saw ways the money could be put to good use and enjoyed the place and quiet – and the lack of press or anything social media related that could give us away – before going back to England.

Arriving back in London was like suddenly press the mute button again, bringing the sound – and the mess - back into our lives at full volume. Luckily, because they were expecting us, we managed to land and travel back into Kensington without being spotted, but now that we were home we were once again very aware of our new life and new routine.

For one thing, our days in Knightsbridge were over and we were now living full time in Kensington Palace. The biggest difference, for me, was how open it was. Although a lot of people – including Will and Kate – lived in separate ‘apartments’ in Kensington, it still felt a lot more private than living in a building. It felt like a house because, after all, it sort of was – a house connected to a lot of other houses. It had beautiful gardens, a separate housing arrangement for the security and the most important thing: absolute privacy from prying tourists and reporters creeping just outside the hidden away gates.

Most of our belongings had been transferred there in the weeks prior to the wedding and the rest of it had been moved during our honeymoon by our staff, but most of it still needed to be arranged inside, so that’s what we spent our first days as a married couple doing: setting up our new house and purposely avoiding the news and the internet. When the house was done, we had Will and Kate in with the kids for dinner, and as soon as we did, it started to feel like home. I enjoyed living in a private place so close to family – since from back when I was a kid I was so far away from mine.

These slow, quiet first few months in Kensington also allowed me to start my job with UN without a lot of hassle. The first stage of it was to read the previous reports on the situation of human rights of the immigrants fleeing Syria and finding refuge all over Europe. It was a mentally exhausting work – and surely a depressing one -, but it fulfilled me to know I could try to make a difference. I also started exchanging emails and conference calls with the other people on my team, and we started planning the first few steps of our work as soon as we could meet up in Geneva.

As a duchess, my first official engagement was still a long time away – it would only happen after I selected a charity I wanted to patronage, which I was ready to do after doing a lot of reading on the subject, but which Edward had me holding up because he didn’t want me to appear to eager to please (he also thought I should appear too comfortable at it right away, as it would only showcase how timid Kate was when she started and, as the future Queen, her image needed to be protected).

Instead, he insisted my first engagement should be a joint one. ‘Not with Harry’, he warned, ‘people already know you get along, obviously. It needs to be someone in the family’. My first idea was Kate, of course, and his idea was Camilla (yay?), but that could wait as first, I had two very important personal events to attend – both of which were weddings.
The first was Alli’s. Alessa McKenna and George Percy got married in the magnificent gardens of Alnwick Castle, specifically in a flower altar built right in front of the Grand Cascade, a beautiful set of ornamental fonts. The guests were seated in the garden in front; I stood by Alli as her maid-of-honor as she was mine, as well as George’s sister Melissa Van Straubenzee, whose husband Thomas was the best man. Because they were somewhat known in England – as the aristocrats they were -, they had all decided it would be best not to acknowledge Alli’s pregnancy until a few months after the wedding.

“So they’ll try to make it seem like a honeymoon baby?” I had asked Alli.

“They just won’t acknowledge otherwise.” She explained. “But they’ll let people come to their own conclusions. They’re known, but they’re not famous, you know how it goes… they just need to keep appearances for their high society friends.”

“Yes, the very traditional aristocracy…” I mumbled, knowingly. “Which I never thought you’d come to be a part of, by the way.”

“You and me, both.” She laughed, nervously.

Alli, the crazily special girl I had met on my day in freshman year was now Countess Percy, who would one day be Duchess of Northumberland, soon to be mother of the little boy who would grow to inherit the castle where the wedding took place. I watched as my best-friend married her blonde soulmate, feeling my heart almost burst with joy over the excitement and happiness in both their faces.

Just being in my best-friend’s wedding felt different. We had to greet countless people that day and not as a maid-of-honor, as a royal. As someone that every single guest wanted to introduce themselves to and express how beautiful they thought our wedding had been. Luckily, I was somewhat used to it, as an actress, and so was Alli.

I made a speech that night as her maid-of-honor, about how that smiley, big haired weirdo was the only good memory I carried of high school, and how she had been there in the best moments of my life, now only making me who I was, but reminding me of who I wanted to be in the process of becoming one of the strongest women I knew.

After we were done with the pictures, the meet-and-greet, and we had watched as Lord and Countess Percy had their first dance, Harry waited until most of our friends were distracted to pull me by the hand across out of the big ballroom, across the amazing garden into a tunnel made entirely of ivy walls, which stretched for miles on end around Alnwick.

We giggled as we hurried out, almost running out of eyesight of the guests and security – who knew we were safe there. We basked in the privacy of the tunnel after entering enough of it which, at sun down, was starting to also get dark.

Before I could even catch my breath, Harry pulled me towards him, wrapping his arms around my waist and joining our lips in a deep kiss. He blindly walked me to the ivy wall of the tunnel, to which he pressed me mercilessly – with no consideration for my expensive dress, as he truly never had, to be honest – and pressed his body to mine with no regard for decorum, since we were now alone.

I happily ran my hand through his hair, enjoying the tickling feeling of his stubble – which he had been growing since the wedding - on my skin, making me feel as tingly as only he had the power to. I felt as his fingers pressed my hips, my thighs, and my behind as his crotch felt bulgier against mine, making both our breaths come out heavier and louder by the second. I slowly slid my hands...
down his neck, across his shirt, until they were above his pants, where I could feel his growing erection.

He grinned as he nibbled on my lower lip, breaking out kiss with a sigh as he held my hand in place.

“Behave, Your Royal Highness.” He teased, looking around at both ends of the tunnel to make sure we were alone. “Anyone could see us.”

Smiling, I freed my hand from his hold to slide it down his pants as he gave me a lustful look.

“Then let them watch.” I whispered, watching, satisfied, as he closed his eyes in bliss, letting his head fall back as I held on to him, hearing the low moans he now emitted.

Even if anyone had come looking for us, we would have been too busy to notice.

—

The second wedding we attended later that month was Ophelia’s. That was the day I wore a long, dark red, Elie Saab dress as I stood by the redhead I had loved as a sister for years as she became Mrs. Ophelia Estrada (Oscar’s real last name).

They got married at a place in Surrey called Northbrook Park, which had a beautiful, ivy covered manor where they held the reception and the most wonderful garden where they placed a white, wooden gazebo covered with white and red roses that served as an altar – also decorated with a crystal chandelier, which perfectly set the elegant tone of the day as well as the red carpet between the rolls of seats.

There I watched as my little sister married a man who was much older than her, but loved her the exact way she deserved: unconditionally; with such adoration in his eyes it felt invasive to watch the way he looked at her when he sang his vows – an ukulele version of the song he had written for her right after they met.

I wasn’t the maid of honor in this wedding, but if I were, I would have told the crowd – which included a lot of my friends from Hollywood, which also took the time to express their thoughts about our wedding – that Ophelia had been one of the first elements of normalcy I had in the business. She was a kid when we met, idealistic, energetic, overly excited, and over the years, no matter how much life – and I -, tried to warn her to be a little more careful, she never listened. She never closed off and started building up walls – she embraced the world and its dangers, knowing she could be strong enough to fight if need be. I would have told them she might have been like a little sister, but she was who I had always aspired to be.

There wasn’t an ivy covered, miles long tunnel in Northbrook Park, so that night, after we had listened to all the speeches and posed to all the pictures and talked to all the guests and watched as Mr. and Mrs. Estrada had their first dance, and Harry pulled me out of the reception by my hand when everyone was distracted, I wondered if we were just going to drunkenly embarrass ourselves in front of some of the many security guards around.

Instead, he pulled me across the garden towards the woods by the lake, and after we were far enough from the crowd, he pressed my against a tree right before kissing me as strongly as I ever remembered being kissed.

“Is this gonna be our new tradition?” I asked, smiling as he kissed my neck expertly, hovering his eager hands over my body. “…for whenever we attend a wedding?”
“I thought we could shake things up this time.” He replied, before taking just enough distance so he could turn me around to hold me from behind.

I felt his lips in my neck again, but this time his hands quickly wrapped around my hips to find their way down my crotch, and just as I looked around, feeling naughty and exposed, he pressed his hand over my labia a few times, increasing the knots of pleasure in my stomach, before finding my clit. I held his hand in place, so he’d know he was there, and he started pulling my dress up. The long fabric thankfully made a curtain around my legs as he slid his hand down my underwear, and I weakly let my head fall back to his shoulder as I felt his fingers inside me, moving mercilessly as his lips still assaulted my neck. I pulled his other hand over my breast, and allowed my mind to focus on his touch.

As far as the new traditions in my life went, that was one I could be absolutely okay with.

—

My debut as a royal ended up being with none other than the Queen herself. She invited me to come to Buckingham Palace in mid-October to check the installations of an exhibition the charity Historic Royal Palaces was putting up there, to be opened next winter after she and Prince Philip left the palace for Christmas season in Sandringham. The exhibition would count with dresses by Kate, Her Majesty, the late Princess Margaret – the Queen’s sister, Lady Diana and also, of course, my very own wedding dress – complete with the train, cathedral veil and everything.

Showing up to my first royal engagement with none less than the Queen of the United Kingdom was no easy task, so it only happened after a few preparations had been done – first, I read about the charity organizing the exhibition and its details, so I could ask questions on the day, and the press, which would follow us around, could see I had done my homework and was honestly interested. Then, I was lectured on what I should and shouldn’t do – as if all the royal training hadn’t been enough – especially on what concerned what I should and shouldn’t say about Harry’s mother, since we’d be seeing her clothes as well. And then, my favorite part, I chose a look.

I picked a green Dsquared2 knee-length dress for the occasion, which wrapped nicely around my body and had short sleeves and a high neck with a necktie. I matched it with nude pumps, diamond and emerald earrings and a diamond bracelet – as well as, of course, my engagement ring and wedding band. But the best part – the part that truly had the world talking that day, much more than I had expected – was my hair.

After years of not being allowed to do with it as I pleased because of characters I was playing or growing it out for the wedding, I had finally been able to cut it. Because it was so long when I did – almost at my lower back -, I decided it was pointless to throw it away and decided to give it away to charity, a move I documented and posted on social media to encourage everyone to do the same, so that wigs could be made for cancer patients.

Before that picture (a montage of me in the hair salon’s chair, me holding the cut out hair, and my new hairdo, at shoulder-length), the only three pictures I had uploaded online were of Harry and me in Jericoacoara, to thank the village for their hospitality after we were back from our honeymoon, and two of the two wedding I had been a part of: one with Alli, and the other with Ophelia, congratulating both of them on their big days and wishing them the best. All pictures had made the news – something I had been trying not to think too much about – but my haircut post was a whole new thing.

After all the headlines I had inspired over the years, I hadn’t thought a haircut would do much in the scale of excitement, but boy was I wrong. In the middle of the UN reports, and the charity reading, and the preparation for my engagement with the Queen, I was briefed by Clara on what
the media – and the world – was saying about my hair and they were saying quite a lot. From ‘newlywed Jenifer Silva cuts hair to honor late Princess Diana’, to ‘Jenifer Silva reinvents the Princess-do!’, every headline was a bigger stretch than the last.

So it was to no one’s surprise that when I stepped into the big ballroom in Buckingham Palace that day with the Queen – the first time I was seen live with my new hair – it was all people could look at, instead of the damn dresses we were supposed to be seeing.

“Oh, that’s gorgeous.” I told the Queen, as we looked at a satin dress her sister had worn years before. “Such intricate detail. I think it’s my favorite of all of them.”

Behind us, the clicking of the photographers’ cameras grew louder as I flicked my hair to look at the tiny woman beside me, who nodded.

“Yes, it was a different time, but Margaret was always very fashionable.” She looked at me. “I would have thought your own would have been your favorite.”

I smiled. “Well, it’s a tie.” I settled, diplomatic, and she smiled as we made our way to the central display in the room, where my wedding dress took up most of the space with its big lace train.

“It looks heavy. Was it heavy to pull on the day?” The Queen asked, conversationally.

“It was.” I admitted. “But I figured, I’ll only wear it once, so I might as well have it really big.” She grinned. “Yes. Though you wore it very nicely, you didn’t seem to be struggling.”

“I’m a good actress.” I joked. “I mean-“ I tried, before giggling as I realized the irony of what I had said. The press behind us laughed with me, and even the Queen allowed a grin.

I had been told to avoid mentions of my professional past and with four words I managed to bring it all onto myself.

“I like the lace story you told us. What is it again? It’s handmade?” The Queen asked, changing the subject.

“Yes, it’s called Bobbin lace.” I explained, going into the full story of the lace in my dress, glad to have a way to bury my little mishap.

Despite the easier-than-I-anticipated hour I spent with the Queen and British press in the Palace, and her gentle assertion that I had done ‘quite well’, I still endured a polite lecture from Edward the following day, as we went over the headlines my royal debut had made, all of which mentioned either my hair or my ‘joke about being a princess-actress’.

“I had thought Diana would be your undoing, but you managed to steer clear of that topic and still get yourself on hot waters.” Edward hissed, over breakfast.

“Pipe down, Edward. It was her first time, and she did great.” Harry said, defensive, as I merely sighed as I drank my tea.

“The press is now making up that the Queen is angry at her for stealing the limelight with her fashion choices.” He replied, staring at his tablet to read. “Jenifer Silva channels Princess Diana and steals focus to her hair instead of her work. Can you believe it? They even managed to bring your mother into this.”

“They’re the wrong ones, not Jen.” Harry returned.
“It was a bad timing to cut my hair, I get it.” I said.

“You didn’t do anything wrong.” Harry told me.

“The Little Princess Trust says they’ve had a 35% increase in hair and financial donations since your post about donating your hair.” Monica told me, looking at Edward pointedly. “She didn’t even make a proper engagement out of it, and you still did some good. If we can channel this energy into her soon to come royal work, we can achieve really great things here.”

“Let’s just try to plan our moves better.” Edward told her, looking at me. “Especially in what concerns the social media. You have a lot of the focus now and we need to bring it down a notch, they’re already looking for reasons to pin you against Kate, we don’t need you trying to appear as if you work more than her.”

“I know. I’ll lay off it for a while, sorry.” I said.

“Don’t apologize. You didn’t do anything wrong-“ Harry insisted.

“I know, but he’s right.” I interrupted. “The world is watching and everything needs to be thought of a lot more thoroughly. I’ll do better.”

Harry sighed, but Edward nodded happily, and we went on with our work day – Harry attending meetings about next year’s Invictus Games, and me having my first meeting with representatives of the charities I wanted to patron – something that was still kept secret at this point.

As much as I assured a slightly concerned Harry that night that I was fine with how everything was going – and that I definitely was not regretting marrying him -, as I drifted off into sleep in his arms there was no avoiding it: the sharp pain in my gut I only remembered feeling once before, when my life was so filled with stress everything else faded to black.

This was my first sign of the challenges to come.
I should have known everything would be harder than I predicted.

For instance, you wouldn’t have known on that early November in 2018, as I stood in a balcony dressed in black besides Kate and the Countess of Wessex - all of us looking solemnly at our husbands in the street carrying wreaths for Remembrance Day in front of the military and well-wishers - that my day had started seven hours before. According to Harry, it was my own fault for not wanting to hire what he referred to as ‘a proper housemaid’. Instead, we just had a cleaning team, which came three times a week. That left me (and Clara, who was still my personal assistant) in charge of steaming my outfits, preparing everything I would need for morning engagements, getting my hair and makeup done and all the other countless things no one imagined had to happen before a duchess could step out in public.

Still, because I had just come back from my first three days trip to Geneva where I had meetings with my new UN co-workers, I didn’t have time to tell Clara what I would need for Remembrance Day – or even time to find out what I would need for Remembrance Day. Or, for that matter, find out even what Remembrance Day was. It was hard enough keeping track of Brazilian holydays, and American holydays, but to suddenly have to know all the British ones was a lot of work. For that reason I woke up extra early that day, googled it, and got everything ready and so when we stood at eleven in the morning in silence for two whole minutes, yes, I was tired. And sleepy. And remembering all the things I had to get ready for my trip to the UN’s General Assembly. And all the work I still had to do before letting the public know what charities I would be choosing as patronages. And dreading all the gruesome human rights violations reports I still had to read from my meetings in Geneva. So as I stood there, I yawned.

Call the press! The Duchess of Clarence is human and feels sleepy like most mortals! I didn’t think it was that big of a deal, after all I did manage to make it there after the crazy couple of days I had had just before. And I was looking like I belonged too, so I thought the yawning was a mere detail. Of course, when you’re a royal, details matter.

I was wearing an expensive Saks Fifth Avenue black overcoat with a big faux fur collar, and keeping warm with black stockings and gloves, although if I was being honest I really wanted to be wearing long boots and proper pants, because the cold morning was making me even more sleepy. Still, I stood beside the others trying to look as professional with a headpiece on as they did, even though I couldn’t stop yawning during the whole solemn two minutes of silence representing the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month in 1918 when the guns of Europe fell quiet.

After the two minutes there was still a long ceremony during in which the members of the Royal Family – such as the Queen, Prince Philip, Prince Charles, William and Harry and their uncles and aunt all laid wreaths in total silence. It was weird that about eight thousand people were around, but no one dare say a word. Then the military band started playing a funeral march and the politicians took their turn laying wreaths as well, before the band played the national anthem and, this time, all eight thousand people sang, such a thunderous, emotional sound that I had chills and felt slightly more awake.

After the very ceremonial – meaning slow – exit, we all went back home on time for lunch. At Kensington, we said goodbye to Will and Kate and went to our own house, where Harry set about cooking and I sat with Lane-Fox and Monica dealing with our most recent crisis: my negative headlines spree, which as we went online, we found out my yawning spree had only added to.
A mere three months after our wedding, the British media had already grown bored of me and decided to go on a lying spree about any topic they could come up with. Their favorite one was that in my Hollywood-essence, I was trying to get the limelight all to myself, meaning I was using everything that I had to outshine Kate. This then turned into a lie that Kate was getting irritated with me, and suddenly we’re frenemies (reason why everyone wanted us to stand next to each other during Remembrance).

Because of this ridiculous idea that I was trying to outshine her, our staff and the Queen’s staff, and the staffs of Charles and Will and Kate as well, all decided I should probably hold off on royal engagements until this frenzy had died down, so we didn’t confirm the press’ suspicions. This meant I could not release my statement saying which charities I would be working with as a duchess – something I was actually quite excited about. Instead, the official story was that I was using this post-wedding ‘grace period’ to adapt to my new life and get our household affairs in order.

So on top of all the negativity going around about me, a quick Google search showed us that instead of helping, my attendance at Remembrance only made things worse.

“You were supposed to be seen friendly with Kate,” Edward said, “instead now they’re critiquing your fashion choices – fur, seriously, Jenifer? And saying you’re bored!”

“I can’t stop myself from yawning!” I complained. “It’s humanly impossible!”

“Have you heard of coffee??” He returned.

“Hey!” Harry scorched, warningly.

We had almost forgotten he was around, but he had yet to forget my stay in the hospital when the amount of stress had made me have an ulcer burst.

“Sorry.” Edward breathed.

“He has a point.” Monica conceded. “Everyone’s still a little unsure of why you, a Hollywood actress, would abandon your glamorous life in Los Angeles to be a British royal, with all the tradition and boringness-no offense, Harry.” She added, apologetically. “Yawning for almost half-an-hour straight during your first big outing…”

“And such a solemn one at that!” Said Edward.

“Okay, I get it!” I stopped them, sighing. “Sorry. I’ll… I’ll just have to be more prepared. I didn’t have a lot of time with the Geneva trip. I’ll get things done earlier next time so I don’t have to wake up so early.”

“What you are doing is delegating.” Edward decided. “Enough of this ‘we don’t need staff!’ crap. We’re paying for an assistant, Clara, so use her. She’s supposed to keep you from looking bad, so let’s try that, shall we?”

“Fine, yes, of course. You’re right.” I said.

I didn’t fully agree with him, but I could see Harry getting increasingly angry from where he was, throwing Edward some nasty looks, so I needed the subject to be over.

Harry had been petrified I would get another ulcer ever since the first one had burst, and I knew the rumors were harder on him than on me. At some level, I knew he wondered if they were true. They spoke of his biggest fear, after all: that I would get bored of the life I had now we were married. So
I needed him to know I wasn’t.

In fact, the only royal work I could be seen doing to avoid appearing ‘too eager’ was joint engagements, such as the Remembrance ceremony with the whole family and the other ceremony I attended that month, with Harry: the WellChild Awards.

Harry was a patron of the charity, which aided seriously ill children and the healthcare professionals who cared for them, and they gave out annual awards for inspirational and caring patients and professionals, so they felt valued and had incentive to keep up the good work. Harry attended the ceremony every year, meeting the kids and the workers, handing them the awards and just generally making them feel better, as he did.

So that year I went with him – part the effort to build up my image as a ‘duchess in training’ -, to look and learn. I wore a knee length, royal blue Reinaldo Lourenço dress, with a black lace high neck, matched with black pumps.

We ignored the cameras as we walked in, and Harry introduced me to the charity’s staff, which he knew by name after working with them for so long.

“Your Royal Highness.” The chairwoman greeted me, smiling, taking a small curtsy.

After a little more than three months of this, I was still not used to it, and still unsure of how to act when it happened. So I just waved my hand dismissively at her as I smiled.

“It’s just Jen.” I told her, giving her a handshake.

We were ushered in, and met all of the kids and their families, all of which seemed flustered to see us, to say the least. Most of the adorable children seemed too shy to say anything, but their parents explained their conditions and their fight, and we made sure they knew how brave we thought they were.

Since the negative headlines started appearing, Harry kept giving me concerned glances at all points of the day. So as we made the rounds around the room, greeting people and listening to their stories and trying to make them all feel heard and appreciated for their valuable work, I looked at him, expecting to have to give him a comforting look that said ‘I’m fine! Focus on work!’, but instead, I realized he wasn’t looking at me.

Harry was looking at the eight year-old ginger girl in a wheelchair in front of him as he crouched down, with a charity staffer by his side explaining her condition and history. Harry didn’t look at the staffer either. Instead, he smiled at the little girl who was very slowly telling him something – she seemed to have some type of mental development disorder.

“Oh, really?” He asked, seeming genuinely interested. “Well, she’s right here, do you want to ask so yourself?” he looked at me, then, a little surprised to find me looking at him, and gestured for me to come over.

“Excuse me.” I smiled at the nurse I had been talking to, and walked over to him.

“Sofia, this is my wife, Jenifer.” Harry told the little girl as I leaned down to be on her eye level. “Sofia says she watched our wedding and she wants to know if your train was really hard to pull and if you had to wear it for the party as well.”

“Oh, really?” I smiled at her. “Well, the train was really heavy, but I changed dresses for the dinner, and my other dress was quite simpler, so it was easier to wear it. Did you like my dress?”
“Yes!” Sofia smiled a little crooked smile. “I liked the tiara, too.”

“You did?” I giggled. “Wasn’t it beautiful? Harry’s granny lent it to me. I quite liked it.”

“You looked like a princess.” She said.

“Oh, thank you very much. You look like one too, you have hair just like Ariel. Have you seen The Little Mermaid?” with her eyes shining, she nodded. “Well, your hair looks just like hers.”

“What’s your favorite princess?” Sofia asked.

“Hm…” I thought about it, probably for a lot longer than I should have, and Harry chuckled when I looked at him, as if asking for help.

“Well, mine is Mulan.” He said, and Sofia smiled.

“I think mine is Rapunzel.” I told her. “What is your favorite princess?”

“…you!”

“Me?!” She smiled, such a sweet and charming smile we couldn’t resist squealing in admiration.

“Thank you!”

We stood up, biding Sofia goodbye and shaking her mother’s hand, who seemed so touched by our conversation I could see tears in her eyes – unable to stop myself, I pulled her in for a comforting hug, which gladly, though a little surprised, took.

I kept noticing that throughout the night, Harry maintained his professional stance. He never once looked at me worryingly, he never tried to guide me too much around, he didn’t try to shield me. More than anything else, I realized I loved this about him. I loved that he could worry about me, but he could also know when he didn’t have to. He knew I could do this job, he knew I was comfortable with this part of our lives. He knew I could handle it, and I had a better time knowing I didn’t have to constantly reassure him that I was fine.

The truth that Harry knew was that I didn’t need to adapt to shit, since I was pretty used to most things my new life brought already – press, charity work, the whole ordeal. And our household affairs were in order because, in Harry’s words, I was a ‘controlling freak who cannot calm down’. So instead, I used that time during which I could not do my royal work, to do my other work, the only work I was allowed to do – the UN work.

So that November, after the WellChild Awards, I got my work in order and took off for New York, for the UN’s General Assembly. Harry was still very concerned about my levels of stress rising because of all the negative press so soon after the wedding, and after it happened enough times, I had to admit I had been feeling stomach aches again, so he cut me off alcohol – again –, which along with my still coffee-free diet, made for even more stressful days, instead of helping with it, argument he didn’t seem to buy.

Still, he insisted feeling sleepy was worth not risking waking up throwing up blood again, so I had to take it. Because he thought I needed to slow down on everything I had been doing – even though I wasn’t even actually doing the royal work -, he agreed to follow me to America so we could spend the thanksgiving holyday unwinding in Idaho with the Artchets. I would be seen in the Assembly, and he would take the private plane to Idaho, where I would meet him afterwards so we could avoid being spotted. Thankfully, Richard’s hometown was a dead end spot, so I generally could enjoy the open mountains with no paparazzi.
I picked a Chanel plaid pink dress for my weekend with the UN, covering it with a white Chanel blazer and oversized pearl necklace. Classy and elegant, making sure there wasn’t anything the press could say about it – as they had criticized me so much for wearing fur to Remembrance I had had to take to Twitter to explain my coat had fake fur, as I grew scared PETA might try to throw red paint on me on the street or something.

Luckily, after the work actually started, there was very little time to worry about my outfit or what non-sense the press was making up about me lately. I had meetings with civic representatives to attend, reports to deliver to the Assembly on our countless Borderless projects, and assistance to give Emma Watson – who was so kind when we met, the first time after the wedding – as she gave her report on our joint Women’s Spring projects.

I met a few of the foreign royal women I had met on our wedding as well, such as Madeleine who was with her mother representing their charity, which cared for children, and the Queens of Jordan and Netherlands, as the Crown Princess of Denmark. I chatted with them, about how I had been adapting since the wedding and the latest developments on work with Borderless, happy to hear their news for their own work, and finally felt back at my old routine of actually doing something for a living instead of being just a ‘duchess in training’.

I told myself if those incredible royal women could work, then so could I, and I needed to stand up for it. At most, if they wouldn’t let me do what I was supposed to as a royal, I would continue to do my job as me: Jenifer, the UN Human Rights ambassador.

—

Arriving in Idaho after the intense now almost four months since the wedding felt like when we arrived in Jeri for our honeymoon: like pressing mute on the world. There was barely anyone outside for miles on end and the people who did go out were old pals of Richard and knew better than to tell anyone about his famous guests. When I got to the farmhouse Richard owned there – where his parents lived through the year and he and his family stayed whenever they came to town -, Harry had been there for a few hours with his security.

“Oh, look, it’s the princess!” Richard’s mother greeted, happily, when I walked through the door. “Wait, do I need to curtsy? I’m gonna curtsy!” She teased, before giving me a big hug.

“Come on, Martha, I should curtsy to you! Hosting all these weirdos every year, you’re the one who deserves a tiara!” I told her.

“Damn right, at least someone sees it.” She replied, cheekily, as I took off my dark purple overcoat before walking to Harry, who was sitting in a stool by the kitchen isle smiling at me.

“Hi.” He said, when I got close enough for him to reach out and pull me into a tight hug.

“Hi.” I replied with my face buried into his neck. “How was your flight?”

“Boring without you. How was work?”

“Boring without you.” I teased, and he smiled larger.

“Hey, Jen!” A voice called out, and I turned back to see blonder-than-ever Payton walking towards us, guitar in hands. “Wanna hear my new song?”

“You’re here!” I marveled, smiling at her. “I thought you were on tour with Fifth Harmony!”

“They gave us the thanksgiving weekend off.” She justified.
At eighteen years-old, Payton, who now went as Pay as her artistic name, had a signed contract with a label and an EP out which had been doing pretty well in the charts – something she achieved by captivating her brother’s youtube audience and letting the world know she had a song about me and Harry, which her business-savvy dad was smart enough to release right around when the wedding happened. Cassiopeia, the song she had played me years ago when Harry and I weren’t even in a real relationship yet, was everyone’s new favorite song, and Pay was now writing music for a full album to be released next year.

She played me her new songs that day, and I gave her a review with my honest opinions, and what I thought she should improve or not. She also told me about the boyband guy who was begging her for a second date, and the pixie-cut girl from California who was on the tour’s team and whom she had a crush on.

Lounging lazily in the Artchet’s big and warm living room, with the fireplace on and rolls and root beer on the coffee table for us to eat until the whole family arrived for the big dinner later, we sat catching up on whatever was going on in our lives: from Harry’s progress in the Invictus Games (and in the kitchen, which he was now mastering) to Pay’s songs to my newfound love for headpieces. Hunter told us he had played a game in his old college town where he had ran into his old college girlfriend, Poppy, and now they were back together. Asher was releasing an autobiography – a trend amongst famous youtubers – and would be hosting the winter games’ for the online coverage Youtube would be presenting next year. Aiden was just hoping he wouldn’t fail calculus and Kidd missed having George and Arthur to play with, but with the help of their parents, the three boys had been exchanging emails since the wedding.

Nothing felt better after months of overthinking every move, every word out of my mouth and being criticized for each of it to be able to simply sit there in the fluffy rug in front of their fireplace, in the middle of Harry’s legs with his arms around me and the Artchets around us, talking about anything that didn’t involve protocol or tradition, talking without needing to check who was I about to offend. Not needing to sit like a duchess, not needing to wear contacts and relenting myself to my prescription glasses, laughing loudly and speaking out of turn knowing LF would not be in the corner judging me for it.

As I breathed in and out, deeply, that night, all through dinner, feeling my stress pains finally easing off, it was even more discrepant how much it actually bothered me: I was able to function better without it and finally, I was able to admit that Harry was right: it was very concerning that so little time into the marriage my stress was already at full speed again. I would have to find a way of dealing with the royal mess my life now was without jeopardizing my health, and hopefully without making Harry think I was suffering by having him by my side.

Still, as fun as that day was – as fun as we both had laughing with the Artchets, roasting marshmallows, doing s’mores in a fire outside, doing a snowmen contest in their garden -, the pain still came back. As much as I tried to focus on the fun times, as much as I hadn’t so much as remembered the press, and the UN, and the charities, I still winced at how heavy my stomach felt and I couldn’t stop myself from running back inside when everyone was distracted to be in pain without having to pretend I wasn’t.

I laid in bed in the guest bedroom Harry and I were using, clenching my fists in a pillow, trying to take deep breaths. I took an ibuprofen, but even so, it was to no effect. I knew this could be both stress and cramps – or both together -, and I knew there was nothing to be done but endure it, so I tried. Still, the pain only increased to a point where I almost wanted to throw up, though I held it in, afraid I would see blood if I did.

‘I will not have another ulcer’, I told myself. ‘I refuse to have another ulcer’.
I wouldn’t be able to say how long I laid in bed, in pain, before I managed to fall asleep. When I woke up, with a sharp pain in my stomach, Harry had joined me, though he wasn’t asleep, but was watching Homeland in his iPad with the earbuds on.

“Hey.” He said, pressing pause upon realizing I was awake. “Are you okay? You’re a little pale and you came upstairs really early.”

“I have cramps.” I lied.

“Cramps or ulcer pain?”

I sighed. “Well, I’m not a doctor, and they’re both very similar. But I took a pill.”

“And did the pain stop?”

I sighed again. “…no.”

“Jen-“

“Harry, I know what you’re gonna say.”

“Do you?”

“I’m fine!”

“You need to see a doctor!”

“I’m not going to see a doctor for cramps.”

“You don’t know if it’s cramps.”

“I have my period, idiot!”

I didn’t like calling my husband an idiot, and I didn’t think it was great for the marriage either, but the idea that Harry thought just four months of being married to him had been enough to drive me into another stress-related ulcer was too much to bare. The last four months had been the happiest and most exciting of my life and I knew how much he thought he was damaging to everyone around him, I couldn’t have him actually believe he was ruining my health. Besides, I was wearing a tampon as I had indeed been spotting.

I turned to the side, ready to try and sleep again, and Harry finally let it go. After what felt like maybe half-an-hour of my turning to every side to try and find a comfortable enough position to sleep, he got up, breathing heavy and annoyingly loudly, and left the room.

I guiltily turned on the bed again, and stared at the golden wedding band in my left hand (I took the engagement ring off to sleep as it was too heavy and uncomfortable). Was this our first marital fight? Of course our first fight would be about the stupid press and my inability to deal with stress, it was so typical of us. I reminded myself that if my pain was cramps and I was on my period, then I was also probably PMSing, and should cut Harry some slack as I more than just likely was a bit of pain myself those days. We should have known it wouldn’t all be as easy as we expected, we should have expected the challenges, but letting something this silly drive us apart was just stupid.

I took a deep breath and got up, decided to go after Harry and remind him that we were fine, when the door opened.

“Come on.” He said, grabbing his jacket and my coat. “We’re going out.”
“What-? Where?”

He threw me my coat and started putting on his jacket. He looked at me and after taking a deep breath, as if bracing himself, he said, “I’m taking you to see a doctor.”

“Harry, for the love of-“

“Jenifer, I don’t want to hear it.” He interrupted as I rolled my eyes. “You’re in pain! You’ve been turning in bed sighing in anguish for the past two episodes of Homeland!”

“I’m a girl! I can handle cramps!”

“I can’t!” He dramatized. “I can’t just sit here and watch you suffer, so we’re going to see a doctor and you’re gonna get some stronger meds and I do not give a shit if he thinks it’s a silly reason to come in or not. We’re doing it.”

“Harry. You need to calm down about this!” I pleaded, but he was already getting the blanket off of me and pulling me on my feet.

“Jen, look at me.” He said, cupping my face with both hands. “Remember when you were in a hospital bed after waking up in the middle of the night throwing up blood?!” He said, dramatic, and I suppressed an eye roll. “Remember how you promised me you wouldn’t make me have to imagine my life without you again?!“

“I won’t die of cramps, Harry!”

“You don’t know if it’s cramps!” He said, exasperated. “Because Jen, look at you! We’ve been married four months, the world in on your case, you’re already working too hard for the UN, and now your stress is back!”

“You don’t know is that, either!”

“Well, then we’re gonna find a doctor who will tell us.” He insisted. “Because if I happen to be right, this time I will not sit around waiting for you to almost die again!”

I sighed, deeply, and this time I couldn’t help but roll my eyes.

“You are such a drama queen.” I mumbled, but now I put on my coat, grabbed my beaning and my gloves on the nightstand, and sat down to put on my boots.

He looked too desperate, too concerned for me to try and convince him I was fine. Of course he knew I wasn’t, he had to know. He knew me better than anyone. So I gave up trying to convince him and decided that if he needed a doctor to tell him I was okay, then I would let him take me to one. I had vowed to make him happy, after all. If it took a trip to a hospital at one in the morning, how could I say no?

“How are we going to an emergency room and avoid people seeing us?” I asked, when we finally made our way downstairs.

“We’re not going to an emergency room.”

Richard was waiting for us in the kitchen, on the phone with someone.

“You woke up Richard?”

“Yes. Yeah, thanks, Chris, they’ll meet you there soon. They’re just leaving. Thanks for doing
“Then I have a cold. Not an ulcer.” I said, giving Harry a pointed look.

“Never hurts to see a doctor.” Richard said, pulling me towards the door. “Chris is waiting for you at his clinic, there’s no one there but he obviously has a key. Your security has the address.”

“Seriously?” I complained. “You woke up your cousin at one in the morning to go open up his clinic in Thanksgiving just because I have cramps?!”

“Would you rather go to a normal hospital and risk being spotted?” Rich asked, sarcastic. “Chris is a doctor, he’s a professional. And you’re paying him for a private emergency consultation, so trust me, he doesn’t mind. Now go, I wanna go back to bed. Call me with any news!”

He practically threw us out of the house, and Harry and I marched to the car, where our security already awaited in two separate cars behind with the engines on. We got in – me on the driver’s seat, as Harry didn’t like America’s driving hand –, and set off following the first security car, which had the address.

The drive was silent except for the sound of the wheels in the snow and my annoyed, heavy breathing.

“You can be angry at me, Jen, but a doctor’s visit could be the difference between you having to go through another gastrointestinal surgery or not.”

I didn’t reply; instead, I was still telling myself I loved him and I wanted him to have peace of mind and if going to see Richard’s cousin at one in the morning in the middle of Thanksgiving would give him that, then fine. I could sleep later.

Chris Artchet’s clinic was in downtown Logan, in Utah, which at one in the morning looked like an abandoned city. When we finally parked in front, the light in the reception was on, and I saw Nathan and Eddy make their way in for a sweep. Harry made to get out of the car, but I held on to his arm. He looked at me, and I raised my left hand in a fist, showing him my wedding band.

“I love you.” I said.

He smiled before fist-bumping me with his own left hand, and we left the car together.

“Hey, guys. Make yourselves at home.” Chris greeted when we walked inside, he was carrying a heavy looking keychain with a lot of keys and quickly guided us to an exam room.

“Sorry about this, Chris. I seem to have married a drama queen.” I joked.

“Don’t worry.” Chris smiled. “Ulcers are scary, you should always make sure yours isn’t making a comeback.”

“I have cramps.” I told him. “I’m sure it’s not an ulcer.”

He opened the door to an exam room and turned on the lights, guiding us in. “How can you be sure? When was the last time you saw a doctor about it?”

“Not recently enough.” Harry replied.

“Well, then it doesn’t hurt to check.” Chris said, “Why don’t you sit here?”
Harry closed the door behind us, and I took off my overcoat, beanie and gloves to sit on the bed Chris gestured to. He measured my pressure, listened to my heartbeat, and confirmed I had a very mild temperature, which worried him.

“Try not to gloat.” I told Harry when Chris informed us a fever could point to an ulcer too.

“Lay back, please, Mrs… uhm…” he eyed me, confused, clearly having the same issue I did when I met Harry, not knowing his last name. “Clarence?”

“Just call her Mrs. Princess.” Harry teased.

“Just Jen is fine, Chris. You’ve known me for years.”

“Right, sure.” He chuckled, and pulled my shirt slightly up to apply pressure to my stomach, trying to gather where exactly was the pain.

“Okay, I don’t think it’s appendicitis.” He determined. “But an ultrasound could confirm that better.”

“I think it would hurt more if it was appendicitis.”

“Will the ultrasound confirm the ulcer?” Harry asked.

“No, we need a blood test for that.” Chris said.

Harry sighed. “That will take too long.” He complained.

“Harry, it’s not his fault.”

“Why don’t we make an ultrasound now to eliminate other possibilities, and to give you some immediate peace of mind, and then we’ll wait for the blood test results?” He wheeled in an ultrasound machine.

“What are the other possibilities?” I asked.

“Well, appendicitis is still on the table, as gallstones, infected gallbladder, kidney stones…”

“She can have all of that?!” Harry asked, concerned.

“Not all at once, I don’t think.” Chris joked, but Harry didn’t seem amused.

“The good news is that if it is any of those things then it’s not about stress!” I said, smiley, and if possible he looked even less amused now. “Ouch! That’s cold!” I complained, as Chris spread the gel on my lower abdomen.

“Let’s do this.” He said, and started moving the ultrasound probe a little too forcefully against my stomach.

Harry let out a melancholic, deep breath as he approached to sit on my side, across from Chris, facing the wall.

“Hey,” I called, “I’m fine.”

“You’re in a hospital bed four months into this marriage.” He said, still avoiding my eyes. “Nothing about this is fine.”
“God, you can be so dramatic sometimes.” I rolled my eyes. “People get sick, Harry. It’s normal. Even Super Jen can’t be healthy all the time. I probably just have some kidney stones or whatever, I’ll be fine. Or not, I still say it’s cramps.”

“Why do you think it’s cramps again?” Chris asked.

“Well, it’s time for me to get it, I’m on my period.”

“Are you on your period right now?” He asked. “Or are you just… spotting?”

I thought about it. “Well it just started, it’s still too little to tell.”

“Okay.” He nodded. “And other than the stomachache and fever, have you felt anything else these past few weeks?”

I sighed, not wanting to admit to it in front of Harry, but not wanting to lie to a doctor either.

“I had food poisoning in New York two days ago.”

“What?!” Harry asked, and I just had to roll my eyes again.

“It was probably the street hot dog I had, I just missed it so much!” I justified. “I threw up and felt better soon enough.”

“And you’ve had no more nausea?”

“Well, the pain sometimes morphs into nausea.” I added.

“Jesus, Jenifer, when are you gonna start actually talking to me?!” Harry asked, now starting to sound a little angry.

“I talk to you! I don’t have to tell you everything, though, especially when I know you’ll make such a big deal out of every little thing!”

“You’ve had an ulcer burst!” He said. “I watched you throw up blood until the hospital! They cleaned up your stomach! The stress this whole thing with the press is causing you could be getting you back right to that place!”

“I can handle the media, Harry! What I cannot handle is you thinking I need constant supervision!”

“Oh, and you don’t?” He asked, sarcastic. “Look at you! You have nausea, you’re throwing up and your stomach hurts and if I hadn’t dragged you here you might drop dead at any minute and you’d still be insisting you’re fine!”

“Well, I am!” I said, and he sighed, throwing his arms up in despair. “Okay, maybe I’m not fine right now, but I’ll be! It’s just cramps, I’m telling you, sometimes I get nausea from cramps too! I’ll be fine in two or three days!”

“…Well…” Chris interrupted, and we both looked at him, a little surprised to be reminded he was there. “I mean, I don’t think you’ll be feeling fine for a while…”

“See?!” Harry gave me a sharp look. “What does she have?! Is it stress related?!?”

“What do you mean I won’t be fine for a while?” I asked.

“Well,” Chris said, giving us a weirdly uncomfortable smile, as if he wasn’t sure he liked that we
now remembered he was there, “you’re pregnant, so I’d say you’ll still have to deal with the nausea for a while. And then, of course, it’ll get a little more uncomfortable for a bunch of different reasons.” There was a pause as neither Harry nor me spoke, or moved. Or did anything. “But then you get a cute baby. So that’s good, right?!”
I giggled. “I’m sorry, can you say that again?”

Chris took in a deep breath, and turned the ultrasound monitor so we could see it. “See here?” he pointed at the screen, to a mess of different shades of light and dark gray and a lot of black. “This is your uterus. And this,” he pointed at the small dark circle in a corner, with a smaller, gray circle inside, “is your baby.”

I supported myself up with my elbows to stare at the screen a little better, but all I could see was an abstract mess of grays. I felt more than saw Harry walk around the bed to sit by my side, closer to the screen. He, too, was staring at it with confusion.

“I can see you’re a bit… surprised.” Chris let out, nodding slowly. “Hm… Here, let me check how far along you are…” he typed away in the computer and seemed to be measuring the little circle inside the big one. “Okay, so you’re about seven weeks pregnant. Maybe eight. So that puts your due date to… I think June of next year. A summer baby! That should be nice.”

There was some more silence. I sat up now, holding on to the tissues Chris handed me to swipe off the gel from my stomach. I turned my legs to the side and sat beside Harry, both of us still eyeing the screen with our mouths slightly opened.

“So… I’m assuming you don’t have an obstetrician yet.” Chris went on. “I’m gonna… I’m gonna get you a prescription for pre-natal vitamins and some baby-safe pills for the stomachache and the nausea, and you should definitely get in touch with a doctor when you get back to England, okay?”


“Oh, no, it’s actually more normal than you usually hear.” He told me. “Your uterus is getting ready to foster a new life, it’s a lot of changes, so it’s flexing and getting ready to expand… it’ll go away soon enough. The nausea, however, will still take a while, but it usually dies down after the first trimester.”

First trimester… uterus… new life… the words echoed around the room for a solid minute after Chris said them, and Harry and I simply stared at the screen.

“So…” Harry started, his voice rough and low. He cleaned his throat before continuing. “So, you’re… you’re sure? You’re-? Are you sure she’s-? It’s that, like, definitive? It’s there any way we can confirm beyond any doubt?”

I looked at Chris, interested in that answer. He gave Harry a funny look, and I thought he might be considering a sarcastic answer. God knows that’s what I would do if I were him – well, I’m a doctor, so there’s that! But thankfully I wasn’t a doctor, and Chris was a better professional than me.

“The ultrasound is the most definitive test.” He told Harry, slowly, patiently.

Harry nodded. “Okay. So…” he gulped. “We’re… we’re having a baby.”

“You’re having a baby.” Chris repeated. “Congratulations…” we nodded, probably a very underwhelming reaction, and he seemed to decide he had enough of us. “Why don’t I go get you that prescription and give you guys a moment? I’ll be right back.”
We barely heard him make his way out of the room when we heard the door close. My previously rushed, loud mind – full of plans and work - suddenly went blank. All I could do was stare at the little circle in the screen. That was a baby? That was my baby? How could that be?

I looked down, staring at my stomach – it looked like it had always looked, no sign that an entire human being was developing inside. Was that real? That didn’t sound real. It could be a prank. Except… could it? It couldn’t be a prank.

“So…” Harry started, cleaning his throat again. “I should probably start by apologizing.” I didn’t know why he would need to, but I sure wasn’t about to stop him. “Turns out you do not have an ulcer.”

There was silence as I let his words synch in, remembering all the bantering from the house, the way over and just two minutes before, when both of us thought we were so right, and then I let out a nasalized laugh. Harry chuckled at the sound, and I looked at him, the sight immediately making everything seem even funnier, and soon enough we were both chuckling.

“Oh, my God.” I let out. “I’m… I’m pregnant?”

“You’re… you’re pregnant apparently.”

I nodded. “Oh, my God.”

“But why does your stomach hurt?”

I looked at him. “He literally just explained it, my uterus is getting ready for the baby, it’s normal.”

He shrugged. “I didn’t hear anything else after he said you’re pregnant.” I laughed, and looked at the screen again, covering my mouth with a hand, disbelieving.

“Can you see the baby?” I asked, whispery.

“It’s supposed to be that, I think.” He pointed.

“Well, I know. But like, can you see it?”

He sighed. “Not really… I think it’s just some cells at this point.”

“Don’t call our child some cells.” I joked, holding on to my stomach with both hands, faking outrage, and he smiled.

We exchanged a look, as if for the first time we were both actually seeing each other after the haunting gray screen.

“Hi.” He said, and I smiled.

“Hi.”

“You’re pregnant.” He whispered.

The words sent chills all over my body and I bit my lower lip trying to stop myself from giggling. “I’m pregnant.” I repeated, now holding on to my stomach a lot more aware of what was happening. “There’s a baby. Well, not yet, but there is going to be a baby… we’re having a baby. Because… I’m pregnant.”

Harry smiled again, and shook his head, disbelieving, covering his eyes with a hand.
“Are you... crying?!”

He let down his hand, and I saw the two tears streaming down his redder than usual cheeks. “Yeah. Yeah, I am.” He said, sniffling as he looked at me, with a huge smile on his face.

Harry never cried, and he was very proud about that. So I knew what it meant that he didn’t shield away those tears: those wore happy tears, much like the ones in my eyes.

“Oh, great, now I’m crying.” I giggled.

“Well, you’re pregnant, you have an excuse.” He teased.

“I’m pregnant!” I repeated.

“You’re pregnant!” He shrugged, smiling, and he stepped down from the bed to turn to me, and wrap his arms around me. “You’re pregnant!”

“I’m pregnant!” I giggled, holding on to his shoulders with all of my strength.

I kissed his cheek, one, two, three times, and three more after those, and then three more after that.

“Well, there we go, that’s more the reaction I was hoping for!” Chris joked as he walked back into the room, and Harry stepped away, to stand by my side again, as we both smiled. “Here, I got you some free samples, and you can find the periodicity to take them in your prescription.”

He handed me a piece of paper and some vitamins, and I just handed it all to Harry, who placed everything carefully in his jackets’ pockets.

“Can you print that?” I asked Chris, pointing at the screen, and he smiled.

“Sure thing!”

About ten minutes later we were walking out of the clinic with our baby’s first picture in hands after giving Chris a very serious speech about not telling anyone about the pregnancy. He then wished us good luck, and we said goodnight, each going to our cars.

We laughed all the way home, and when we got there, Harry and I didn’t sleep – instead we stared at the ceiling for what felt like two minutes, but was actually hours. I had thought about babies before, of course, but being pregnant, actually knowing that at that right moment there was a child developing inside of me – an entire human being who would grow to maybe be bigger than me -, it was insane, and that’s what we talked about.

“It’s like some alien thing.” Harry marveled, as we laid in bed, looking at my stomach.

“Don’t call our child an alien.” I joked, faking offense, and he smiled at me.

“Say it again.”

“Don’t call our child an alien?”

“Our child.” He smiled larger, and the only thing I could do was mimic. I tried to picture, for the first time, that this was what was happening – we were having a child, a child that would be both of us at the same time.

I scooched over to him, and took an impulse to lay on top of him, who smiled as he wrapped his arms around my body. I laid a trail of kisses on his neck and didn’t stop until he was laughing.
“It’s not just that I’m pregnant, you know?!” I asked, excitedly, still laying kisses on his neck. I leaned back to look at him, to admire the smile of utter joy in his face. “It’s that I’m pregnant with you. With your child!”

He smiled at me in silence for a long time. “Well, I’m pretty happy about that detail too.” I giggled. “I mean…” He sighed, cupping my face with the palm of his hand. “There’s going to be a human, an actual human child who will look like the both of us. How weird is that?!”

“We loved each other so much that we made a person.” I marveled. “That’s just weird.” We laughed.

My brain was starting to get back at its natural form: the overly controlling, planning that I knew best. So finally, when we couldn’t sleep anymore, I grabbed my phone and started googling things. I laid on my side, with Harry’s arms around me, a hand in my stomach, and I read everything I could find.

“At seven weeks your baby is the size of a blueberry.” I read, immediately making the size with my fingers. “That’s so small!”

“The baby is generating over a hundred brain cells a minute.” Harry read, over my shoulder. “Well, it’s clearly got your brains.” He joked, and that’s how we spent most of the night.

Instead of actually sleeping, we dreamt – about the little kid who would be in our arms soon.

—

We told the Artchets on the following day, though it was only Richard, Janine and the older kids, urging them all to keep the secret with their lives. They laughed and squealed as excited as we were upon finding out, and Richard actually cried about ‘his baby having a baby’.

When we arrived back in London, the first thing we did was to get my parents on Skype to tell them the good news – I spent the half an hour after this assuring my mother she didn’t need to fly to England to ‘tell me what to do’, since I had google and would be just fine. They had questions we were not ready to answer, about names, christening, and when they could tell their friends, and before our heads were spinning too much, we said goodbye and repeated the process calling my brother and Livia.

“Well, you waste no time, huh?” Livia joked.

“Really? You wanna go there, honeymoon baby?” she gave up trying to tease us after this.

We then set out to have dinner in Will and Kate’s house, and were greeted by George, who opened the door wearing a child-sized apron with the words ‘little chef’ in it.

“Hi!” He smiled.

“Hi, sweetie!” I smiled, giving him a kiss in the cheek.

Before we could do anything else, he ran off to the general direction of the kitchen screaming, “it’s gonna burn!”

“We can just order pizza!” Harry suggested after him, and we walked after him to find Kate helping him stir something on the stove, as George stood on a chair.

“Hi, guys.” She smiled. “How was America?”
“Cold and eventful.” Harry told her, leaning against the kitchen cabinet.

“Really? What happened?”

We exchanged a look, and right at this point William arrived.

“Well, Charlie is down for a nap.” He said. “Oh, hi, you two. How was your flight?”

“Jen’s pregnant!” Harry blurted out, excitedly, and I sighed.

“ Seriously?” Kate asked, surprised.

“Woah, you guys don’t waste any time! Good job!” Will smiled, hugging his brother as Kate rapidly walked over to hug me.

“Congratulations!” She smiled.

“Thank you!”

“Hey, buddy, look, look over here. You’re gonna have a cousin! Isn’t it cool?” Will asked George, who stopped stirring to watch, questioningly, the excitement around.

“Like Mia?” He asked.

“Yes, a cousin like Mia. But its mummy and daddy will be Uncle Harry and Aunt Jenny! Isn’t that cool?”

“Remember when we told you your sister was in mummy’s belly?” Kate asked her son, gesturing to her own stomach.

“Yeah…” George said, looking utterly confused, and Harry and I tried not to laugh.

“Well, Aunt Jenny is going to have a baby, and it’s right here in her belly!” She pointed at my stomach. “It’s gonna grow really big and then there’s going to be a baby to play with you and Charlie!”

George stared, silently, at my stomach now. “When is the baby gonna come play?”

We giggled. “Still a little ways down the road, buddy.” I told him. “But the baby is very excited to meet you!”

He smiled and looked back at the pan. “Okay. I’m excited to meet the baby.”

“When are you due, by the way?” Kate asked.

“June.” I smiled.

“Oh, this is so exciting!” She squealed, making me laugh. “Charlie will only be about four years older! When they’re teenagers they’ll be best-friends!”

That was about the same logic Alessa had when we told her and George our news when we met them for lunch the following day, in their house. Alessa, who was now five months pregnant and had a big bump, cried, because of course she did, and then proceeded to plan out our children’s entire lives.

“They’ll be about three months apart, so they can actually go to school together! We’ll put them in
the same schools, from kindergarten to high school, and they’ll be each other’s buddies for gap year, and they’ll probably go to the same college, too! And be roommates! And they’ll have all these memories and they’ll be friends forever and they’ll be in each others’ weddings and then they’ll have kids at the same time too!” she squealed.

“Okay, sure, but what if they’re having a girl?” George asked – they were having a boy.

“Boys and girls can be best-friends, George.” Alli said, and then added, dreamily. “Or they could fall in love…”

“They can fall in love if we have a boy, too.” I argued.

“True.” She nodded. “Oh, this is so exciting!”

“No, but I mean, they can’t go to the same school if they’re a boy and a girl.” George interrupted.

“Why not?”

“Well, Eton is just for boys.” George said. “And girls usually go to Marlborough College for high school, which is an all-girls school.”

I exchanged a look with Alli, as we both thought back to all we knew about the school both our husbands had gone to.

“They don’t have to go to those schools.” I argued.

“It’s the tradition.” Harry shrugged. “Eton is the best school in the country, my family has gone there for generations, so has George’s.”

“And we went to public school and still managed to get into NYU.” Alli said. “It’s 2018, traditions can be changed.”

Harry and George frowned. “Not in the aristocracy.” George said.

“I’m not sending my kid to a boarding school!” I laughed at the idea. “That’s just…”

“Messed up.” Alli agreed.

“Yeah! Those kids are always messed up!”

“Excuse me?” Harry asked, looking offended.

“Well, not you.” I smiled. “You’re fine. But it’s just really… I don’t know, weird. Also, they’re kids! They’re supposed to be at home with us until they go off to college! You can’t just send a kid off into the world before they’re ready!”

“Going to a school away gets them ready to live in the real world.” George said. “It really is what made me into a man.”

“According to what you told me, Stella Cawaski is who turned you into a man.” Alli teased, making us laugh at the dramatic way George rolled his eyes. “I’m with Jay, I want my baby with me until college!”

“Honey, he’s gonna be an Eton legacy!” George argued. “It’ll be good for his academics!”

“He’s gonna live under my roof until he’s eighteen, which will be good for his mental health!”
The argument continued for the rest of the night, and Harry and I did our best to stay out of it, but when we were alone, later on at home, we just had to have our own turn at it.

“You don’t really have anything against boarding schools, right?” he asked.

“Honestly? I think it’s kind of weird.”

“Jen, I went to boarding school! Everyone I know went to boarding school, it’s kind of great.”

“Well, I think it’s weird. Kids should learn manners and how to be grownups from their parents, not some teachers and other kids, that’s a recipe for disaster.”

“What do you mean?”

“All those kids together? All that testosterone? They’ll have no limits, and I doubt the school can provide proper supervision. How will they know how to look after themselves so soon?”

“Cooking and cleaning is provided by the school.” He argued, and I sighed.

“Well, that sounds bad, actually. No one should be teaching our kid how to cook and clean but us.”

“Jen!” He laughed. “Are you serious?”

“Very.” I told him. “Not to mention most boarding school kids are spoiled and mean.”

“Excuse me?!”

“Well, not you. But… okay, the last prime minister? And the pig thing? That was a school tradition, right?!”

“That was a university tradition, and that’s a horrible example.”

“Well, I would rather see my kid every day, and ask how their day went and help with homework—“

“More help than they would have at school?!”

“What about family bonding time? What about a social life? How will they have that if they’re stuck in school all the time?!”

“School will be their own social life, and they’ll still have other activities and friends. And we’ll see them every weekend.”

“Well, that’s not enough.”

“Jen, having them away gives us more time to focus on work—“

“That’s a really selfish reason, Harry.”

As it turns out, there was no convincing each other that the other was right. So we had to press pause on the argument to have a meeting with our staff, who were already waiting for us in our house when we got back after lunch.

Edward had Vodka in his lap as he petted her gently while the others typed away in their computers, talking something about Latin America over.

“Well, Peru would provide them a good photo opportunity in Machu Picchu. But I suppose we
can’t go to Peru without going to Brazil.” Thomas said.

“I still think we should do America first, maybe Canada, then go down.” Argued Monica.

“Well, they’ll go to Canada for the Winter Games, since Harry is the sports ambassador.” Edward told her. “And they’ll be somewhere in Europe for Invictus next year too, so we should look into South America more closely, though I think we need to have a commonwealth country be first.”

“What’s going on?” I asked.

“They’re deciding your first royal tour.” Clara explained. “So far all the commonwealth countries and another seventeen have put up official invitations to have you over.”

“That’s a lot of countries.” I said.

“It’s not unusual.” Edward said. “We’ll just have to plan carefully.”

“Well, good thing you’re talking about work, because we need to talk about that.” Harry started. “Jen and I were talking and we decided she is going to announce her first charities patronage and will start working normally as soon as possible. We think she should announce this year and start royal visits early next year.”

Edward sighed. “We’ve talked about this. You need to give it some time so people will lay off your back. It’s just not the right time.”

“Well-

“And besides you’re still getting settled at the U.N., you don’t need to go finding more work right now. You’re doing good, just hang on a bit longer.” Thomas added.

“Here’s the thing, though-

“They’ll get over it soon, Jay, and it’ll give you time to really think about which causes you wanna take on.” Monica agreed.

“I’m pregnant!” I smiled. “So I don’t think giving it time is the right choice, because soon I’ll have to go on maternity leave, and I don’t think the press will be laying off of us, because now there’ll just be more craziness when they find out. So instead of just avoiding work until months after the baby is born, I’d rather do what I can now. What do you think?”

They had their mouths opened, as I hadn’t given them any time to react, so they just stared blankly at us for a long time until Harry pulled the ultrasound picture from his pocket and raised it to show them.

“We’re seven weeks pregnant.” He said.

“Oh, my God!” Clara and Monica smiled, standing up to come over to hug us, and as if the movement work them up, Thomas and Edward followed them.

“Are you serious? Is this not a prank?!” Thomas asked.

“Pretty serious.” I told him as he hugged me. “My boobs aren’t fitting my bras anymore and I’m peeing all the time, so I think I’d know.”

“Oh, it’ll get so much worse!” Edward said, smiling more enthusiastically than I had ever seen before. “Sorry, I didn’t meant to sound so excited about it, but it’s true! When we were expecting
my wife was miserable for months!”

“Thanks, Edward.” Harry said, sarcastic.

“I’m just so happy for you, you’ve always wanted kids!” He replied, still smiling scarily.

“So, you know what I mean, right? I wanna work.” I said, bringing them back to topic.

“I don’t understand, shouldn’t you be slowing down now that you are pregnant?!” Thomas asked.

“No, I should not. At least not now, because I will have to soon, when I get too pregnant, and then after the baby I’ll have to take time off, and it’ll be a lot of time and people will think I’m being lazy, so I wanna work now, while I still can.”

“Okay, but the press and the rumors-“ Edward started.

“I don’t care.” I interrupted. “And I know Kate doesn’t, either. I wanna work, Edward. I wanna do what I’m supposed to, and I wanna do it while I can.”

Edward gave Harry a pleading look, but all he did was cross his legs and remain silent.

“Don’t look at him. Look at me, I’m the one saying I wanna work.”

Edward sighed. “Okay, fine, we can get started.” As if flipping on a switch, the others instantly turned to their computers to start on the planning of my royal work. “But I think you should pick an easier charity to start.”

“I like my choices.” I argued.

“You picked three charities,” Monica read, “the first helps refugee women who suffered sexual abuse while crossing the border-“

Edward interrupted her. “Too heavy, and too political.”

“The second aides refugees who are survivors of torture from their home countries-“

“Too heavy, and too political.”

“And the third helps adult women seeking help from sexual abuse.”

“Too heavy, and too political. Honestly, Jenifer…”

“Those are the issues I work with!” I argued. “Refugees and sexual abuse. I wanna start with something I have experience on!”

“You can’t say those causes won’t be likeable.” Harry said.

“She is a foreigner who just became a British royal by marriage. She needs to show she’s willing to help British people.” Thomas added.

“Okay, then the third option. It helps sexual abuse survivor who are women over eighteen, and they’re all British women, I think.”

“It’s still sexual abuse…” Edward complained.

“People know Jenifer is a survivor, we can’t pretend they don’t.” Clara argued.
“Yes, but we can try to bury that under a cloud of fluffy, cute charity work!” Edward said.

“Something with kids! Something with animals!”

“Just let her do her thing, Edward. You know it’ll be great either way.” Harry said, making Lane-Fox sigh.

“Fine. Fine! But I want it on record that I advised you better!”

“Duly noted.” I smiled. “Now let’s get to it, what’s the first step?!”

“We get in touch and ask them if they would like you to be a patron.” Thomas said. “The answer will probably be yes, then we start planning a visit, probably to January.”

“That’s good.” I nodded. “From what I remember from their website they have art workshops, and they make exhibits with the survivors’ creations. That would be cool to visit. Also they offer legal support for court cases, it would be good to meet the lawyers who volunteer their work pro-bono and show some appreciation.”

“I’m sure they would like that.” Harry smiled. “Hear that, Edward? It’s gonna be cool!”

Edward who was staring off pensively, looked back when Harry called.

“I think we should schedule a tour.” He said.

“I thought you said it was too soon.” I asked.

“Yes, but now you’re working it would be almost offensive not to do it when Will and Kate did it so soon after they were married.” He said. “We should plan it for late next year, after your baby is born, if you agree.”

And with that, our baby wasn’t even born yet and it already had a royal career being planned.

That night we had dinner in Buckingham Palace, with the Queen, Prince Philip, Charles and Camilla, and though we had planned on waiting to tell them our news at dinner, the opportunity arrived earlier than planned when, as soon as we sat for pre-dinner cocktails in the sitting room, Prince Philip smiled at me in his own cheeky way to say:

“So, you have been married a few months now… When are we gonna hear the pitter patter of little feet around here?”

The others giggled at the eagerness of the question, but Harry and I exchanged a shy smile.

“In about six months, actually.” I said, smiling. “I’m pregnant.”

The cheeky smile in Philip’s face fell, making me laugh. “Wait, what?!”

“Are you really?” The Queen asked.

“Yes, she’s seven weeks. We just found out two days ago.” Harry explained, as his father stood up to hug him, smiling widely.

“Ah, my!” Prince Philip let out, with a hand to his heart. “This is amazing! How did I know?!”

“You didn’t, dear. Don’t flatter your own psych abilities.” The Queen told him. “Congratulations,
sweetheart.”

“Thank you, ma-am.” I smiled, now receiving a hug from Camila – her hugs were getting warmer by the week.

“Do you know the gender yet?”

“Will you want to find out?”

“Have you thought of names?”

“I’ll give you my doctor’s name, he’s quite good, you know?”

“You must start preparing a nursery room at home, you don’t want to wait too long.”

The topics revolved around our new arrival for most of the night, which we didn’t mind one bit as we were happy to giggly talk about it – even though we had nothing planned yet, or barely any information to give them.

It was during dinner that the topic went right back to our previous discussion.

“Dad,” Harry called, “will you please tell Jenifer boarding school didn’t ruin me?”

“What’s that?” Charles asked, as I tiredly rolled my eyes.

“Jenifer doesn’t believe in boarding schools.” He told them.

“And why not?” Prince Philip asked.

“It’s just… not a thing in my country.” I shrugged. “The idea of sending a child away at such an early age is very weird for me. How will they know how to cope?”

“They won’t, of course, school will teach them.” Camilla said.

“Yes, but I just feel that’s our job, as parents.” I told her.

“Well, I think Eton is perfectly fine. And my nieces went to Marlborough and they quite liked it, I think.” Charles said.

“I feel like it won’t give them good boundaries.” I said.

“You think it’ll turn them into spoilt brats.” Harry argued. “Dad, tell her Eton didn’t turn me into a spoilt brat.”

“Well, sure, you’re a fine example of humility.” Charles said, with just a light hint of sarcasm to make me smile. “But you will remember, of course, Harry, that you didn’t like the idea of going to boarding school at first.”

“Really?” I asked, interested.

“Yes, did.” He complained.

“No, you did not.” Charles replied. “You were quite upset at the prospect of not having us close and if I remember correctly it wasn’t until much later in your first year at Eton that you started liking it.”
“Well, but the point is I liked it!” Harry said, pointedly. “I loved it, really. It was fun and it was a good education.”

“The point is actually that whatever you chose, your child will probably not like it.” Charles said. “So just brace yourselves for that.”

“The good news is you have a lot of time to think about it.” The Queen said. “Now, dear, will you pass the sauce?”

—

Though we managed through dinner without going back at it, we just had to pick the subject up again when we were home, and sitting in bed about to watch a movie.

“Are you really saying you don’t want our kids to go to boarding school?” Harry asked, suddenly.

I sighed. “Are you really saying you want them to go to boarding school just because it’s the tradition?”

“Well, no. I want them to go because I went and I liked it, and I think it’ll be fun for them.”

“Well, I liked my education.” I argued.

“No, you didn’t.” He laughed. “You hated high school.”

“Fine, I hated most of it, but it would have been a lot worse if I could only see my family on weekends!”

“Okay, but consider this… maybe our kid will have a better experience? Is it really fair to stop them from having something that they could really enjoy?!”

“Hm…” There was silence, as considered each other’s points. “Okay, I suppose that’s not a bad reason. But I still don’t like it.”

I considered what Harry’s dad had said, about how our kid would probably disagree with our decision anyway, and thought about how terrible I would have thought it was if my parents had decided to send me to boarding school without considering my opinions, so I had an idea.

“How about this… we let them chose.” I offered.

“Right, because kids have been known to make all the right choices.” Harry said, sarcastic, and I smiled.

“Well, we’ll give them all their options, and when the time comes we tell them they can chose between boarding school and day school.”

He nodded, slowly, pensively. “… Okay. That sounds good. We let them chose.” He smiled. “Did we just make our first parenting decision?”

I smiled back, feeling oddly adult. “I think we did.”

More than that, I was feeling like a mother.
The Grinch

My second Buckingham Palace Christmas lunch had a lot of differences to my first one and one very important similarity. For starters, this time it wasn’t a general question of why I was there – I was an official member of the family, a wife, and as such I was expected there. This time I wasn’t being introduced to everyone, as I knew all of them from our wedding, and most of the family were a lot friendlier to me now we had a bigger history. This time we caught up on everything from their lives to my adaptation to royal life. The important similarity however was that, just as I had first to hide that I was engaged to Harry, I now had to hide that I was pregnant.

I wanted to tell all of them – Autumn, the kids, Bea and Genie – I just couldn’t. We had to wait until the end of the first trimester which was right after Christmas and it was too risky to tell people before then, so we had to be strong.

Instead, I talked about work. I talked to them about my new U.N. responsibilities and about the royal engagements I would be starting early next year, which had just been announced to the public and the media. I talked to them about how much I did not miss working as an actress, though I did talk about missing a lot of my friends from America, but most importantly, I was happy to talk about Kensington.

Living in Kensington Palace grew from being a slight inconvenience to being absolutely wonderful and soon enough I couldn’t imagine life any other way. I had grown used to the perfectly lined up dark red exposed bricks, the long glass windows and classic door frames. I now felt at home there.

Harry and I would wake up every day to jog around Hide Park – giving the paparazzi a lot of material we tried not to think about -, and every time I could see the black and golden gates approaching while we made our way back my heart filled with the warm recognition of being almost home.

We’d say good morning to the gatekeepers and make our way to the nanny garden where we grew used to walking Vodka every day. She loved Kensington even more than I did – she had all of that grass to play with and we installed a doggie door in the kitchen entrance so she could come and go as she pleased. She was too small to go too far, but we often grew worried of her whereabouts and went out to find her either at Kate and Will’s garden playing with their dog Lupo, or at the security quarters being petted by every staffer she passed by.

We got friendly with our neighbors – the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester lived in Apartment 1 and sent us a tray of chicken parmesan once a week because they seemed to think it was absurd that I didn’t cook. The Kents lived in apartment 4 right beside us and we grew used to seeing their grandchildren around on weekends when they came to visit.

I grew familiar and friendly with the staff – Will and Kate’s staff who were always around to help them plan their engagements; their nanny Maria who was always running after an increasingly naughty Charlie and all the security teams who took shifts between themselves. The head gardener, Mathew, was very patiently indulging me with all my questions about my hobby. After clearing it with his bosses, he showed me to a patch of earth he said he could help me grow and soon I started working on my own garden, mere feet away from our house.

Our house – event though I had grown to love it, still felt surreal feeling so at home in what despite not feeling like it, was essentially a palace. It had been difficult decorating a palace, especially because as much as Harry and I loved modern design, it was hard not decorating around Kensington’s traditional ceiling and ornamented doorframes and classical chandeliers.
Our big entrance led into a large white hallway, with walls that had ornamented classical corners and ceilings and a huge chandelier hanging right above a round small table in the center, which we made sure always had fresh flowers on it. The chandelier was a priceless antique, lent to us by the palaces maintenance team. The floor was black and white, like a chessboard, and the walls had small, rectangular tables leaning against them in front of mirrors inside of golden frames making the hall seem even bigger. This foyer ended on the main staircase to the upper floors.

To the left, white heavy doors with golden detailing led to our formal sitting room, in which the floors changed into dark, hardwood contrasted to the huge Persian rug under the sitting area, made up of a matching set of crème classical sofas with a delicate coffee table, under a Van Gogh painting Harry’s father and Camilla had given us as a wedding gift. Both the coffee table in the center and the chandelier had golden detailing matching the picture frames and the artwork on the walls had no frames at all.

This room had a set of double doors that led into the formal dining room, which we decided to contrast to the traditional décor of the sitting room by making it modern, from the long, dark wooden table to the comfy cream chairs and the modern minimalistic chandelier. The original walls had a pale green color to them, so we just applied a metallic wallpaper pattern on top, matching the gray long curtains and the silver frames from the big mirrors on the walls. The hint of classical décor here was the golden frame of the painting – which was another loan from the palaces – and the white marble fireplace.

Crossing the hall was the library, which I was excited to cultivate as having a space for it and living in the same place forever meant I could finally own all the books I loved and more – this room was all lined in dark oak and every wall was covered in shelves. It had a mezzanine gallery with black rails where we stacked all our books in alphabetical order in classic looking hardwood shelves. In the level floor, in between the other shelves, we set up a lounge space with a comfy set of brown couches full of pillows and a lot of lamps for good lighting, for a relaxing reading space. It also had a bulky, dark oak table with a black leather arm-chair which we sometimes used as an office, though our official office was upstairs.

In front of the library there was the second sitting room, this was a more casual one which overlooked the Nottingham Cottage and other staff buildings across from our house. The walls were white and ornamented like the halls and the first sitting room, but the couches here were modern and comfier and had more pillows and blankets over them, as well as a black piano in the back and more picture frames in small glass tables around.

Here and in the first sitting room, all of the pictures were either from our wedding ceremony, our balcony appearance or the reception, and a few of before we were married, of our multiple trips around the world, including the picture we took with Vodka in Canada right after we had gotten back together.

A set of sliding, white double doors led to a smaller, more casual dining room, which the palace staffers called breakfast room. It looked a lot like the bigger dining room, but the wall was pale salmon instead of green. The table and chairs were the same, but instead of cream the chairs were a beautiful shade of dark green. The chandelier was more classic here, and the curtains had a colorful print that made the room more casual.

This room had direct access to the kitchen, which was Harry’s favorite room by far. All the cabinets were wood and it had two big isles in the center, with granite countertops and small sinks. Persian rugs protected the hardwood floor and our big, silver, double-doored fridge was the only modern thing apparent since all of the utensils and machinery was hidden away at the cupboards.
The kitchen sat beside another, smaller, staircase – this one up and down. It was all hardwood floor and the downstairs level led to the laundry room, the gym and a cinema room, even bigger than ours in Knightsbridge. The other staircase, in the entrance, was bigger and had light blue walls until the second level. It had white wooden rails and flowers on a center table near a second black piano. Here, the floors were hardwood unlike the rest of the foyer, which were black and white, but on the second floor there was a light gray carpet.

Arriving there, to the right there were the first three guest bedrooms, all decorated in a mixture of modern and classic, traditional and contemporary, with dark paint as background for the clear pattern wallpaper, or vice-versa.

Ahead in the hall, there was a large room which was a double office space both Harry and I grew used to conducting business in. It had light gray walls which looked like an extension of the carpet and white detailing with classic, silver chandeliers. Our tables were dark wood like the big book shelf across an entire wall, and we used white chairs, and there was another large black piano in a corner near the windows – I liked the idea of being able to play some music wherever I was at the house. We had another lounge space here that we admittedly spent most of our time in, cuddling instead of working.

Another room across from the office was a comfy lounge/TV room, with the same white walls as downstairs with golden detailing. The couches were caramel leather and had round corners and a lot of pillows which we enjoyed laying down on to watch the news or a movie in the big TV on top of the fireplace.

We had another sitting room down the hall, the most casual of all three – with large light brown couches and a golden chandelier. This was right beside another two guest bedrooms, slightly bigger than the rest, and out master bedroom was at the far end of the hallway, across the hall from the last two guest bedrooms – there were seven in total, all with their own bathrooms, plus our suite.

Our bedroom was all in a light shade of blue and the carpet was darker, but in a Persian pattern matching the dark fabric of the window curtains and bed curtains. We had a light brown sitting area with a glass coffee table and a large chandelier hanged from the beautifully adorned ceiling. I hadn’t needed much to start feeling at home there, truth be told, all I needed was Harry’s arms around me, his hands laying gently on my belly, which I now was obsessively watching for a sudden grow spur.

Even Kensington became hard to talk about in Harry’s family’s Christmas lunch because all I wanted to talk about was our plans to take the two largest guest bedrooms and turn them into the baby’s nursery and play room! I wanted to tell them about how incessantly I had started to read about parenting and how I wanted to raise our baby in a gender neutral environment; I wanted to tell them about my decorating ideas and ask what they thought about them, so finally, I was able to breathe again when the lunch was over and we went back home – and I could now talk about our baby and our plans to a very giggly Harry who shared on my anguish.

“Your Royal Highness, are you ready?”

“It’s just Jen- Oh, Clark. Shut up.”

“I just like calling you that.”

Grinning, our security officer made his way to the center of our bedroom to get a hold on my
suitcases, which he quickly started wheeling out of the room.

“Cold much?” He asked, and I sighed dramatically, making him chuckle.

“I’m still not used to this winter.” I complained, something I had been saying a lot of the past few weeks.

As we made our way out of the master bedroom, I almost hit face first the Christmas three in the hallway, which was tall and decorated with all colors.

“Ugh!” I complained. “Harry! It’s like Christmas threw up in this house!”

“Relax, Grinch!” he shouted from downstairs.

Before December had even officially arrived, our house already had three Christmas threes set up: one in each of the sitting rooms, all real, big and decorated to match the walls. In the following weeks, not matter how much I complained, they kept popping up: one in the library, one in the office, one in the kitchen, one in the TV room, one in each hallway and then – finally – one in our bedroom. They were different sizes and all personally put up by Harry when I wasn’t around, so I couldn’t talk him out of it. The smell of pine threes was intoxicating and, granted, kind of delicious, but not good enough to make me forget all the trauma I had about the god-awful holiday. Soon enough there were mistletoes in every doorway, red roses over green table cloths, Christmas lights around the staircase’s rails and every window and little smiley Santas or reindeers or elves in the most inconvenient places.

“Literally the only good thing about being married is that I have a good excuse not to have to celebrate Christmas with my family, and you decide to bring Christmas to me. It’s like you don’t even know me!”

“Literally the only good thing about being married?!” he asked, raising a brow.

“You know what I mean.”

“I do, actually. You’ve had a terrible experience with the best holyday in the world, and now we have to re-educate you.” He smiled. “That’s my job!”

“Your job is to not make me want to rip your head off, which is very hard to do when I can’t go anywhere in this house without being reminded that it’s Christmas!”

His smile fell, and he sighed. “I can’t tell if this is your normal Grinch personality or if it’s the hormones.”

“Fuck you.” I mumbled, walking past him towards the door.

“Mark my words, Mrs. Princess. Before Christmas is over I’ll make a believer out of you.”

“That nickname is lame and so is your precious holyday. Now get your ass to the car, I’m freezing!”

He got into the car, we waited until all our six protection officers were in their own cars and then took off. I looked melancholically at Kensington as it stayed behind and braced myself for the holiday to come.

It was Christmas Eve morning and we were driving up to Sandringham. Harry barely allowed me time to miss home before he turned on his Christmas playlist and I just had to accept there would
be no pretending it was a normal day. We were listening to Jingle Bells for the third time when we passed by Harlow, and Jingle Bell Rock when we reached Cambridge. I asked if we could listen to something a little more pop when we were in Ely and he just put on Mariah Carey’s version of All I Want For Christmas is You, singing so loud I actually had to laugh – and film for posterity, of course. Santa Claus is Coming to Town was the soundtrack to our ride through Downham Market and Let It Snow was playing when we reached King’s Lynn.

Finally, after what felt like a very weird three hours, we arrived in the very green, very cold, and very pretty Sandringham Estate. We drove down a long street with huge threes in each side and the blue sky above until we finally reached the palace’s gates, which were promptly opened for our three car entourage.

Sandringham was as I had expected it to be: Big, in the center of the best-kept lawn I had ever seen and made me feel like a Downton Abbey character. It was amazingly beautiful and overwhelmingly regal, all at once, and I had to let out an impressed sigh once we parked.

“Okay, let’s get this over with.” I said, promptly getting off my seatbelt to step out of the car.

“Wait, I have a surprise!” Harry smiled.

I smiled, patiently, leaning my head against the head support as I looked at him.

“You’re just gonna spend the entire month being annoyingly sweet, aren’t you?”

He grinned. “Yes. Now, I talked to Edward and Monica and Thomas before we left. And they agreed that after we got here and had no risk of being swarmed by the press,” he typed away on his phone, and I heard my own chime as I received an email from him, “you could post that to your Instagram account.”

I opened the file he sent, and it was our Christmas card.

“Thanks.” I said, smiling, though I couldn’t mask the confusion in my voice.

I mean, it wasn’t a surprise, I had pre-approved the picture for the card with him, had he forgotten that? The picture was from our wedding reception, it had been snapped while we slow danced a long time after most of the guests had left. I had my arms around his shoulders and his were wrapped around my waist and he was kissing my forehead as we both had our eyes closed and smiles on our lips.

“Why don’t you read it?”

I looked again – the picture was beside a black square where we had approved would go our Christmas message, ‘Hoping your holydays are joyful and you next year is as exciting as ours last one was. Merry Christmas, Jen and Harry.’ But in this version, that he sent me, the text was different. It read:

‘Hoping your holydays are joyful and you next year is as exciting as ours will be when we welcome our first child due in June. Merry Christmas, Jen and Harry (and baby Clarence!)’

“Are you serious?!” I smiled.

“Yes.”

“I thought we had to wait until the 27th. It’s when our first trimester is up.”
“I talked to Edward and the others, and they agreed it’s just a matter of days, anyway. And they think it’ll be a good boost of public moral to release it before Christmas, but most importantly—”

“We don’t need to spend the whole holyday lying to your family!” I interrupted, making him smile.

“Yeah. So. What do you think?”

I took an impulse to wrap my arms around him, who chuckled. “Can I really post it?”

“Yes, go ahead!”

So I quickly downloaded the picture and uploaded it to Instagram, feeling all of me tremble with excitement. “I’m so happy!” I squealed as I hugged him again.

We heard a horn nearby and broke apart just in time to see another car pulling up beside us, with Peter, Autumn and their daughters inside.

We made our way out to greet them, and smiled as the girls barely stopped to hug us before running inside out of the cold, and I joked about wanting to follow them.

“Cold much, are you? I almost couldn’t tell.” Peter joked, about how I was shaking under my heavy overcoat, leather gloves and boots.

“I’m Brazilian, I wasn’t meant for this weather.” I complained.

“Who cares about that, check out what Jen just posted!” Harry said, grabbing my phone from my hands and raising it up.

Peter ignored him, though Autumn looked at it. “Is that a tiara bedazzled on your beanie?” he grinned, just as Autumn screamed, making him look at her with shock. “What-?!?”

“Are you really?!” She squealed, and I nodded, right before she hugged me. “Oh, my God!”

“What is it?!” Peter asked and Harry showed him my phone. “Really? Congratulations!”

We were happy to spend the next two hours or so repeating that process with the whole family – a group of thirty people who were all staying in Sandringham.

We also discovered the Queen had been informed we were going to announce our news today and quickly added one extra scene to her Christmas message which would air tomorrow to include our baby announcement.

Before tea that afternoon, we changed into some more casual clothes to follow Harry, Will and Peter to their first Christmas tradition: an annual football game with the workers from the Sandringham Estate. The game marked the end of the year and the boys had grown used to taking part in it, which always happened in Christmas Eve, through the previous years. Autumn always went to watch and now that the kids were a little older, so was Kate. I accompanied them, excited to watch Harry playing football, even though I was less than enthused about being in the cold – reason why I was wearing leggings under my dark blue jeans and an extra-long sleeved shirt under my cream, Stella McCartney wool turtleneck loose sweater, with a big gray tweed overcoat and black ankle boots, not to mention the same leather gloves and beanie I wore in arrival, all to survive the 5ºC day.

We drove down to the field, a few miles from the big house, where quite a group of people had gathered to watch the game – family and friends of the players, I assumed, as well as the usual
group of prying paparazzi.

“A lot more than usual.” I commented with Autumn, as we made our way around, noticing there were a lot more of them than I had expected, and they started taking places nearer where we were as we walked on to get better angles of us. “I wonder why they’re so interested in the football.”

“You’re kidding, right?” Kate smiled. “Jenifer, you just announced you’re pregnant! It’s your first official outing since! They wanna picture you cheering on your husband and they probably want to know if you have a bump and stuff.”

“Oh, right.” I giggled, surprised to realize I had been so caught up on the excitement of meeting the whole family and talking about the baby that I forgot the world had just recently found out about it.

Harry and Will were in black and yellow jerseys and quickly went off to start warming up with their teammates, as Kate, Autumn and I walked around. A few of the other onlookers came by to greet them, and they quickly introduced me – Kate knew a lot of the same families from Sandringham as she and William had a country residence just two miles away and spent more time there than in London.

“Congratulations on your good news!” My new friends smiled as Kate introduced us. “Do you know if it’s a boy or a girl yet?”

And so I spent the next hour or so answering the same questions I was happy to – the ones about my sweet little unborn child.

“If it’s a girl can we play dolls with her?” Savannah asked, when I was playing ball with her moments later.

“Of course you can.” I smiled. “I’m sure a boy would be happy to play dolls with you, too.”

“Really?” She giggled, almost missing the ball when I kicked it to her. “That’s funny.”

“Will the baby still like us if it’s a boy?” Isla asked.

“Of course he will, you’re adorable. And his cousins. He’ll love you.”

“But boys are mean.” Savannah explained, kicking the ball my way. “And girls are cool.”

“Well, that is true.” I giggled.

I quickly kicked the ball up and bounced it between my two feet fast before sending it Isla’s way, just as George ran his way towards us.

“Woah!” Savannah marveled.

“What?!” I asked.

“Aunt Jenny, how do you do that?!” George asked, pointing at my feet.

“Embaixadinhas?” I asked, in Portuguese, honestly not knowing what the translation to the ball tricks was.

“Keepie-uppies.” Savannah replied.

“That’s how you call that? Keepie-uppies?” I giggled.
“Or kick-ups. Daddy said players call it kick ups.” George told me, matter-of-factly.

“Okay, well, let’s go with keepie-uppies, just because it sounds so cute.” I smiled, and he looked like he did not approve of my methods of judgment.

“Can you do it again?” Isla asked, bringing the ball to my feet and quickly stepping away.

“Uh. I’m not sure I can actually do it when I mean to.” I said, fiddling with the ball.

“What do you mean?” asked Savannah.

“Well, sometimes you can only do something if you don’t think too much about it.” I explained, realizing they only looked more confused.

Isla shrugged. “Then don’t think about.”

I smiled. “Okay, Miss Phillips. I’ll try.”

So I stepped on the ball with my high heel boots and wheeled it around my feet a couple of times. I legitimately thought of taking my shoes off, but decided not to because on one hand, the paparazzi would just love that; on the other, it was still absolutely cold. So I pretended I was back in Brazil, trying to impress my father, brother and cousins, and just stuck it out. I missed the ball a few times, getting more and more flustered, until I started to feel angered by not being able to do it again.

“You did it just now!” George complained.

“Be nice.” Kate, who was a few feet away with Autumn and Charlotte, called.

“But she did.” He replied.

“I know!” I hissed.

I tried again until I managed to get the ball to bounce off one of my foot – I let it in the air until I was able to kick it up again with my other foot, and it fell back quickly so I kicked it up again with the same one, having to balance myself with it up now so I could keep the ball up.

“Yay!” Isla cheered, applauding.

“Mummy, look!” Savannah called, now attracting the attention of a lot of the others around.

I managed to continue to do the keepie-uppies a few more times before losing my balance on my heels, which got stuck on the grass, and finally ended by catching the ball with my hands and making a curtsy for the kids, who applauded, making me giggle.

It was a few minutes later that a loud whistle let us know the game was on half-time, and the girls and George quickly ran into the field to find their dads.

“Hey, babe, did you see me score?!” Harry smiled, walking towards us with a bottle of water.

“You scored?! I must have missed it!”

“How would you miss it?!”

“Well, excuse me, I was a little busy dazzling the kids with my ball tricks.”

He smiled. “You were doing ball tricks?” he asked. “Why am I not surprised?”
“I was excelling in ball tricks.” I told him, smugly, and he walked over to whisper in my ear.

“Oh, you don’t have to tell me you excel at ball tricks.” He said, suggestively, and I giggled, blushing.

“Trust you to make anything dirty.” I complained. “This is a family event, Your Royal Highness.”

He kissed my cheek, strongly wrapping his arms around me.

“Uh, you’re disgusting!” I complained, but he only held me tighter while I tried to fight him off.

“You’re sweaty and muddy!”

“And you’re sarcastic and a Grinch, you don’t see me throwing it in your face.” He joked, and I laughed.

“Hey, you guys done giving the paparazzi cute pictures for the baby story the papers will run tomorrow?” Peter shouted, making the others laugh as we broke apart.

Harry went back to the field later, telling me to watch him score another goal, and I smiled as I did.

I kept chatting with the ladies, helping them with the kids, talking excitedly about my baby and getting as much advice as I could. I followed the kids to the wood fence at the edge of the field, which they were decided to climb, and made sure Charlie, who was the littlest, knew what she was doing. Soon the reason why they wanted to be there was made clear as horses appeared as if out of nowhere and started eating the grass by the fence, prompting the kids to try and pet them, which I wasn’t sure the horses were very happy about.

The game was over – I managed to cheer happily when Harry scored another goal – and we started to make our way to the car after the teams took photos and celebrated, or embraced each other in the case of the losing side.

Harry walked towards me with a wicked grin and I very late realized I should be putting distance between us, as he was now even sweatier and muddier than before.

“Harry! No!” I shouted, but it was too late, as he was already wrapping his arms around me, making me laugh. “This is a Stella McCartney blazer! You know how hard it is to clean tweed?!?”

He merely chuckled, and finally let me out of his hold. “You’re cute.”

I smiled up at him, with a sarcastic expression, and he laughed.

“Uncle, Aunt Jenny can do keepie-uppies!” Charlie told him as we walked to the parking lot.

“So I’ve been told.” He told her. “I’m not surprised, she can do most things. And I’ve seen how handy she is with balls.” He winked at me, and I gave him a widened-eye look.

“Harry!” Kate hissed. “Seriously?!?”

“I’ll do dirty jokes in front of your kid before he or she is ready for it, see how you like it!” Will warned.

“What’s a dirty joke, daddy?” Charlotte asked, looking up at William with her big, blue eyes.

Kate sighed as Will stared at her, blankly, and Harry and I tried, but failed, to suppress the grins on our faces.
“Uh-“ Will attempted, picking Charlotte up on his lap. “It’s, uh… It’s… It’s jokes about dirt, Charlie. Like mud and sand.”

“Like Aunt Jenny with her balls?” She asked.

“More like Aunt Jenny with my balls.” Harry mumbled, and we broke in laughter.

William gave us a stern look. “Yes, Charlotte, like Aunt Jenny and the ball.”

“Keep laughing.” Kate warned us. “It’ll be you soon.”

Harry passed an arm around my shoulders as we walked and laid a kiss on the top of my head.

“I can’t wait.”
Baby’s First Christmas

Christmas with the royal family included a lot of traditions I suppose are normal for most families – like a friendly football game with tea later as the kids make the final touch-ups on the Christmas tree. Admittedly, however, I didn’t think most families had centuries old glass angels miniatures that belonged to a Queen, like ours did. Still, I sat and drank tea with the others as the kids were trusted with the priceless antiques as they hanged them on the empty branches.

Later that day we took to our fourth outfit change, for dinner, and this time wore our black-tie best, as you do. Christmases in my family were usually all about shorts and dresses because it was summer, but that’s how the royal family did it, so I wore a long Ralph and Russo pearl shade dress with lace and ruffled short, sheer sleeves, with my recently shortened hair in a high bun, as well as a diamond bracelet, pearl earrings and my engagement ring.

This dinner went on much better than my first one with the royal family did, a lot more casual and warm, even though it was such a colder night. The only problem was that I had to hear about everyone’s favorite drinks, and yet order none. The Queen favored a cocktail called the Zaza (made from Dubonnet and gin) and Charles was a fan of cherry brandy; William and Harry both enjoyed a pint of Sandringham cider, made from apple trees planted within the 20,000 acres of grounds of the Estate. I stuck with my water because of the baby, and because of the ulcer, but the smell from their cups was making me more jealous than I cared to admit – maybe the reason why Harry at some point stopped drinking his cider and instead asked for an orange juice.

“You can drink.” I told him, defensively.

“I know.” He shrugged. “I’d just rather not be the reason you’re more miserable than usual on this fabulous day.”

I rolled my eyes – it was hard not being annoyed with him during Christmas, he just liked the holyday way too much for my taste; my taste being, of course, that I hated Christmas. I hated Christmas almost on principle, mostly because Christmas movies would have you believe it was the most magical time of the year and anything could happen when really it was an annoyingly normal day when society tried to pressure people into being happier than they were. Also the whole capitalistic manipulation of making people want and buy gifts they couldn’t afford was just cruel, which I told Harry repeatedly either he asked or not, probable reason why he stopped asking.

After dinner, we all gathered on the big white drawing room where the main tree was to open presents.

“We know it’s untraditional…” Prince Philip told me, as we walked together, arms linked. “But when Queen Victoria married Albert, she wanted to make him feel at home, so she instituted the costume which was the tradition in his home country, and is been like this for generations.”

“It’s how we do it in Brazil, too.” I told him. “And I think it’s sweet that she would do that. We both know it can be hard arriving at a completely new setting after getting married.”

“Indeed it can.” he agreed, petting my hand which hanged from his arm, gently. “And how are you getting along, dear? My grandson treating you well?”

I smiled. “Like a princess, as he always has.”

“Good. Let me know if that changes, I’ll kick his arse and whip him into shape.”
I giggled. “I’ll kick his ass myself if I need to, sir, you just rest and worry about being as great as you are.”

“Rest? What do I look like to you? An old man?” he grinned.

“Absolutely not. I’m just trying to protect my husband.”

“What about your husband?”

Philip and I looked back, to find Harry catching up to us just as we entered the room.

“We’re deciding which of us gets to give you an arse whooping.” His grandfather told him, and Harry responded by looking utterly confused, and a tad hurt, making me smile.

“What did I do?!?”

“Who’s getting an arse whooping?!” Zara asked as she too walked by us as we started to look for seats on the big room.

“Me, apparently, though I’d love to know why.”

“I don’t need to know why. Can I give him an arse whooping, grandpa?” Peter asked.

“Nobody’s giving me an arse whooping.”

“That’s right, only me.” said Philip, walking away to sit with his wife, “and only if he deserves it.”

“Again, why would I?!?” Harry asked, confused.

I gave him a kiss on the cheek. “Don’t worry about it, he won’t need to.”

The royal family had a lovely tradition of exchanging mock gifts on Christmas, which was good because it was cheap and a lot less stressful than having to find something good enough for the actual Queen of England. I was doubtful of this method of gift-giving, thinking it might have been a prank Harry decided to pull on me, but he had a lot of history to back that with, including the time he had given his grandmother a shower cap that said ‘ain’t life a bitch?’ and the year he and William gave her a pillow that said ‘It’s good to be Queen’.

So we had the idea of buying as many ugly Christmas sweaters as we could that year, and that’s what we gave his entire family: Will had a dark blue one with a reindeer whose nose was a large knit ball; Kate had a red one that read ‘happy holla days’; Bea got a light pink one with Drake knitted on it in his hotline bling move and George was wearing one that looked like an elf’s body except the neck ended on the neckline, so his head was the elf’s.

The worst of all was a green one with red and white stripped long sleeves, with fringes and the words ‘ho, ho, ho’ printed amongst an assertion of other drawings; we gave that one to his aunt Anne. I had feared it would increase her hate for me, but she stared at the horrible sweater for two seconds before laughing so loudly I couldn’t help but laugh too. I didn’t remember seeing her genuinely laugh before and when she thanked me later on it was the first time I actually think she liked me.

The Queen’s sweater was bright pink with a large Christmas tree with actual lights and pom-poms hanging from it, which she promptly got help from a staffer to wear; Prince Philip giggly also took off his suit’s jacket to wear his one, which was a green one with a reindeer in sunglasses that read ‘oh, deer!’.
Harry’s sweater, which I picked, was black and red, with white letters forming the words ‘on the naughty list’, and though I had picked myself a yellow and green one, the package he gave me that night held a green one with the Grinch’s large face on it. I gave him a look full of sarcasm so he knew how I felt about it.

“It’s your spirit animal!” He justified.

It was a delightful sight, the royal family with ugly Christmas sweaters over their black tie outfits, and I had my spirits fully lifted while we opened our gifts.


“This isn’t a mock gift,” I joked, “I fully intend on reading this.”

Kate and William gave us a set of really tacky china, royal wedding themed – it had our faces on it and #Jerry in every piece. My favorite gift, however, came from Peter and Autumn, who gave us a large picture frame with a photo of us on our wedding day, in the balcony, but our faces had been swapped out with photoshop and, in their place, our faces from different moments: our meme moments, mine in the ‘I don’t know what I am doing here’ Golden Globe speech, and Harry in his confusion face from Trooping the Colour.

“Oh, my God!” Harry laughed.

“This is the best thing I have ever seen.” I told them, honestly.

—

We woke up the next morning almost as soon as the sun was in the sky. Of course ‘woke up’ is a lose term for being ‘abruptly brought into consciousness’ by the most god awful sound the universe had ever witnessed.

“Harry!” I shook him up. “Harry, what is this?!”

He barely opened up his eyes. “What?”

“This sound! What is it?!?”

“…the bagpipes?!”


“Scottish tradition.”

“We’re not in Scotland!”

“But my family is part Scottish.”

“Why does that mean we have to suffer?!” He merely lazily smiled, still with his eyes closed. “I gotta be honest, I’m regretting marrying you just a little bit right now.”

Waking up to traditional Scottish music was only one of the things I hadn’t been aware of when it came to marrying him. Another was that we had not one, but two services to attend on Christmas. The first was a private one, with a more relaxed dress-code, so that we could all take communion without disrupting the public service later on too much. So we got dressed and took off in cars to the church at nine a.m.
We then returned to the house, changed clothes yet again, and had breakfast, and I went back to the bedroom to busy myself trying to get my hair tucked back under a purple headpiece – a disc with beautiful purple orchids falling from it. I had a Jason Wu black dress with long sleeves on, shielding away a long sleeves shirt underneath and actual black leggings as well, instead of weak-ass stocking that wouldn’t warm me up at all.

“Okay, time for church 2.0.” Harry started, getting to the room a few minutes later. “Woah.”

I looked up. “What?”

“Now, Mrs. Princess, you look like you belong in a headpiece.”

I smiled. “That’s still a lame nickname.”

He shrugged, walking over to stand right behind me, leaning down to rest his head on my shoulder. “I know.”

I busied myself adjusting my headpiece and when I looked back at him, he was staring at me with a small smile on his lips.

“What?”

He sighed. “You. You’re here. In Sandringham. And we’re going to Christmas service together. With my family. And you’re wearing a headpiece. It’s just… hard to realize this,” he held up my left hand with his, both our wedding bands shining together in the bathroom light, “happened.”

I smiled. “One day, a few years from now, we’ll have been together for so long, we’ll be so used to each other that you won’t even understand how you could ever have felt this way.”

He considered my words for a few seconds, then shifted in place to find his phone in his pocket, which he then raised up to angle the bathroom mirror as he started to film us.

“What are you doing?” I asked.

“I want the me of the future to remember how fucking lucky he is that he married Jenifer Silva, even if he sometimes forgets it. So I’ll film this and save it for posterity.”

I eyed the camera with a sarcastic look. “Seriously?”

“Hey, that’s also the baby’s first Christmas! Maybe we should show it to he or she in the future so he or she knows how amazingly gorgeous their parents once were.”

I smiled at our reflection in the mirror – me in my black dress, makeup and hair pulled back in a headpiece, and him in his blue suit, with his regrown beard and perfect smile; we did look good.

“Are you implying we won’t be gorgeous in the future?”

“You will. I’ll probably be bald.” I laughed and he brought the phone higher to film the top of his head. “Baby, look, daddy had hair once!”

I laughed louder, and started applying lipstick. He took a step to the side to film me better.

“Okay, that’s enough, I guess.”

“Just a bit more. Say something for the baby in his or hers first Christmas.”
“Saying his or hers all the time is so long, we need a gender neutral nickname.”

“I shall call thee lime.” Harry decided. “Because that’s what babycenter.com says it’s the size of the baby this week, a lime.”

“I like it.”

“So say something to little lime, Jay.”

I sighed, blotting my lips in kleenex, and turned to face his phone. “Here’s the thing, kiddo, by the time you watch this, you’re probably wondering where daddy is. He’s dead. I killed him because he annoyed me on our first Christmas together. Sorry about that.”

He lowered his phone. “Well, that was not what I had in mind.”

There was a knock on the door, and he opened it, allowing Kate to come in. “Is Jen ready?”

“Hi, in here.”

“Thanks for doing this, I just need it in a simple chignon.”

Ignoring Harry’s look of confusion, she sat on our bed and I proceeded to fix her hair up in a bun.

“Why have you never asked Bea or Genie or Autumn?” I asked.

Kate had asked me to do her hair for Christmas, because the only thing she felt capable of doing on her own with a headpiece was leaving it either down or just half-up, and so every Christmas she always wore her hair like that.

“Well, it took me a few years to feel comfortable enough around them.” She admitted, making me smile. I liked that that meant she felt comfortable enough around me. As time passed, as I started to really feel like I had a sister.

It was a little time later that the door was barged open again and George and Charlotte ran in.

“Mummy!” George called. “Daddy asked to show if I look right.”

“Can’t your dad tell if you look right?” Harry asked, grinning, coming out of the bathroom straightening up his tie.

“Mummy knows best.” George said.

“That’s right.” Kate smiled. “You look lovely, baby. Go tell dad to brush your hair.”

“Okay!” He ran off, leaving a sad looking Charlotte behind.

“Mummy…” She cried, laying her head on her mother’s lap. “I want to go, too…”

“We talked about this, Charlie, you’re too young. Next year you can go, okay?”

“Why can Georgie go?” She asked.

“Because George is a big boy now.” Kate said.

I noticed Charlie was still in her pajamas and not ready to leave as the rest of us.

“Is this George’s first year walking to the church?” I asked.
“Yes.” Kate said. “And someone is not feeling happy about being the only one left behind.”

“I want to go with you!” Charlie complained.

Harry showed up from the bathroom holding his phone up. “And here’s your cousin Charlotte who’s quite upset that she can’t go to church with us. Hey, Char, come here.” He lowered his phone just enough to pick her up from Kate’s lap. “Look here, to my phone, I’ll show this to the baby once it’s born, do you want to say hi?”

“What are you doing?” Kate asked.

“He wants to film the baby’s first Christmas or whatever.”

“Why?”

“So lime can know what life was like before he or she was around.” Harry told her.

“Why would, uhm, lime,” she said, uncertain, “want to see me getting my hair done?”

Harry sighed, frustrated at how we didn’t seem to get his point.

Charlie looked back at me, seeming confused. “Isn’t the baby there?” she asked, looking at my stomach.

“It is, but in the future it’ll be here with us, and it’ll be as big as you are, and then I’ll show this video. Can you say hi?”

She waved to the phone, still looking confused. “Hi.”

“You know, Charlie, the church thing is actually quite boring.” I told her, whispery, “We’ll back in no time to play with you.”

“There, we have to sit there and listen to some old man talk while you stay here in the warmth playing with your nanny. We wish we could stay!” Harry agreed.

“Will you two please stop saying that? She’ll have to go at some point.” Kate complained, making us laugh.

“Chances are by the time the baby sees this,” Harry told Charlotte, “you’ll be a lot older and you’ll already be going to church with us, and the baby will be the one staying.”

“But I wanna go now!” She complained.

“Well, chances are you’ll also not remember wanting to go once you go because then you’ll find it boring.” He told her, and she just stared.

“…why?”

“Because you’re a child and you still don’t have a good concept of time.”

Charlie looked at her mother, her lips trembling sadly. “Mummy…”

We suppressed a giggle and he returned her to Kate’s lap.

“Aren’t you great with kids?” Kate teased, petting her daughter’s hair gently.
“Are you warm enough?” Harry asked, caressing my back gently as we walked down the street a bit later.

“If she isn’t warm enough wearing fur you might have to shed off your skin to give her, Harry.” Peter joked.

“First of all, fake fur. Second of all, I told you, I’m Brazilian.” I complained. “And yes, babe, I’m fine.”

We walked in a large group down the street from the Sandringham Estate house, mostly made of his family and the security staff. It was the royal family’s tradition to walk to church. The street was located in the middle of the Estate, surrounded by fields of grass which were traditionally taken over by people who came to wish them – us? – Merry Christmas. It wasn’t a long walk, but I had been cold every day for the past few weeks, so I knew I would suffer, reason why I was wearing a purple overcoat on top of my black dress, which had a large fake fur collar and matched my headpiece. I also picked a long pair of black leather Jimmy Choo boots which helped warm my legs, despite having long heels which I knew would be a bad idea.

We didn’t walk for long before we spotted the tall, black gates of Sandringham, and realized there was a lot of people lining the streets waiting for us.

“Woah.” Bea let out. “Somebody’s popular.” She winked at us with a smile before walking ahead faster with her sister, Genie.

“It’s Mr. and Mrs. Jenifer Silva over there.” Peter agreed, with a grin.

They weren’t wrong – Kate had warned me this might happen. Though there wasn’t so many people usually, the number had increased a lot after her wedding, and chances were it would increase even more after ours. Said and done, just as we stepped outside of the gate, I could see there were a lot of young people there – teenagers and young adults, some with signs – and they cheered when they saw us, which made me think they weren’t your usual Sandringham well-wishers.

I held Harry’s hand tightly in mine, afraid I might trip on my heels.

“Merry Christmas!” We heard as we walked, and we looked at the general direction the phrase had come from to smile.

“Merry Christmas!” we heard again, and we looked to the other side.

“Merry Christmas.” I smiled, feeling a little more comfortable by the second. I raised my hand and waved at a little girl standing beside her mother, looking at us in awe. “Hi! Merry Christmas!”

She smiled excitedly at her mother as she waved back, blushing.

“Congrats on the baby!” Someone shouted, and Harry and I waved at the same time.

“Thank you!” We smiled.

“They’re so nice.” I told Harry. “Okay, I can do this. It’s not so tough.”

In front of us, Beatrice slowed down to wait. “You’re lucky they’ve paved the road, it used to be all dirt, forget wearing good shoes.”
“Oh, yes,” Eugenie agreed, “we used to pick our worst shoes knowing they would get so muddy.”

“Merry Christmas!” someone shouted, and the four of us looked back to reply in unison:

“Merry Christmas!”

“Jen! Hi, Jen!” I heard. There were three teenagers at one side, holding a sign that read ‘yaass queen!’ with my picture with my tiara on our wedding day underneath. I giggled as I waved at them.

“Hi! Merry Christmas!” I smiled.

“We brought you something!” One of them shouted.

“I’ll be back! We’ll be late for the service!” I told them, apologetically.

I had been told some of the well-wishers brought flowers, but we could only stop in the way back home, or else we might be late for church.

As we had told Charlotte, the service had ended up being pretty boring, mostly because we had already watched one that day. So soon after the service ended and we had shaken hands with the ministers and greeted the important people, we started making our way out.

The church was at an elevation in the terrane, and we stopped atop the small steps down to let the press photograph us together. It was a lot cleared from this point how many people had come, and I marveled at the amount of them who had decided to spend their Christmas morning in the cold just to try and get good places to see us.

“Can we go now?!” George complained, pulling his father’s hand.

“Oh, now you’re bored, huh?” William asked. “Make sure to tell your sister when we get back home.”

“Jenifer?” Kate called, from where she stood nearer the crowds down the steps.

“Should I?” I asked, in a whisper.

Harry smiled. “Go dazzle them.”

I stepped out and went to meet Kate, who was already holding a couple of bouquets of flowers.

“Here, this is my sister, Jenifer.” She told the group of kids in front of her, making my heart melt. “These little girls wanted to meet you. And she has something for you.”

The little blonde in front handed me a large card; as soon as I held it I could tell it was just a sulfite sheet of paper folded in half. She had made a colorful drawing in the cover, of a girl (in a princess dress, I noticed), a man and a child, all inside a big red heart. I opened it, my mouth already dropped, to find the scribbles of a kids’ handwriting that said ‘congratulations on your baby and merry Christmas! Love, Stephanie’.

“Oh, my God, thank you!” I smiled at her, who blushed as she smiled back. “Did you do this yourself?!” She nodded.

“I used crayons.”

“Good for you! You have really nice handwriting!”
“I can spell already.” She bragged.

“That’s impressive! And at such a young age! Thank you for the card, I love it. Thanks, Stephanie.” Stephanie took a little curtsy and I looked at the taller girl by her side. “Hello, thank you for coming.”

“Merry Christmas.” She smiled, curtsying, and handed me a bouquet of daisies.

“Thank you so much, this is so nice of you!” I smiled. “Hi, Merry Christmas!” I greeted the other girl by her side, and the other one, until I had talked to them all. “Are you guys having a good Christmas?”

We made some chit chat, and smiled at them as we bid them goodbye so we could start to make our way back.

“Let me hold that for you.” Maisie, my newest security officer said as she approached, and I handed her my flowers and card.

“Yes, this is my beautiful wife.” I heard, and looked around to find Harry crouched down next to an old lady in a wheelchair.

I approached and smiled, and the lady immediately made to stand up. “You Royal Highness—“

“No, please, don’t get up.” I urged her, quickly following Harry to crouch down on my heels. “How are you, ma-am?”

“You look beautiful.” She said, her shaky voice coming out very low.

“Thank you so much! So do you, I must say, that’s a very fashionable hat.”

She smiled touching her cream, fur hat. “I was just telling your husband…” She started. “That his mother would be very happy to see him so happy with such a lovely wife.”

“Oh, thank you, it’s so nice to hear that. We like to think that she would.”

“She would.” She told me, matter-of-factly. “And congratulations on your baby.” She said, whispery, winking at us as if it was a secret.

“Thank you!” I giggled.

“Do you know if it’s a boy or a girl yet?”

“We don’t.” Harry told her. “We’re calling it lime so far, because it’s supposed to be the size of a lime.”

“I’m sure it’ll be pretty as you both are.” She smiled, and Harry and I exchanged a loving look. “Such a pretty couple!”

“Thank you, ma-am.” Harry told her.

“Thank you, and Merry Christmas!” I smiled, and we stood up to start walking down, not before smiling at the people behind her to greet them.

We managed to take quite a few steps before spotting a little brunette girl in front of her parents in line, and she raised a bouquet of flowers up at me, so I walked over.
“Hi, Merry Christmas!”

She made a small curtsy. “Merry Christmas.”

“This is Jane.” Her mother said, smiling proudly as she leaned back to take a photo of me and Jane so close together.

“Well, it’s nice to meet you, Jane. Thank you for coming and thanks for the flowers!”

Harry was talking to a group of older women across the street, and I waited for him, and we waved at them before walking on.

It was a heart-warming day – walking down a long road filled with people in both sides who were smiling at us and whose only goal was to give us some flowers or to get a smile and ‘merry Christmas’ back. We tried to tend to all of them, but it was very hard as there was way too many, so we ended up walking fairly slowly up the road.

I finally reached the teenagers I had seen on the way there, and approached them this time.

“Hi, guys.” I smiled.

“Hi, Jen!” They replied, sounding far more at ease than the others, and I realized they had American accents. “We’re from New Mexico!”

“You’re from the U.S.?!” I marveled. “But like, do you live here?”

“No, we came for Christmas, to travel, thought we’d travel up to try and see you.” One of them said.

“Oh, my God, you guys, thanks!”

The other girl handed me a box. “This is for you, we made you a care package from America.”

I giggled. “Did you really?!”

“It has your favorite chocolate and stuff.”

“Oh, my God, thank you!” I smiled largely. “Thank you so much, and Merry Christmas!”

I walked with Harry a while more, before I spotted a large golden retriever wearing a santa hat by it’s owner’s feet.

“Oh, my God, it’s a dog!” I gasped, immediately changing course to approach the dog, making the owner laugh.

“Her name is Flour!” She told me.

“As in flower?”

“No, Flour! For some reason she loves to eat it!”

“Oh, my goodness, Flour, don’t eat the flour!” I smiled, caressing the dog between her ears.

“We brought this for your doggie.” She told me, handing me a chew toy that looked like a reindeer.
“Vodka?! I asked, smiling. “That is so sweet of you, thank you!”

“How old is she?”

I did the math in my head. “Well, Harry got me her in my first birthday right after we started dating, it was… 2013. So five, almost six now. She’s a young woman.”

“And how are you enjoying England?” An old lady asked nearby, and I straightened up.

“I love it.” I smiled. “Still getting used to the cold, but I’ll get there.”

“Are you really?” She giggled.

“Yes, I’m freezing!” I confessed. “But it’s very nice to be here, everyone is so sweet.”

I walked with Harry a bit more, always handing our gifts to our security who carried them so we could hold more things, never walking too much without stopping to greet someone else.

“Hi, sweetie, what’s your name?” I asked a little girl, sucking her thumb by her mother.

“Lara.” She mumbled, shy.

“Don’t you have a question for the duchess?” Her mother said.

Lara got her thumb out of her mouth and stared at her feet. “What’s your favorite thing about living here?” She mumbled.

“Here? In England?” I asked, crouching down to her eye-level, and she smiled. I looked around, thinking of how to answer her, fully aware of the handful of people around who were filming me on their phones – including her mother – and spotted Harry giggling as he joked with another group of people a few steps behind me. “Him.” I told Lara, pointing at my husband, and she followed the direction I signaled to see him and smiled. “He’s my favorite thing about England. But don’t tell him that, okay? He’ll be very smug if you do.” She nodded, grinning, and I wished her and her family merry Christmas before walking on.

“Jenifer! We have a little thing for you!” another couple called, just two steps away from Lara. “Congratulations on your baby, this is for you!”

They handed me a red book that read ‘The Girlfriend’s Guide to Pregnancy, or Everything Your Doctor Won’t Tell You’.

“Oh, thank you, that is so nice of you!”

She smiled. “It was the most useful one in all my pregnancies. I have five.”

“Five? My God, good for you!” we giggled. “Thank you! It’s nice seeing you, merry Christmas!”

I looked back, to find Harry crouched down next to Lara. She pointed at me and said something I couldn’t hear, though I imagined she was telling him about our conversation just minutes before.

“She said that?” Harry asked, beaming, and looked at me, smugly; I rolled my eyes, dramatically, making the people watching us laugh.

“I knew he shouldn’t have known that.” I said, to no one in particular.

“Can you keep a secret?” Harry asked Lara, and she nodded, so he approached and whispered
something in her ear, before standing up. “Bye, merry Christmas!”

“What did you tell her?” I asked, while we walked away a couple of seconds later.

“That you love me.”

I smiled. “That’s no secret.”
‘Dearest Alexandra,

Let me start by thanking you for your Christmas card, amazing gift and heartwarming congratulations! I cannot believe you actually knitted such a perfect onesie in such little time since our pregnancy announcement. I guarantee Baby Smith will be wearing it as soon as we leave the hospital - or should I say, as soon as it leaves my uterus, since I’m not entirely sure I’ll have a hospital birth, something Mr. Smith is not very happy about, may I add. He thinks it is an outrageous and ancient idea even though so many health care professionals have declared that in healthy pregnancies there is really no risk at having a home birth. Our staff isn’t excited at this idea either, they think the media will be too critical, considering ever since the eighties all births in the family have been in the hospital. It’s been getting quite annoying to have every decisions we make approved by people who should not ultimately have a say in our lives.

I was saddened to read about Ethel’s health issues, has she improved at all? Do let us know if there’s anything we can do. We all know she should have laid off the cigarettes a long time ago.

In other news, we are finally traveling back to London after a much needed break from the world in Sandringham. We left the family’s house right after Christmas and traveled to Brazil, where we spent New Year’s Eve with my family, we then traveled back and met Mr. Smith’s grandparents again in Sandringham where they wanted to give us a gift. This was estrange for a number of reasons, one of which was that we had just been there for Christmas, and they could have given it to us then, and also that the family does not have a tradition of actual gift-giving, so we didn’t know what expected us this early January of 2019 when we traveled back there.

Before we were even settled, ‘Grandma and Grandpa’ Smith drove us a few miles away from their house to a place called York Cottage, which after a wonderful tour we discovered was their gift (!). The “cottage” is huge and beautiful, with miles of well-cared grass and a small lake in the front. There’s also a stable in the back where we found two horses, one of which was Mr. Smith’s horse, and the other a new primadonna that his grandfather gifted me to go with the house. They said it was a belated wedding gift, though I cannot imagine a world in which that gift isn’t completely outstanding.

We proceeded to spend the next few weeks in the cottage, meeting with constructors and decorators to make sure the renovations the house needed could be done as soon as possible so we can stay there after the baby is born, as it’ll be a more relaxed environment. ‘Relaxed’ is perhaps an understatement, the place is magnificent and a true heaven on earth. In my wildest dreams I couldn’t have imagined a most beautiful place to call home and I think the only other place I love more than York Cottage is our home in London, which has quickly become my favorite place in the world.

Alexandra, I wish there were enough words in the english language to express how overwhelmingly happy I am! I wake up every day to the sight of the love of my life by my side, his hand over the small bump on my stomach where our baby grows. We have breakfast together, meet our staff, which is filled with friends, and take off to do the kind of work that, although sometimes mentally exhaustive and saddening, makes us feel accomplished and useful. I come home at night and find him cooking dinner, talking to our dog, and we tell each other the good and the bad we went through that day, and what the next days hold. He makes me feel less anxious, less afraid. We watch a movie, we love each other, and we drift off to sleep in each other’s arms knowing we are happy, because we know we will wake up to each other.
I wish I had been less scared in the past, perhaps then I could have loved him longer. We have an eternity ahead, and I still regret the time we wasted.

But I think you were right in what you told me on our wedding day (did I mention I have our picture in a frame over our fireplace?), we need to look into the future, and learn from the past. I know I did.

Mr. Smith sends his love, and we are both hoping we get to see you and sweet Ethel soon.

Love,

(Now actually) Mrs. Smith.’

—

The months that followed held more new accomplishments in a day than most of our lives had in years. One of them was getting a new house.

If I had found love in Kensington Palace, York Cottage quickly became my everything. I had never seen myself as a country girl; in fact, living in big cities, in the middle of the rush and excitement, had always been my speed. Harry and I both liked the feeling of living in the center of London, but when his grandparents took us to York Cottage in early January – after we came back to the country from spending New Year’s with my family – I felt my heart almost swell with the smell of snowy grass.

Harry says that’s what got to me the most – the snow, the fact that when we came back to Sandringham that January it had snowed just a couple of days before, so the whole place was under a few centimeters of the white, fluffy frozen water that somehow made everything look more special.

“Admit it,” he grinned, “the moment we rode into Sandringham and you saw the white, winter wonderland fields, that’s when you decided you wanted to live here.”

He wasn’t wrong – Norfolk was absolutely delightful. It was far away from the big paparazzi groups, it was up north enough that I would never have to worry about the heat again, it had the big garden I have always dreamed of and horses.

“Horses?!” I gasped, delighted, on the day Her Majesty and Prince Philip had taken us there. After a quick tour of the place they showed us to the back, where a small stable held two horses.

“Oh, it’s Jules! Hi, buddy.” Harry greeted his own horse, whom he always rode in polo games and such. “How did you get here?”

“We had him transferred.” His grandmother explained. “And this is a prima donna, Jenifer.”

The horse on the bay next to Jules was a dark shade of brown with white stains, and it looked at me with long, serious eyes. “She’s beautiful. What’s her name?”

“That’s for you to decide, she’s yours.” Prince Philip told me.

“What?”

“The house is for you.” The Queen explained. “William and Catherine have Anmer Hall nearby,
and we all quite like the north. So we felt with the high interest the press has on you, you should have an oasis of peace around here too, for when you need space.”

“Especially with the baby coming.” Philip added.

“Yes, so… this is your home now.” The Queen shrugged. “And that is your horse.”

And just like that, we got a new country house and I got a horse. I called her Peggy, and immediately demanded a ride around, which Harry opposed as it ‘would not be good for the baby’.

There were a lot of things Harry didn’t think would be good for the baby those days, amongst which were helping him paint Lime’s nursery (a light shade of pink which would be background to large golden patterns) or move boxes or furniture into York Cottage when we started remodeling. I didn’t mind these things too much, or I couldn’t, since we made a compromise: I wouldn’t get myself into too much of physical effort as long he didn’t pester me about work.

My first award season as a civilian (if you can call a member of the monarchy that) was spent working even harder than I remembered working as an actress. I didn’t have to do much physically – it was mostly meetings at home with our staff planning charity visits and actions, and Skype calls with my U.N. Human Rights team about reports and data. The rest of the time was spent either typing reports or reading more of them, and making plans to act for or against what results they showed. Every couple of weeks I got on a plane and flew to Geneva with Clara and my protection team, where we stayed in a hotel and I spent the following three days meeting my coworkers and bosses to talk in person about the work that couldn’t be discussed online.

So even though there wasn’t as much standing or moving around as acting, it was mentally a lot more challenging. I spent my days reading about torture, about police violations, about child abuse and law infringements in war zones, about homophobia and sexism and how the rights of human beings were being violated. Even the royal work was like that; I spent my days then talking to charities about the people they helped and how I could help make their work easier, which always came back again to the victims.

Breaking Free was the first organization that I had announced I would patron. They helped female adult survivors of sexual abuse, and I had a particular wish to do something about the subject. We had exactly seven private meetings before my first visit, which was actually a lot less than usual, but we wanted to get working as fast as possible.

The organization needed the help, and they knew it. Kacie Grant was the director and chairwoman of Breaking Free and she was the one leading the first meeting we had, which was just a big introduction to me of the work they do. I already knew most of this from their website, but I was happy to find they were all a lot more involved than I had first thought. They also already knew where they needed to improve, so I didn’t have to tell them: they needed a better website, they needed a social media assistant to focus on online outreach, so that the directors could focus on contacting volunteers to improve the programs they offered, like art workshops and free counseling. At the very least they needed an influx of donations so even if they couldn’t get volunteers they could try to hire people for those jobs.

The Breaking Free Facebook page had only 115 likes when I checked it after that first meeting, they needed help. On the week after we announced our partnership, that number jumped to 1003, and it continued to grow in the weeks that followed until the day of my visit arrived, when it was already 2867. Not only that, but in those weeks of private meetings that no one was hearing about, they had already received calls from volunteers and had had more donations than the whole previous year. All of that just by announcing a patronage! It finally started to dawn on me just how much my name could do for causes I wanted to help.
On the day of my visit, I knew there would be a lot of frenzy about what I wore – I knew because everyone had warned me that to some extent that’s all the press, and most of the people, would really care about. But as far as I knew, this was another work day, so I wore dark pants, a loose button up shirt, since my bump was starting to form, and a black and white Balmain blazer with golden buttons shielding me from the January cold of London.

The invited press was there when I arrived with Clara, Monica and Edward, whom despite not being needed insisted in coming since this was such a big deal. I greeted Kacie and the other directors upon arrival, where they were waiting for me, at the entrance, and they guided me inside their building in Wiltshire, where a few members of the press accompanied my visit and I was introduced to the whole staff and volunteers, who helped with the art workshops and yoga classes, which they offered for relaxation of survivors; I then met more volunteers who offered self-defense classes for those who wanted to feel they could defend themselves after their attacks.

I took part in some of those workshops to promote them, also met the lawyers who volunteered pro-bono work for legal cases where survivors wanted to press charges; I then met with some of the survivors who had been okay with having their identities revealed in front of the media – we sat down in a room alone, with the directors, and they told me their stories and about how the organization had helped them heal or deal with legal issues of persecution in court cases against their abusers. I shared some of my experiences – with abuse and with therapy, and how it had helped me despite being so weird. The press wasn’t there for this, as I didn’t want anyone to feel badly about talking about what had happened to them in front of photographers, but Clara took pictures that were sent to the media later.

As anyone but me could have imagined, the media talked more about my outfit than about the organization, which was both upsetting and frankly, a little flattering. The Balmain blazer I wore sold out in three hours after the pictures of my arrival to Breaking Free hit the internet, as did most of what I had worn since getting married, which was kind of terrifying.

And then there was the criticism.

“Now that her grace period is over and the Duchess of Clarence has started on her road of solo royal engagements, it is clearer what image of Britain we can expect her to represent to the world, and if her first engagement is to serve of example, apparently that image is of a country in a lot less financial trouble than any of us has been led to believe.” I read, the following morning of my engagement, to a Harry who was already rolling his eyes. “Jenny Penny sported a Balmain blazer that cost an outstanding 885 pounds- I’m sorry,” I stopped reading, in outrage. “Jenny Penny?!”

Harry sighed. “They’re saying you have too much money.”

“I know what they’re saying, it’s ridiculous!”

“You do have money.” He argued.

“Yes, I worked for it. A lot. And that blazer is three years old! Why do they care how much I paid for it?!”

“Listen, Jenny Penny,” Edward started, ignoring the stern look I threw his way, “the problem is that now every pound you spend is understood as British money, and so they feel they have a right to an opinion.”

“That blazer isn’t new!”

“Which they don’t know.” He shrugged. “I’m not saying it makes sense, I’m not saying is fair. I’m
saying that’s how it is.”

“They’ll be looking for ways to criticize you, and will use anything they can.” Harry added, sadly.

“What can we do?” I asked.

“Nothing.” Edward told me.

I knew he was right, the problem was that as an actress, it was very hard for me to simply stand still as my new nickname caught on and every other news outlet started using it – in other days, I would have taken to Twitter to put the press in their place, but I was a Duchess now. I had to find other ways to make myself heard.

My solution was quite simpler than I had previously imagined: I decided to auction off my blazer – the very one they had called too expensive. It would be auctioned off online to the highest bidder and all the money would go to Breaking Free so they could hire more staff. In the short sixty seconds video where I announced it on my Instagram, I made sure to explain the money would go to this organization and shortly summarized all the amazing work they did, as well as people to organization’s website.

The good part about this was that the press had no control over it – they couldn’t spin this story around and make it about something else – they tried, of course; they wrote stories about the background of the video and how you could spot some of our house’s decorations in it. But funnily enough, despite the media criticism, people seemed very much interested in owning my blazer, and it reached fifteen thousand pounds in the three days of bidding.

Not only that, but without the media to shift their attentions away from the important topics, people heard about the organization and clicked on the link to their website – Breaking Free got even more donations and more contact from people who wanted to volunteer. Despite it being a lot less suave than I had wished, at the end of the week I felt like it had been mission accomplished on my first royal solo engagement. Now it was on to all the next ones.

—

Since Christmas, our little Lime had evolved to be the size of a peapod, then a lemon, an apple, an avocado, a turnip and finally, at our eighteen weeks appointment, it was supposed to be the size of a bell pepper. Still, we only ever called it Lime.

We went online every week to find that Lime had evolved from a gross-looking alien-type lifeform into an actual human-looking child. Lime now had fingerprints, and could squint, frown, grimace, pee, and even suck its thumb!

My nausea had died down and my sleepiness was starting to, though I still needed naps to get through most days. I hadn’t had any weird cravings, just mostly ice cream (in the middle of winter) which might just be good, old me being crazy about ice cream.

My bump grew bigger every day, and most of my jeans didn’t close anymore, so I had gone shopping with Lizzy, Natasha and Zoe to their favorite maternity stores, where I managed to buy quite cute looking maternity wear.

Another interesting development of that early 2019 was that Harry was now clean shaven. It happened because when we read that Lime had now the ability to hear us, we started talking (and singing) to it. Harry liked to lay his head on my upper stomach, and I started complaining that his beard tickled, which he had a very mature response to:
“Doesn’t seem to be a problem when I’m going down on you.”

“Well, when you’re going down on me I’m too busy thinking of what your tongue is doing to care about your beard.” I returned. “But talking to the baby is innocent, and sweet, and so it bothers me more.”

So after the third time I refused to let him pull my shirt up so he could talk to Lime, he stood up and marched straight into the bathroom and came back fifteen minutes later, clean shaven.

“No!” I complained, dramatically. “No, no, no! Harry, no!”

“It’s temporary.” He justified.

“You promised!”

“I wanna talk to my child, Jenifer!”

“But you look so hot with the beard!”

“I’ll let it grown after Lime is born.”

“You promised! You said you would never shave!”

“You can’t have it both ways, Jen!” he chuckled. “I’ll let it grow after the baby is born. For now, you’ll just have to deal with it.”

He decidedly marched back into bed and pulled my shirt up, immediately laying his head on my now growing bump.

“Hi, baby.” He said, and I stopped complaining because he just sounded so sweet when he talked to Lime. “Don’t worry, mum and dad aren’t arguing, we’re just debating a very important subject, which is how much hotter I look with a beard.”

I laughed. “When you are born, Lime, I’m sure you’ll agree with mommy that daddy looks a lot hotter with a beard.”

“That’s just… weird.” Harry complained.

“Well, maybe not daddy.” I allowed. “But I’m sure Lime will agree men look a lot better with beards.”

“Lime could be a boy.”

“Lime could be gay. Or bi. Or just a comfortable enough straight boy who is willing to admit men look hotter with beards.”

Harry busied himself with telling Lime about my first day of work – it was amusing how easy he managed to pretend I wasn’t there or couldn’t hear him, and just talked unceremoniously to the baby about me, which both made me blush and fall in love with him a lot deeper than before. I stroke his hair as he laid on my stomach, and we spent most of our free time like that, as a family.

“What if…” I started, considering what I had said just a few minutes before, “what if Lime is gay?”

Harry turned in the bed to look at me. “What are you asking?”
I shrugged. “Your family doesn’t really have any same-sex relationships, no LGBT people. And they’re all very… traditional. Chances are they, and the press, wouldn’t be very understanding.”

“Well, they’ll have to deal with it.” He said, pointedly. “I’m not telling my kid it needs to be anything other than what he or she want to be.”

I smiled as I leaned forward to place a deep kiss on his lips, feeling his soft lips against mine.

“Hear that, Lime?” I asked my bump, “We got your back.”

I decided to look at the beard situation on the bright side – it made it a lot softer now when he went down on me.

That’s how we went on with our days. We remodeled York cottage, we talked to Lime, we read parenting books, and we, of course, worked. I traveled to Geneva every two weeks, for two or three days at a time, and spent my days in London in conference calls, or reading reports or on planning meetings of royal work with the staff.

Our guessing of what Lime would grow to be didn’t last much. In February we had another checkup appointment and that is when the mystery was over.

When we headed into the clinic that night, since this made it easier to avoid paparazzi, our doctor received us with a smile and we were ushered inside right away – that’s the kind of special treatment I didn’t mind one bit having because of my new rank.

We – let me correct that, I - had chosen our obstetrician based on one concept and one concept alone: did we like her. And the answer is yes, I did. I liked her a lot. Her name was Stella Cantorini, she was the daughter of Italian migrants and had attended Oxford – I knew every name in the list of recommended doctors Monica had drafted me would be a good choice, as they all had a good education and experience (and the royal seal of approval), but I needed a doctor I could trust and I wouldn’t feel too weird about meddling in my vagina, so I chose Stella because she was laid back and sweet.

As we told her about how our lives were going in the last few weeks, and amused her with the very sweet story of Harry’s decision to shave, Stella busied herself with unceremoniously zipping down my pants and splattering the cold gel on my lower abdomen so we could get started.

She measured Lime’s head, abdomen, and femur, to make sure it was all growing at the right rate and to confirm our due date, which at this point stood firm on the 14th of June. She also measured the heart rate and rhythm, checked the amniotic fluid and placenta all while we tried not to shout in her face that we just wanted to know the gender already!

Finally, almost so fast that we barely heard her, she said:

“… Okay, you wanna know? Because some parents don’t wanna know.”

“We wanna know.” I told her, quickly.

“We could wait, but someone is a bit of a control freak… “

“We wanna know.” I interrupted Harry.

Stella smiled, and it felt like the entire world was on silence as she moved the sonogram probe around my bellybutton.
“Okay… here are Lime’s legs… and it appears that Lime is a girl.”

As fast as Stella had uttered the words ‘Lime is a girl’, our world changed. It went from the elegant furniture we had spent weeks choosing for our palace apartment to colorful toys, books about parenting and baby-carriers. Our world was suddenly filled with bows, small, soft teddy bears and pastel colors.

We took two of the closest guest bedrooms to ours and turned them into a nursery and a play room. The nursery was painted with a light shade of pink and added a golden pattern wallpaper and a furry light pink rug, the same tone of an armchair and bedding in the white crib, matching the cream, long curtains in the windows.

Finding out Lime was a girl was all the incentive we needed to start going overboard with absolutely everything: suddenly we had chest drawers filled with pink onesies and little dresses, socks and beanies, baby-sized jackets and bows; we made online purchases almost every day of things we found that we simply could not help but want our baby girl to have. A ball pit, an indoor swing set, an outdoor swing set for York Cottage, a slide that went from the playroom’s highest wall in a circle to the center, into the ball pit.

“You think we’re overdoing it?” Harry asked while we emptied sacks and sacks of little plastic balls into the pit.

“No.”

“We bought a lot of things she won’t even be able to use for the first couple of years.”

“I don’t care.” I smiled. “I really don’t.”

We bought a set of white and golden Versace travel gear which included a stroller, a car seat, a detachable pram and a diaper bag; we bought a pacifier that was a thermometer; we bought a toddler sized caterpillar rocker and I made sure to get Lime a bodysuit that read ‘I’m cute. Mom’s cute. Dad’s lucky!’ , which I showed Harry with a grin on my face.

Suddenly, things started not only making sense to us, but to seem incredibly normal, like buying a video monitor so we could keep an eye on her, and a high chair that she wouldn’t fit for another few months after she was born, a sippy cup shaped like a Starbucks cup and the word snugapuppy –the name of the bouncer we bought.

From my designer brand closet, I suddenly had a selection of maternity jeans with elastic bands, nursing tops which opened to let my boobs out, and a breast pump, which I still didn’t know how to use.

We were still set on our gender-neutral parenting plan, reason why we decided not to tell anyone that Lime was a girl – we continued referring to her as ‘it’ and ‘Lime’ in front of family friends and staff, making sure we dodged their insistence for news of the gender kind. We recognized the privileged position we were in, and the privileged position our girl would be born in, and if there was no way around it, we at least wanted to use it for something good. Both Harry and I had spent a few years fighting for equality, so we wanted to hold on the news of our baby’s gender to force people into thinking neutrally and noticing the difficulty that it brought to speak about an unborn child without condemning them to gender roles. We wanted them to wonder why was it so frustrating to buy a neutral onesie or a toy – why was everything made for babies either pink or blue?
Still, in our house, when we were alone, we talked to our baby girl, we debated names, and we bought pretty little dresses in secret, just because we couldn’t resist.

When we finished putting away all of the little dresses and onesies we had bought already – most of which I knew Lime would not have the time to wear before she outgrew them - I realized Harry had a point: we filled the playroom with toys and pillows and when we found a huge, almost life-sized pink play-castle, even with a little garden under its little windows, we didn’t even need to convince ourselves to buy. Still, every time he asked, I just couldn’t help my answer.

“We’re going to spoil her, aren’t we?!”

“Oh, well.” I shrugged, unable to feel even a little guilty.

The truth of the matter was I wanted our baby to have everything I hadn’t had growing up: as many toys as she wanted, as much space as she needed to run and let her imagination grow wild. If girls were sugar and spice and everything nice, I’d make sure she got exactly that. I wanted her to have memories in our house that would keep her warm forever.

“I moved around so much when I was little, I can’t really think of a single place when I remember my childhood.” I told Harry. “The houses we lived in were rentals, and we didn’t even lived in them for too long, so when it comes to our baby, I want her to have that sort of place where she belongs, you know? I want her to love this house, I want her to miss it when she leaves, I want her to want to come back even when she goes away for college. I want her to come visit us and run inside to be instantly filled with that warm feeling of… I am home.”

No matter what happened – no matter where life took us – Lime needed to know the one unchangeable truth: we would always have her back, and we would always be her home.
If I could go back in time, I would find every moment when someone had told me that pregnancy wasn’t ‘that hard’ to punch those people in the face. Pregnancy was one of the hardest things I had done in my entire life and that is coming from someone who had endured abusive relationships, tough diets to get into characters and award seasons. As much as I loved Lime and the idea that I would soon hold her in my arms, I hated very few things more than I hated what she was doing to my body.

I was bloated, heavy, my gravity center was fucked up and walking in heels was now a challenge. I had to pee every goddamn half an hour and I was eating like an insane MMA fighter preparing for a fight. My bump was now bigger and I had pains in my lower abdomen and on my sides, which Stella, my obstetrician, had classified as round ligament pain.

“The ligaments that support your uterus are stretching to accommodate its increasing weight.” She explained, smiling. “It’s totally normal!”

Yes, apparently all of it was totally normal. I could feel my organs being squashed to make room for the human being I was carrying inside – whom I loved – and it was completely normal. The palms of my hands were red, which was completely normal because of all my extra estrogen. Patches of my skin were darkened because of an increase in pigment and it was completely normal. Heartburns, indigestion, leg cramps and terrible sleeping nights were all completely normal and the worst part was that I couldn’t even complain.

I couldn’t get out of bed without rolling to a side first, but I couldn’t complain. I couldn’t sleep even though I was exhausted, but I couldn’t complain. Why? Because Her Royal Highness, Jenifer, the Duchess of Clarence, needed to be an example of a woman who had been born for this.

“People don’t wanna hear about your problems,” Edward reminded me. “It makes them think you’re entitled and spoiled. You’re privileged, they wanna hear about how humbled you are by the honor of bringing a baby into the world.”

In many ways, Edward was my new Janine: he gave the truth like it was, even when I didn’t want to hear it. This was made more useful by the fact that he had a child himself – little Eponine, who was now almost six years old -, so he could easily mix his royal expertise with his parental one and give it to me like it was.

Which is more than I could say about my husband, who even now still tried to shield me away from his world.

“You’re carrying a person inside of you.” Harry said, “You’re allowed to look tired!”

“No, the thing is, I am not.”

As a royal, the only thing I was allowed to look was perfect. People didn’t want their fairytale vision shattered, and I knew if I looked even a little less than what I usually did, the press would find ways to write weeks worth of terrible headlines about how pregnancy was stressing me out and I was about to walk out the door from Harry.

That was the reason why instead of snuggling in my blankets in that cold 17th of March in 2019, I
was instead dressed in dark green for Saint Patrick’s day. I was starting to get a hold of how to
dress for the British cold now, so I was wearing a dark, long sleeved body suit under my emerald
green dress and long, black Louboutin boots to warm up my legs, as well as my dark green Lanvin
overcoat, which matched my big headpiece.

As most things with the British Royal Family, this was also a military tradition. For someone who
had spent so much of her time speaking against a military dictatorship in Brazil I seemed to be
spending a lot of my time these days in military parades. About 200 soldiers, led by a band of the
Irish Guards, paraded through a puddle stained square, bringing a splash of color to the otherwise
gray, cloudy day in their full ceremonial scarlet uniform.

My job in the parade was to present shamrocks to the soldiers, who came to me one by one to
salute, receive the shamrock, salute again, and step out. A senior female member of the royal
family always did this to follow the century-old tradition, started by Queen Alexandra, the wife of
Edward VII, in 1901, role which was famously carried out by the Queen Mother and then Kate,
and now me.

Harry stood by my side in his uniform – the first one I gave a shamrock to – and then we stood in
the cold as one by one the soldiers marched up to us. Another soldier handed me the shamrocks,
which I proceeded to hand to the soldiers.

“Good morning.” I repeated, smiling, time after time. “Happy Saint Patrick’s day!”

“Thank you, Your Royal Highness.” The soldiers replied.

The boringness of the job was replaced by unexpected elements: the first being my pain; in my
abdomen, in my sides, in my lower back. My sleepiness, my nausea, my hunger and the slight
necessity to pee, it all filled my mind so much I had to focus not to let my expression show I was
having a bad time. The second interesting element was one thing that Edward, Monica, Thomas,
Clara and Harry had all forgotten to prepare me for: a dog.

I was always happy to see a dog – part of my personality that the media and fans had caught up
with ages before, which was a running famous post on tumblr and twitter, and even had some
Buzzfeed articles dedicated to it, mentioning the times I would stop running from paparazzi to pet
random dogs in the street and stuff, and of course, everyone had been pleased with the moment in
Christmas I had immediately walked over to the women who had her dog with her, gasping ‘a
dog!’.

I was presenting the last shamrock to the regiment’s newest mascot, an Irish wolfhound called
Lupin. When I realized what was happening – when the soldier holding Lupin’s collar started
walking him towards us, I had no other reaction other than to drop my mouth opened in amusement
and gasp:

“A dog!”

My mouth was still opened when they got to me and I almost forgot to wait for the soldier to salute
before going in for the dog.

“Hi! Hi!” I greeted the dog, who was wearing a red tunic, petting his head. “Who’s a good boy?
You’re a good boy! That’s right, you’re such a good boy! Here, have a shamrock!”

The soldier held him still so I could place the shamrock in his collar, but Lupin was now happily
wagging his tail and attentively smelling the skirt of my coat – probably noticing Vodka’s smell.
“This is Lupin’s first year here, ma’am.” The soldier told me. “It’s his first year with us.”

“Oh, is it?” I looked at the dog. “It’s my first time here, too! Are you enjoying yourself? It’s cold, isn’t it? Oh, you’re such a good boy!”

The god wolfed, happily, in response to me, and we all laughed in delight – after I giggled first, completely forgetting the cold, my pain and the boredom.

The other element that helped was the people. I kept surprising myself at how much I liked my royal work because of the people. It was the same reason I liked to travel, the same reason I had once dragged Harry to Bulgaria – people! Real people, each different than the next, people whose lives are so different to ours, and to one another, all there, all meeting us for different reasons, coming from different backgrounds, going to different places. But they were all there. They all smiled when I said good morning. They all looked genuinely honored to meet us.

And then there was the kids. As with any other royal engagement, a lot of people came to watch us in Saint Patrick’s Day, and a lot of them brought kids, and a lot of the kids brought me flowers, and some of them had questions.

“When will you have your baby?” A little blonde girl asked me, reading from a piece of paper the question she had written with crayons so she wouldn’t forget.

“And another few months!” I told her, with a smile. “I’m excited!”

“Is your baby a boy or a girl?” Another little girl asked, this with ginger hair and glasses.

I looked at her, my heart beating faster, wondering if Lime would look like her, and braced myself to lie for a child. “We don’t know yet. But we’re excited no matter what!”

—

For my 29th birthday, Harry and I drove up to York Cottage where we stayed for a whole week. Harry went horse riding and I looked after the garden, planting peonies and roses, tulips and daisies. We fed the fish in the lake in front of the house, and inspected the pier we had commissioned to be built into it – as well as a small bridge leading up to the rest of Sandringham’s fields.

The orange sunsets, the dandelions, the smells of rain on the grass, the chilly breeze of Norfolk, it all started to feel like more than home – it felt like heaven, like everything I needed in life.

We only left the Cottage for a polo match that Harry went to play for Sentabale at a nearby country club. I complained the whole way that I wish I could play too, and only stopped when he promised I could next year, after the baby was born. I enjoyed the day as the rest of the wives did, since it was my only choice – by standing in the outer field and talking about the Lime, enjoying the day.

We grew used to going out for picnics at lunchtime; Harry had a new cookbook about sandwiches and he enjoyed making different ones every day before we set out into the fields, enjoying the fact we didn’t need our security team with us in Sandringham. We found a good spot in the grass where we could lay on a towel and enjoy the sunlight with our sandwiches and books.

“Do you miss it?” Harry asked, in one of those occasions, in the very day I turned 29. “Partying?”

“What do you mean?”

“It’s your birthday, and we’re laying in the middle of nowhere with sandwiches and books.” He
said. “Do you miss a kick-ass party so you can dance till morning?”

“No.” I told him. “Maybe next year. But today I have all I want, right here.”

I laid my head on his arm, like a pillow, and caressed my bump trying to imagine where Lime’s head was.

Suddenly, I raised my head to look at my belly. I forced myself to sit, with some difficulty, and touched the side of my stomach.

“What?” Harry asked.

“I… I don’t know.” I said, “Give me your hand.”

Harry sat up in a hurry, and scooched closer, touching my stomach where I was.

“Can you feel that?”

He stared at my belly intensively for a while, and then gave me a disappointing expression. “No.”

I sighed; for the past few weeks I had started to feel the fluttering sensation the books described as being the baby’s movements. She had been too small for Harry to feel, so he had been impatiently waiting for the moment Lime would grow big enough to let him feel her moving around inside of me.

“I thought you would… it felt big.” I touched my bump again, trying not to feel upset at his heartbroken expression as he laid down with his head on my lap, his ear touching my stomach as he closed his eyes from the sun.

“Come on, Lime.” He pleaded. “Say hi to daddy…”

She moved again, and he leaned back, seeming scared.

“What?”

“I felt that.”

“You did?!”

Harry sat up and I raised my blouse, so he could touch my stomach where his ear had just been.

We waited in tension for a few seconds and after a while, she moved again. I smiled up at Harry, who had his mouth dropped open in shock, making me laugh.

“I feel that!”

“Yay!” I squealed. “Good job, Lime!”

“Oh, my God…” Harry marveled, leaning down to lay his head delicately on my bump. “Oh, my God… She’s alive!”

“Of course she’s alive. What do you mean?”

“I- I don’t know… it just didn’t feel real until now. But I… I touched her! Sort of. She moved! She’s moving, because she’s alive!” He stared at my stomach again, serious. “She’s right here! She exists! She’s real!”
I smiled adoringly at the man in front of me, wondering what I had done that was so good that made me deserve him.

—

The baby in my arms wasn’t Lime, but I loved him just as much as I loved her.

“Hi, baby.” I smiled, watching as his tiny, newborn face twisted in a yawn. “Hi. You’re adorable, aren’t you?”

“Why do we always do baby-voice to babies?” Alessa asked, to no one in particular.

“Because they’re so cute we can’t help ourselves.” George, her husband, replied, looking over my shoulder at their son in my arms.

“He’s amazing.” I marveled. “Congratulations, guys.”

My best friend exchanged a loving smile with her husband, who sat in the arm of her chair, passing an arm over her shoulders.

Alessa had gone into labor just a few days after my birthday, something she thought was problematic because it meant their son was, like me, an Aries.

“I know from experience it’ll mean he’ll be a hot head mess, like Jen. We’re screwed.” She joked.

I didn’t mind. I looked at that baby – that adorable, tiny, dark haired little angel, and all I could see was a part of my best friend, as alive as both of us were.

“I’ll teach you all you need to know about how to drive your mother crazy.” I promised him, teasingly.

“Yes, he’s adorable.” Harry agreed, in his own baby voice, looking at the little Percy. “And thank goodness you look like mummy, huh? You got lucky!”

“Ha-ha.” Percy mumbled, ironic, as we giggled. “Says the balding ginger. Let’s talk when your baby is born.”

“Hey! We don’t say the B word!” Harry complained.

“What, baby?” George asked.

“Balding.” Harry whispered, dramatically.

“So what should we call him?” I asked.

“Alexander Hugh McKenna Percy.” George told us. “After both our grandfathers.”

“Can we call him Alex? Or will you be one of those annoying parents who chose a name but don’t want people to use its obvious nickname?”

“No, I like Alex.” Alli smiled.

“I can’t believe you have a child.” I said, shocked.

“Me neither.” She sighed, smiling. “He’s the best thing I’ve ever done.”
“We.” George corrected her. “We’ve ever done.”

“Did you grow and carry him inside of you?” She asked him, sarcastic. “Didn’t think so.”

“Give up, George.” Harry told his friend, just as he was ready to reply. “That’s not an argument we’ll ever win.”

“And how are you?” Alli asked.

“I’m… pregnant.”

She nodded, effusively. “I know what you mean. Just a bit more, though.”

“My ankles are swollen and I can’t sleep on my back anymore.”

“But… you’re glowing!” George offered, sounding optimistic, and Alli sighed.

“You know, people just think we care about that.” She said. “In reality the whole carrying a human inside of you thing is much worse.”

“And the glowing is probably just the sweat of all the extra weight.” I agreed.

“Okay, you know what? I’ll just stay quiet now.” George said, making us laugh.

Alex started to cry, a low, high pitched cry that made us all turn to look at him at the same time with worrisome expressions. “Oh, no.” I said, “What do I do?!”

“He’s probably wet.” George said, getting up to take his son from me. “I got it.”

“Or, you know, he’s probably just wishing aunt Jenny happy birthday.” Allie smiled.

“Hey, want to come see what awaits you?” George asked Harry.

“Why not?” Harry followed him, and we were left behind as Alli laid her head back in the couch.

‘You wanna do it? Practice and all that’?, George’s voice came low and distant through the baby-monitor walkie-talkie in Alli’s coffee table, and we both looked at it with the mischievous grins of who was eavesdropping.

‘You just wanna get out of it.’, Harry replied.

‘Well, yeah, but you should practice, too.’

Alli and I exchanged a smile.

“You look tired.” I noticed.

“I am.” She smiled.

“It’s the first time I see you smile because you’re tired.”

She closed her eyes, seeming more at peace than I had ever seen her. “I didn’t know you could be this happy.”

‘Hey, that wasn’t so hard!’ Harry’s voice came through the walkie-talkie.

‘Please, it was a pee nappy. Just wait until the big brown hits you.’
‘Yeah, well, I’ll count my blessings.’

‘How you doing, by the way?’

There was silence.

‘I’m fine.’, Harry told him.

‘Scared?’

There was more silence, and even through the walkie-talkie we cold hear a long sigh.

‘Yeah.’

‘I know.’ George told him, after some more silence.

‘Alli was right’, Harry added. ‘He’s the best thing you’ve ever done, like I know Lime is the best thing I’ve ever done… so what if I fuck it up?’

‘Shush, Harry!’

‘What?’

‘The F word!’

‘Oh, sorry. I mean, what if I screw it up?’

‘Dude!’

‘What?!’

‘S-C-R-E-W!’

‘That’s not a cuss word.’

‘Yes it is, it still means S-E-X’.

‘Well, that’s not what I mean.’

‘Doesn’t matter what you meant, matters what the baby hears!’

‘He’s too young, he doesn’t even know what we’re talking about!’

Alli leaned in from the couch and turned the radio off.

‘It’s normal to be scared.’ She told me.

“I know.” I sighed. “I just wish he wasn’t so worried about me freaking out that he felt he couldn’t tell me about when he does.”

She smiled. “You two are gonna be great parents.”

“In your wise opinion after three days of motherhood experience?”

She laughed. “Take the compliment, Silva.”
Getting ready for a baby was difficult enough without the annoying hassle of being a royal. As if trying to decide on a birthing plan and getting ready for how radically our lives were going to change wasn’t hard enough, we still had to hire a nanny – for when we inevitable had to go back to royal engagements after our parental leave -, a security team – because as a royal our little Lime needed three protection officers of her own -, and reply to the overwhelming amount of presents we were sent from all over the world.

Though it felt like a lifetime ago, our wedding had happened less than a year before and it was still generating a lot of buzz. Just at the end of the previous year I had been named person of the year by Time magazine and the best dressed by Vogue – things that didn’t necessarily mean anything other than the fact people still cared, something we could see by the countless congratulations cards and gifts being sent to Kensington about the baby, from people who simply liked us or politicians and royals from all over the world.

After some back and forth, we finally managed to choose the three main protection officers who would protect our daughter and a nanny we liked – Ana Carolina, a Brazilian middle aged woman who had been living in Britain and working in child care for the past seventeen years. Though she didn’t have experience with high profile children, she had good references, didn’t mind the press harassment, and could talk Portuguese to Lime, and that was really what sold it for me and Harry.

Finally, the only thing left to choose was the birth plan and the medical team who would be assisting us. Though over the course of our pregnancy there was a total of thirteen health care professionals assisting our obstetrician Stella – amongst which were neo natal specialists, anesthetists, nurses and so forth -, the truth of the matter was I didn’t want a world of people in the delivery room as I was bringing Lime to life.

With that in mind, I decided I wanted to have a home birth, with nothing but us, Stella and a midwife present. Harry hated the idea, something he made sure I knew.

“It’s the twenty-first century, there’s a reason people started having babies in hospitals!”

“How about this?” I argued. “When you are pushing a human being out of your vagina, you can have a say in how you do it, okay?”

That shut him up.

Unfortunately, because the royal family didn’t condone sharing royal birth plans to the media, the press had no way of knowing we were having a home birth and a full two months before our due date, they were already setting camp in front of the Lindo Wing of Saint Mary’s Hospital – the place where they assumed I was giving birth as that’s where Kate did.

Along with the press, people also started setting up camp by the sidewalks of Lindo Wing – phenomenon according to Kate and Will would only grow with time until they were told I wouldn’t be admitted – which wouldn’t happen until Lime was actually born. Our hope was that we could be at York Cottage for the birth, so that we didn’t even have the press harassment of London.

But until that time came, it was business as usual: as I entered my last trimester I stopped traveling to Geneva and started having my meetings at the U.N. offices in London, as well as the usual conference calls to deal with work. My meetings for Breaking Free continued normally and I still attended some more events for them and even some ceremonies with the whole family when needed.

Finally, as May arrived, a good six weeks before our due date, I had my first garden party in Buckingham Palace.
The Queen’s garden parties were a way to acknowledge people from Britain who had made a positive impact in their communities. Everyone got to dress up in their Sunday best and enjoy an afternoon in the Palace’s gardens with tea, little sandwiches and cake. And, of course, they got to meet us.

I attended that day as I had every other work appointment for the past few months: in heels and makeup as to not let anyone know how utterly exhausted I was from carrying Lime inside of me. I wore a lace red, long sleeved dress under an Oscar de la Renta red cape with flowery embroideries and a dark red Rachel Trevor-Morgan fascinator with a cascade of roses framing my face.

Along with Harry, Beatrice, Eugenie, Prince Philip, the Queen, Harry’s father, and Camilla, I exited the palace that afternoon wearing my best smile and prepared to shake hands and make some people feel heard and valued – it was far from being a bad job, it was actually rewarding having the power to make someone so excited and joyful, especially the Queen’s guests, who were genuinely invested in helping others.

Far from unexpected at this point, I once again gasped at the sight of a large, black Labrador who was accompanying its vision impaired owner and quickly left the line to go pet him.

“A dog!” I smiled, making the guests giggle. “Hi! Are you being a good boy? Of course you are! Hello.” I straightened up and greeted the owner and the people around, because I knew it would be rude to ignore them for the dog, and continued on my way.

We each walked with a palace staffer who told us where we were supposed to go and who we were supposed to greet next, reminding us of who those people were and why they were there – though they liked to tell us ourselves.

“Hello, ma’am, thank you for having us.” A gentle-looking, middle-aged woman greeted, curtsying, as I reached her.

“Thank you for being here.” I smiled. “I heard you have a volunteer project in your neighborhood. Do you have a lot of volunteers?”

“We have enough, ma’am. We gather people who are willing to donate some of their free time to accompany some of our older residents, to the grocery store or just to keep them company.”

“Oh, that’s so wonderful.”

“Yes, thank you, ma’am. And how are you? Almost time for the baby, isn’t it?”

I smiled, touching my large bump under my cape. “A few weeks more! And I’m…” I sighed, bracing myself to make the lie seem believable. “I’m great. We’re just very excited, we can’t wait to meet the baby, really.”

I was not great. It was now May and as a result of my thirty-one week stage of the pregnancy, I had started to experiencing the very normal Braxton Hicks fake contractions, which were basically a way of my body to rehearse the labor. If I could I would have told my body it wasn’t putting up some kind of Broadway musical to need that many rehearsals, but I couldn’t; so I just sucked it up and tried to smile at all the kind, nice people who had done so well for their communities.

Luckily, Braxton Hicks didn’t last long, and so I was soon able to focus better… until it started again. Also luckily, there are very few excuses as acceptable as a pregnancy when you need a rest, and so I was able to run back into the palace to have a sit down.

“Oh, I’m sorry, ma’am.”
“No, it’s fine, please, pretend I’m not here!”

The palace staffer smiled, timidly, before curtsying and walking back into the room. She was carrying an empty tray with mini-sandwiches’ holders, and I imagined she needed to re-stock them - I had purposely decided to wait out my Braxton Hicks in the food room, so I could do what I was doing best throughout my pregnancy: eat.

“Do you need me to call someone, ma-am?” she asked, kindly.

I must have looked pale as I sat there, breathing through my pain.

“Call me Jen. And no, thank you, I’m fine. It’s just Braxton Hicks, some kind of… fake contractions.”

She smiled, understanding. “Oh, right. I had those too throughout my pregnancy. We’re the unlucky ones, then, some women don’t even feel them.”

“Lucky them.” I giggled. “How old is your child?”

“Six.” She smiled. “A girl.”

“Nice.” I wished I could have told her I was having one too, but I just smiled instead, until a thought occurred to me.

“Did you say through the pregnancy?”

“Yes, ever since the first trimester.”

“Huh.”

She proceeded to place the mini-sandwiches in her tray as I thought.

“It was my understanding Braxton Hicks were just a late-pregnancy sign.”

“No.” She smiled. “Usually if you feel them, you feel them throughout. That’s what my sister said, at least. She’s my OBGYN. She had a patient who thought she was having late pregnancy Braxton Hicks, but though it’s possible, it’s usually just a sign of preterm labor, which was the case.”

“Catelyn,” a young man called, walking in, coming to a halt when he saw me – a reaction I was now getting used to -, “oh, Your Royal Highness, the Duke was looking for you, ma-am.”

“My husband?” I asked, and he nodded, so I stood up, letting out a long breath. “Nice to meet you.” I smiled at Catelyn, who curtsied as I left.

“Ah, ma-am.” She called. “They say there’s no reason to worry as long as it happens less than four times every hour.”

“Thanks.” I smiled, making my way out, trying to do the math in my head.

—

“I hate this.”

“Thank you, Edward.”

He ignored my sarcasm, buffing. “I really hate this.”
“Edward, if you wanna leave, leave.”

He scorned. “Right! And deal with Harry’s fury later?!”

“I didn’t ask you to come.”

“Monica is on her honeymoon with Thomas,” he hissed, “and your husband is up north playing polo for charity, I wasn’t just going to let you come to the hospital alone.”

“I’m not alone.” I argued. “I have Maisie, Johnnie and Eddy.”

“Don’t forget all the vultures outside.” Eddy added, without taking his eyes from his Nintendo DS from where he was sitting in the armchair beside my bed – Maisie and Johnnie were guarding the door outside.

“Can’t forget them!” I added, ironic.

Just a couple of days after my first garden party, Harry drove up north to play another polo match for Sentabale. Since Stella’s practice was in London, instead of driving up with him and taking refuge in York Cottage as I wished I could, I had to stay for our weekly appointment. Because Monica and Thomas had gotten married the week before – in a small, simple ceremony in York Cottage with her son Max walking her down the aisle and me serving as a heavily pregnant maid-of-honor -, she and Thomas were taking their honeymoon leave for that week, and Edward felt guilty of leaving a pregnant woman alone, so he felt compelled to follow me to my checkup.

“It’s just a routine thing, you didn’t have to come.”

“Well, I-“

“Hello, guys!” Stella smiled, walking into the room. “Oh, where’s Harry?”

“Work thing.” I told her. “His last one for a while.”

“Oh, good. And what about you? Already on maternity leave?”

“Two more weeks.” I told her.

“Technically she could have started it already,” Edward told her, “but workaholics haven’t been known for taking it easy, have they?”

I gave him a stern look. “Do you wanna go wait outside?”

“No, I’m good here. Hi.” He looked at Stella, who nodded, curiously, before moving on with the exam.

As she usually did, she first asked how I was doing this past week, how I was eating and sleeping and so on. She did the ultrasound, and I struggled against my tears as I always did at the sight of Lime and the sound of her heartbeat, strong and victorious as it always was.

“Hm.” Stella mumbled.

“What?”

“Oh, nothing.” She said, dismissively. “She hasn’t grown much since our last appointment.”

“That’s normal, right?”
Stella nodded, absentmindedly, though her eyes were still glued to the screen.

“It probably is,” she answered, finally, “but just to be on the safe side I wanna do an intravaginal sonogram, to check on things with more detail.”

“Sure, whatever you need.”

I kicked Eddy and Edward out at this point, as it was weird enough to have Stella poking inside of me without them there to watch.

After she was done, she printed some images of the sonogram and excused herself; Eddy and Edward walked back inside.

“What did she say?” Eddy asked.

“Nothing so far.” I shrugged. “She just said she needed a second opinion on something.”

“Oh, good. All those specialists we hired will get to do something, after all.” Edward noted.

Stella came back a few minutes later, smiling as she usually did, though this time her face was more severe than before. I didn’t smile back.

“What is it?”

“Well…” she sighed. “It could be nothing.”

“…okay?”

“Have you had more pain in your abdomen?” She asked. “In your lower back, maybe.”

“Yes, as usual.” I replied. “And some Braxton Hicks.”

“Braxton Hicks?” She asked, her tone getting an urgency I didn’t recognize from before. “Not like the usual abdominal pain?”

“No, more like contractions.”

“Mmhm.” She mumbled. “Okay… were they, uhm, were they frequent?”

“Well…” I considered it. “A little.”

“How frequent?”

“I don’t know, a few times a day for the past couple of weeks.”

“Like, three times an hour?” she asked, nervously. “Or four?”

I recognized the number from what Catelyn, the palace staffer, had told me on the garden party. As my breathing grew heavier, I tried not to think too much of the pains I had had over the past few weeks. Instead, I did what Harry would tell me to do, and breathed.

“Stella.” I called. “Talk to me.”

She took in a deep breath. “You’re dilated.”

I was silent, waiting for her to continue, but she didn’t.
“That’s… somewhat normal, right?” Edward asked. “This close to her due date.”

“She’s six weeks away from her due date.” Stella added. “And I don’t think you’ve been having Braxton Hicks, I think you’re going into preterm labor.”

“What-?” I sighed, touching my bump just as Lime gave me a comforting kick, almost as if she was holding my hand. “What are you saying?”

Stella tried to smile confidently, and she took a deep breath before speaking.

“Jenifer, I think we’re going to have this baby today.”

Chapter End Notes

Can you tell I need this story to be over??? lol I'm trying to get my diploma I have no time for this, so the next update should be the last! Thanks so much for reading!!!
“Once Upon a Time, There Was a Princess”

“Excuse me?”

“Excuse me?!”

If I seemed unsure about the idea, Edward seemed truly on the verge of a breakdown.

“It’s too soon.” I told Stella. “My due date is still six weeks away!”

“Six weeks!” Edward echoed.

“I know.” She replied. “But I don’t see as much growing as I would like, and you’re seven centimeters dilated, and you’re having contractions. It is my professional opinion that your body is telling you it’s time. There’s not many explanations, sometimes it just happens. All we can do is go along and make sure the baby comes out safe and sound.”

“But it’s still not ready-“

“I know.” Stella nodded. “But we have a great premature unit and specialists on call, and it’s more normal than you think. Obviously it’s not the ideal, but in cases when it’s needed, we can make it work.”

I took some time to absorb this, caressing my bump with both hands, trying to make sense of the fact that I might hold Lime in my arms a lot sooner than I had planned.

“Okay.” I said. “Let’s go home, then.”

“Oh, Jenifer, you can’t go home.” Stella told me.

“I’m having a home birth!”

“No anymore.” She said, apologetically. “I’m sorry, but a premature birth is simply not ideal for a home birth. You need to be close to the NIC-U in case the baby needs immediate care. I strongly urge you to stay here.”

I struggled against tears, seeing my perfect birth plan flying out the window. “But-“

“We can still have a natural birth right here, safely. I’ll do the best that I can, okay?”

“Harry is not here.” I mumbled and, this time, I wasn’t looking at Stella.

Edward sighed, immediately finding his phone. “I’ll get him here.”

It all happened much faster than I could even realize. When I laid in bed for my thirty-one week checkup I didn’t imagine I wouldn’t be leaving - I was admitted to Saint Mary’s hospital and the medical staff we had previously hired were all brought in to start worrying about the possible dangers surrounding Lime as she was born this soon, some of which included respiratory issues, bleeding in the brain and a number of heart problems.

I was glued to the bed, unable to think of anything other than my baby girl, swimming away inside of me, possibly in distress without me even realizing it. Was it my fault? Should I have paid more attention? Was this a sign that I was simply not ready for this?
“Clara, it’s me.” Edward’s voice was reaching me from a distance, as if he was speaking from the end of a long tunnel, even though he was still in the same room as I was, walking up and down nervously as he did. “Jenifer has been admitted to St. Mary’s… yes. Well, she’s fine, but the baby might be coming a lot sooner than we predicted. I need you to go to Kensington and grab her hospital bag and a change of clothes for Harry. Meet us here. Thank you.”

Eddy dragged his armchair closer to my bed and held my hand, comforting. The warmth of his palm reminded me to breathe, and I held on strongly, hoping more than I had ever hoped for anything that Lime was okay.

“Clark, it’s Edward. Is Harry playing?” Edward went on, now on the phone with Harry’s protection team. “Tell him we’re going into blue protocol. Yes. Right now. Yes, we’re here already. Get the helicopter and get him in through the back door. Okay, thank you.”

“What’s blue protocol?” I asked.

“Code for emergency.” Eddy explained. “In the event of a birth, it means mother and child have been admitted to the hospital.”

“Why not red? Or black?” I asked.

“…I don’t know. So it’s not too obvious that something bad is happening maybe.”

“Tim, we’re going to need the helicopter for the Duke of Clarence. Yes. As soon as possible, he’s in Berkshire… As close as you can get him to St. Mary’s. Yes, thank you.” Edward let out a long sigh, and looked at Eddy. “We need to set up the perimeter outside.”

Eddy nodded. “Do I call for backup?”

“Yes, call the Kensington security headquarter. They’ll send more people to guard the entrance and the hospital, and contact Scotland Yard to secure the street.”

“Okay.” Eddy made to stand up, but I was still holding on to his hand. He leaned closer. “You’re gonna be fine, kiddo.” I looked at him, unable to stop the tears in my eyes.

“I’m having contractions again.” I admitted, and he exchanged a worried glance with Edward, who quickly stepped out.

“Maisie,” I heard him say, from the door, “call Stella.”

“Hey.” Eddy said. “You’re gonna be fine. Okay? You’re a princess, you get special treatment!” he joked, and I tried a smile, though the result was mostly a grimace. “Your little brat is probably just making a dramatic entrance, just like mamma.”

I managed a better smile, but still couldn’t let go of his hand.

There was too much inside of me: Harry so far away, my baby potentially having all kinds of health issues, the possibility that I would simply be bad at all of this parental thing; I just needed to hold his hand. I needed the touch, the comfort.

I watched as Eddy signaled something to LF, who approached. Eddy held his hand and let go of mine, making me hold Edward’s hand instead.

“I-what-?” Edward mumbled, confused and seemingly uncomfortable, but Eddy just pat his shoulder and went on his way to follow his orders.
Edward’s skinny, bony hand was cold and shaky in mine, as I realized he was nervous. It took me a moment to realize it was the first time I held his hand, and probably the first time I touched him for this long, too. He let out a deep breath and took a seat in the armchair Eddy had been occupying, avoiding my eyes, but still hanging on to my hand.

I remember the first time I had met him, in Harry’s penthouse apartment in Manhattan, right in the middle of my stolen phone scandal. He had looked at me with such cold judgment that I had felt as if all of the reasons I couldn’t be with Harry had just materialized in front of me.

I felt my heart pounding heavily in my chest as another contraction hit me, and just as my face twisted in pain, Stella walked back in.

“Another one?” She asked, checking her watch. “They’re getting closer together, that’s not good.”

“What can you do?” Edward asked.

“One thought would be to try and delay the birth, but she’s progressing too fast, I fear the time for that might have passed.”

“What does that mean?” I asked, through clenched teeth.

“It means we should call the anesthetist and get you an epidural.”

I only had a minute to remember I wanted a natural birth, and to hate that I couldn’t bring Lime to the world in my own house, in my own bed; then, another contraction started again, and I crushed Edward’s hand in mine.

Stella waited until I nodded to walk out, and next thing I knew is I was being helped to sit up so the anesthetist specialist we had vetted months before could stick a needle in my spine.

The agonizing seconds turned into minutes, and the minutes turned into half an hour. My contractions became more regular and with less and less time between them. I held Edward’s hand in mine, breathing as deeply as I could, trying to distract myself by listening to his phone calls.

He called the palace officials, the Queen’s and the Prince of Wales’, and then he left a message for Monica and Thomas.

“Harry is on the helicopter already.” He told me, finally. “He’ll be here soon!”

I nodded. Harry would be there soon. That was all I needed.

Stella came back to check on me every fifteen minutes; she sounded more confident and sure of herself as time passed, as if the hardest part had been to let me know we would need to have the baby sooner, but the actual act of it was the easy part. At least until she noticed another problem.

“You have a short cervix.”

“Shouldn’t you have checked that months ago?!?” Edward hissed.

“It isn’t checked unless there’s a reason to think the birth might be premature.” She explained.

“What does it mean?” I asked.

“It means you won’t dilate any more than you already are.” She explained. “It means the baby won’t be able to fit through your birth canal. It means we have to have a cesarean.”
“Harry is not here.” I cried.

“Harry is not here!” Edward echoed.

“I’ll get the operating room ready.” Stella said, standing up.

“No.” I said, resolute, shaking my head. “No. It’s too much! Harry is not here. And Lime’s not ready yet.”

Edward gave Stella a worried glance, and she sighed before approaching me.

“Look at me.” She asked. “You are going to have to trust me, okay? I’m good at my job, Jenifer. And I would tell you if I thought you had reason to worry, but C-sections are very normal. I know this is happening too fast, but you’re fine, okay? We’re going to get through this. Just breathe, okay? For me. For Lime. Can you do that?”

I took in a deep breath, letting it out slowly, and nodded.

“We can hold off a bit longer, as we get the operating room and the team ready, but when I come back, if I say that we need to go, then we’re gonna go, okay?” she gave me a stern look and I bit my lip to stop myself from crying.

Stella nodded, and smiled comforting before leaving again.

“Say something.” I asked.

Edward looked at me, taking his nervous eyes from his phone, where he had been hoping to get news from Harry. “What?”


He nodded, slowly, and I stared at the ceiling. Some time passed, but finally, he spoke.

“I can do some magic tricks.”

I looked at him. “What?”

He shrugged. “I can do some magic tricks. I wanted to be a magician until I was about thirteen, so I learned some tricks.”

I looked back at the ceiling. “Huh.”

“Really? Nothing?”

“I’m sure I’ll tease you tomorrow. But today it’s just not enough to get my mind off this.”

He sighed.

“I know.”

“…know what?”

“About you and Harry.” He explained. “When you first started dating… it wasn’t real. It was a publicity stunt. I know.”

I looked at him. He seemed calm, even a little smug as he looked at me.
“Harry told me in April of 2013.” He added. “Right after he went with you to your brother’s wedding in Brazil. He called and told me it wasn’t real.”

“Why would he do that?”

“Because that’s when he realized he was in love with you.” Edward smiled. “That’s when he realized he was in a lot of trouble because he was pretending to date a friend, but in reality, he was in love with her.”

I looked back at the ceiling, remembering the agonizing two months I had spent in Arizona after my brother’s wedding to Livia, when I had stopped picking up Harry’s calls to try and let go of what I thought was a simple attraction.

“It was the stupidest idea we ever had.” I smiled.

“Yeah. I know.” He agreed.

I looked at him. “That’s why you hated me.” I realized. “When we met, that’s why you hated me. You thought I was using him.”

“I didn’t hate you.” He rolled his eyes, and I gave him a stern look. “I was slightly annoyed by you, sure. But hate is too strong a word.”

“You were a dick.”

“He was in love with you, you were dating him for the publicity… of course I thought you were using him.” He said. “And then do you remember what happened?” I looked at him. “You asked what could you do to make sure his image wouldn’t be left too damaged after you broke up.”

“That’s when you told me to come to England.” I remembered.

“You looked me in the eyes and you said,” he smiled, “I’m in love with him. And I knew you thought you were lying. But your eyes were too intense for it to be a lie. Even you are not that good of an actress.”

I smiled, feeling a tear stream down my cheek.

“I just wanted things to be easy for him.” Edward said. “And I knew with you they wouldn’t be, so I was hoping he would fall for someone… simpler.”

I nodded. “I was hoping that too, but…” I shrugged. “I love him.” As my voice broke in a cry, he squeezed my hand, gently.

“I know.”

I took in a deep breath. “Edward… I’m scared.”

“I know. It’s gonna be okay.”

I hanged on to his hand, feeling Lime contorting away inside, trying to ignore the feeling that I could no longer tell if she was just kicking or if it was another contraction.

“It’s a girl, you know?” I told him, whispery. He squeezed my hand again, and smiled. It was the first time his smile didn’t look threatening.

He cleaned his throat. “…well, I’m sure if she’s gonna be anything like you, she’ll be both
beautiful and a nightmare.”

I laughed through tears, and he joined me.

The door opened, and a flustered, anxious looking Harry barged in, in a hurry.

“Oh, thank God.” Edward mumbled, letting go of my hand.

Harry’s arms wrapped around me, tightly, and I held him with all the strength I had left.

“I’m sorry.” He asked. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry.”

I wanted to tell him he had nothing to be sorry for, and that he shouldn’t feel scared either, because he was so clearly meant for this, but I couldn’t. I had an alarming knot on my throat and I was trying not to cry as to not make him feel guiltier.

“I’m so sorry!” He repeated, kissing my cheek without letting go of the hug.

“Harry, you’re here.” Stella said, walking back in. “…great outfit for the birth of your firstborn.”

Harry was still wearing his polo uniform, wet and muddy from the match.

“Oh, you know,” he sniffed, letting go of me to smile at Stella, “I wanted to encourage Lime to practice polo.”

Stella giggled, and then gave him a serious look. “You’re gonna have to clean up to get into the O.R.”

“O.R.?!?” he asked, scared, and Stella proceeded to summarize everything that had happened while he was away.

Harry held my hand, tightly, as she spoke, and I manage to breathe better for the first time since this whole thing had started. Clara arrived with my hospital bag and a change of clothes for Harry, and he went to the bathroom to clean up as I was wheeled into the operating room.

He met me there soon afterwards, wearing a hospital gown and cap, quickly holding my hand as he sat in a stool by my side as around us, a group of around fifteen people – including Stella – walked around preparing everything.

“So.” Harry started, sounding casual. “How was your day?” I laughed, and he leaned in to lay a kiss on my forehead. “I’m sorry I wasn’t here.” He whispered. I shook my head, still not being able to speak. “I should have been here.”

“It’s too soon.” I whispered. “It’s not your fault. She’s early.”

He leaned his head against mine; around us, the group of people worked, making their occasional noises. I could feel my stomach being scrubbed with something wet, though nothing from my chest down hurt anymore. I remembered what I had overheard him saying to George, about being scared.

“You’re perfect.” I told him. “Did you know that? You’re perfect.” He looked at me, surprised, and kissed my forehead. “I’m scared and afraid, but I don’t worry one bit about the baby, because I know she’ll be fine. She’ll have you.”

“She’ll have you too.”

“I know. But I’m… I’m screwed up.” I sighed. “I don’t know if I’ll ever be able to not be broken
anymore. But you’re… you’re you. You were made for this. You’re gonna be great.”

I felt a tear on my forehead, which I knew was his.

“What if I’m not?” he asked. “What if I mess up? What if I give her all kinds of daddy issues?!”

“You won’t.”

“How can you know?”

I leaned my head back to look him in the eyes. “Because I won’t let you.”

He smiled. “Promise?”

I nodded. “I’ll slap you if I have to.” He chuckled.

“Okay.”

The epidural meant I couldn’t feel pain, but it didn’t mean I couldn’t feel anything. I felt everything
that happened in my body, from the first incision, the second and third and all the ones until they
had cut through all my skin and fat until my uterus. It didn’t feel painful, though it felt like a lot of
pressure.

“Are you in any pain?!” Harry kept asking, whenever he looked at me, to which I would always
shake my head no.

I couldn’t blame him for thinking I was in pain; from the minute I started crying I didn’t stop
anymore. It wasn’t just the pressure in my lower abdomen as I felt Stella and the pediatric surgeon
opening my uterus, it was the whole emotion of the day. It was knowing Lime was in danger. It
was knowing I could be about to hold her in my arms. It was thinking of my parents an ocean away
probably being flown in as this happened, without any news. It was the memory of every single
day I had had Harry in my life.

The day I met him, tipsy on a black tie dress in Kensington Palace; me with a broken heart and him
with a fiancé. The day he knocked on my door in Manhattan. The first time my lips touched his in a
sunny beach in Morgan Bay. The first time I wished I could be crushed under his arms. The first
time he said he loved me. The first time I let him. The first time I managed to get the words out.

This baby – this little girl that I could feel being pulled out from inside of me – was the literal
materialization of how much I loved him. I fell in love with the best man the world managed to
make, and now we were having a daughter.

“You need to tell me if I’m hurting your hand.” I whispered to Harry, when I realized I was
crushing his fingers in mine as I felt the pressure increasing in my abdomen.

He looked at me. “Jen, they’re pulling a human being out of you. Break my hand, it’s the least I
can do.”

I managed to smile, and he stood up straight to look over the curtain separating my head from the
rest of me.

“Jen, how are we doing?” Stella asked.

“I’m… I’m good.” I said, through clenched teeth.

“Pressure?”
“Yes.”

“That’s very normal, okay?”

“Okay.” I breathed. “Just get her here.”

“You’re doing great.” Stella said. “You’re doing so great.”

“Do we have a name yet?” Jared, our pediatric surgeon asked.

“No.” Harry told him. “We haven’t agreed on anything. Nothing seems good enough.”

“What are our options?” Stella asked.

I sniffed, trying to remember all the names Harry and I had considered since finding out about Lime.

“Alexandra.” I told them - our medical staff were the only ones, other than me, Harry and now Edward, who knew the gender. “Theodora.”


“Valentine.” I told them, trying to distract myself from the pressure in my stomach.

“For a girl?” Jared asked.

“Yes.” Harry told him, rolling his eyes. “Princess Valentine. Can you tell her what a horrible idea that is?”

The room laughed.

“I think it sounds cute.” I argued.

“It’s too Hollywood.” Harry replied, the same argument I had been hearing over the past few months.

“Well, not for nothing, but I think Stella is a great name for a girl.” Stella said, making us giggle.

“My grandfather said the same thing.” Harry told her. “Except his suggestion was Philip for a boy, and Philippa for a girl.”

“That’s sweet.” Stella agreed.

I started counting the tiles on the ceiling as they worked, trying to distract myself.

“My parents?” I asked Harry, after a while.

“Edward sent the jet for them. They’ll be here tomorrow.” I nodded.

“And-?”

Before I could finish the question, he replied. “I had Clara call Janine and Richard, they’re getting on a plane, too.”

“Thank you.” I smiled. He stood tall again, to look over the curtain. “How much longer?” I asked the nurse standing closer to me.
“Just a couple more minutes.” He told me.

A few tense seconds passed in silence as I stared at Harry, looking worriedly over the curtain as he held my hand tightly.

“You have to tell me what she looks like, okay?” I told him. “As soon as you see her.”

“Of course.” He smiled down at me. “She’ll be as beautiful as you.”

I watched him as he watched the doctors working over the curtain, his eyes watery and anxious, as scared and excited as I was sure mine were. His hand was shaky with mine and in a second, as I watched him, all my fear vanished.

I remembered his resolution when he first told me he wouldn’t give up on me, and how stubbornly he asked me out until succeeding. I remembered every kiss, every single one. I remembered every smile, and most importantly, I remembered every time I had doubted we would make it. I didn’t think I could let go of my fears. I didn’t think I would find a way to live without them, but I did. With Harry, I found strength and bravery. I didn’t think we could do it, but he held my hand, he kissed me, he didn’t let me give up, and now we were here: together; victorious.

“Victoria.”

He looked down, and smiled. “Victoria?”

“Victoria.” I repeated. “It’s easy to pronounce in Portuguese and it’s traditional.”

He sustained my look for a long time before leaning down to kiss me. “Victoria.” He whispered, and we exchanged a smile.

“I’m scared, but I’m not afraid.” I told him. “Does that make sense?”

He considered my question for a long time. “Kind of.”

“You make me feel victorious.” I told him, and our tears tainted our smiles at the same time.

Suddenly, in one second, the world slowed down on its course; all the noise was gone from the universe and the only thing we could hear was the faint, high pitched crying coming in short breaths from the other side of the curtain.

Harry’s eyes and mine widened. He stood tall to look again, and I watched as his lips stretched into a delicate, emotional, shocked smile. His eyes watered again, and his hand grew tighter in mine. He didn’t blink as he watched her, and as I watched him, I could see him falling in love with our daughter. I could see the exact moment his entire being became entirely about her, and it only made me love him more.

The room erupted in delighted cheers as our daughter cried the most beautiful sound in the world.

“Is she okay?” I asked, desperately. Harry nodded, absentmindedly, still watching her.

“She’s fine!” Stella replied. “She’s beautiful!”

“Harry, you wanna cut the cord?”

“I-what-?” Harry approached, still looking breathless and nervous, without every letting go of my hand, and I watched as he quickly disappeared behind the curtain to cut the baby’s umbilical cord. “Here?”
“Yes, right there.” Jared told him. “Okay, happy birthday, little princess.”

“Oh, my God.” Harry let out, smiling nervously. “She’s perfect.” He told me. “She’s… she’s perfect.”

“Is she okay?!” I asked again, more desperately.

“She’s perfect.” Harry repeated. “They’re- they’re just cleaning her up. She’s fine, I think. Is she fine?” he asked Stella and Jared, whom I could feel were now working on closing me up.

“They’re cleaning her up, and we’ll check her breathing and heart rate and everything else, and you’ll get her soon enough, okay?” Stella told us. “First we need to assess the complications her preterm condition might have brought.”

Harry didn’t let go of my hand, though he now stood up straight, his eyes following the neo-natal specialists who were caring for our daughter.

This was the day everything else stopped mattering. The only thing that mattered anymore was the little girl whose cries echoed through an operating room in Saint Mary’s Hospital that 8th of May of 2019. It was 02:13 in the morning. The day Princess Victoria of Clarence was born and our world was made so much bigger and brighter. So much crazier and loud. So much more colorful and special.

I closed my eyes, feeling Harry’s hand in mine, hearing our daughter cry, feeling my heart full of love and peace. I took a deep breath, knowing everything was fine. Everything was perfect. I didn’t need to worry anymore – that’s when I started to drift off.

“Jenifer!”

From what sounded like far away, I heard Stella’s worried voice. Victoria’s cry faded away. I couldn’t feel Harry’s hand in mine, or the pressure in my abdomen. I couldn’t feel much of anything anymore except an overwhelming sleepiness.

“What’s happening?” Harry asked someone.

“Harry, we’re gonna need you to step out.” Jared told him.

“What?!”

Harry sounded mad. I knew, in the back of my mind, I should care, but I just didn’t. Victoria was fine, Harry was fine, everything was fine. I could sleep now. This was the day her story began, so mine could end now.

‘Once upon a time’, someone would say one day, ‘a princess was born’.

“…she’s bleeding out.” I heard.

The last thought I managed was one last plea to God: I hope they’re not talking about Victoria. Please let her be okay.

This was before I knew they were talking about me.
Harry had his eyes closed as he rested his head over his arm on my bed, his hand lightly hanging on to mine. I stared around at the room; the chest by the bathroom door was covered with flowers and there were some pink balloons tied to one of the bouquets – they read ‘it’s a girl!’ Almost absentmindedly, I realized what a good room that was – spacious, well lit, warm, well decorated. The large window by my left had a view of the building next door and I could see the sky was a light shade of blue sprinkled with the usual London clouds.

My eyes found the television hanging from the ceiling; it was on mute, but on, on CNN, and the clock in the lower corner of the image read 06:22am. The newscasters were moving their lips, thought I couldn’t hear what they were saying. The caption under the image read ‘Royal baby: Duchess of Clarence admitted to Saint Mary’s Hospital for preterm labor’. The image changed and they suddenly showed a screenshot of twitter’s trending topics – I could make out the words ‘Jenifer Silva’, ‘royal baby’, ‘Clarence baby’ and ‘Duchess of Clarence’. The screenshot gave room for a corresponded, standing in front of what I recognized as the Lindo Wing. I could see the crowd around him, reporters, photographers and the usual, cheery well-wishers, all dressed in the colors of the British flag and holding baby onesies. One woman held two signs, pink and blue, that read ‘it’s a boy!’ and ‘it’s a girl!’, probably waiting for the moment she would know which was true.

Slowly, I started remembering the torturous past events that led me to that bed. The contractions too soon; Harry far away; Edward who knew we had faked the beginning of our relationship… and Lime. I remembered the pressure in my abdomen and the high-pitched crying, and with a painful knot on my throat, I remembered Lime now had a name: Victoria.

With my heart constrict, I squeezed Harry’s hand, feeling myself be filled with worry.

“Harry!” I called. “Harry!”

He took in a deep breath, and rose up in a hurry, looking around anxiously before his eyes settled in mine.

“Hi.” He smiled, worriedly. “Hi.”

“Victoria?”

He smiled a little more comfortably at the name, leaning closer to cup my face with his hand.

“She’s fine. Nic-U. Nathan is with her.” He told me. “How are you? Are you okay?”

I took in a deep breath, assessing that for the first time. “I can feel my legs again.”

He smiled. “That’s good.” Nodding, his smile faded as his eyes hovered my face. His fingers traced my cheek and I saw the anguish in his expression. “I was so worried.” He breathed, his pain causing my heart to start beating erratically again.

“What happened?” I asked, holding his hand on my cheek.

Harry sighed, suddenly seeming a lot older than his usual cheerful, childish personality would have anyone believe.
“Victoria was born… they were cleaning her… Then you-you went to sleep.” He closed his eyes, biting his lower lip. “They started moving faster around you, and they said I had to wait outside… they said you were bleeding out and next thing I know they’re kicking me out of the room.”

I turned my head to kiss his palm, which was holding my cheek.

“I thought-‘” he cleaned his throat. “I was so scared.”

I pulled him closer to me, and he sat on the bed so his arms could wrap around me tightly.

“I’m okay, though.” I said. “Right? I’m fine?”

“You’re fine,” He said. “Stella said something with your ulcer meant you had internal bleeding. But they fixed it.” I felt him snuggle his head on the crook of my neck, inhaling my sent as I still hanged on to his muscles for comfort.

“And Victoria?”

He leaned back, smiling happily now. “She’s so perfect, Jay. She’s… she’s beautiful!”

I felt my eyes watering as I had a painful realization. “I haven’t see her yet.”

Harry’s smile faded. “I know. You will! They’ll bring her soon, I think.”

But as much as I watched the door intently for the following several minutes, Victoria did not enter it. Edward did, though, along with Monica, Thomas and Clara.

“Hi!” Monica smiled, slightly tanned, hurrying to my bedside to hug me. “Are you okay? We came as soon as we heard!”

“You shouldn’t have cut your honeymoon short!”

“Are you kidding? We wouldn’t miss this.” Thomas replied.

“She’s so beautiful, Jay.” Monica told me. “She’s got so much hair, and this squishy little eyes-“

“And she’s so tiny!” Clara added. “I mean, I know she’s a baby, but she’s so small!”

“What does the press know?” I asked, looking at the TV, hoping I didn’t sound rude – I just couldn’t hear about my own daughter from everyone’s perspective anymore; I hated that I seemed to be the only one who hadn’t seen her yet.

“Last night as soon as you were taken to the O.R. we sent a press release informing the media you had been admitted to the hospital with signs of preterm labor and was undergoing an emergency C-section.” Edward explained.

“Everyone lost it!” Clara told me, wide-eyed. “CNN, BBC, they all stayed on a vigil all through the night hoping to have news, which was stupid, because they know if the baby is born after the Queen is asleep they won’t be told until after she is, in the morning when she woke up. Still, the news have been talking about nothing else since.”

“There’s the usual circus outside.” Thomas said. “A lot of people came to stay in front of the hospital, with signs and whatnot… praying, wishing you well.”

“And you’re four trending topics on twitter.” Monica added, with a grin. “Though that’s not news.”
“Your parents are about seven hours away.” Edward said. “And the Artchets should be here in five.”

“Taylor, Selena, Ophelia, Beezus, Alessa, they all called for news.” Harry smiled. “I told them you would call them as soon as you felt up to it, but I let them know they baby was born and is fine.”

“I thought no one could know before the Queen.” I said.

“I won’t tell them if you don’t.” He winked.

“The flowers are from the Earl and Countess of Wessex,” Thomas said, reading from a list on his phone, “the Duke of York, the Warrens, the Cambridges, the crown princely couple of Denmark, the Queen and King of Netherlands, and Jordan, and Spain… and a Portuguese card from the Queen of Sweden. There’s also balloons from Earl Spencer and a… Alexandra and Ethel. That’s all they’re identified as, though we don’t know who they are or why they’re in your list of friendly correspondents.”

“I’ll answer theirs first.” I told him, exchanging a smile with Harry.

“Okay.” Edward said, sighing. “I’m gonna go call the Queen. As soon as she is informed we have to release the statement for the media.”

“No.” Harry said. We all looked at him. “Call Granny, but we’ll wait to release the statement after Jen has met Victoria.”

I smiled, glad. I already felt excluded as they all had met the baby before me, I didn’t want to be in the same level as the press, too.

Harry sat by my side in the bed as our staff went over preparations about my hospital stay and everything else we needed to take of now the baby was born, like first portraits and announcements and such.

I laid my head on my husband’s shoulder, and held his hand. All I could think was that his hand had touched our daughter, and I hadn’t.

“Is she really too tiny?” I asked, whispery.

“The normal amount of tiny.” He said. “I mean, she’s premature, so she still has some growing to do, but Stella says she has no premature problems other than that. She’ll probably come home with us when you’re released.”

“Good. That’s good.” I looked at him. “Then why was she born early?”

He shrugged. “I think she was just really excited to meet us.” He smiled.

“Good morning, Your Royal Highness.” A nurse said, as he walked in. “How are you feeling today?”

He proceeded to check my vitals. “I’m good. Chilly.”

“That’s normal, the body is adjusting to the missing mass of the baby and the placenta.” He said. “Not to mention your extra blood lost. Are you hungry?”

“Not really.”

“Any pain?”
“Just slightly over here.” I touched my lower stomach, feeling the stitches where they had performed the C-section.

“That’s normal, too.” He told me. “Let’s get some food in you, alright?”

“I wanna see my daughter.”

He smiled. “Let’s get some food in you first-“

“No.” I told him, gathering the most demand I could. “I want to see my daughter. Now.”

He looked at me, realizing my tone, and exchanged a look with Harry, then with Edward and the others.

“Uhm. Okay. I’ll go-I’ll go ask the doctor what we can do.”

“Thank you.” I told him, feeling slightly guilty about being rude.

He made his way out, leaving behind a deafening silence.

“So…” Edward started. “For the portrait, I was thinking-“

“No.” I stopped him. “I don’t care. I don’t wanna know.”

“But-“

“Edward.” Harry warned.

“Okay.” Edward said, finally.

Monica cleared her throat. “So… I had Clara email your U.N. supervisor, they’ve officially put you on maternity leave, which means-“

“No.” I interrupted. “I don’t wanna talk about work. I don’t wanna hear about work. I’m not gonna do anything until they give me my daughter.” I looked at them. “Is that clear?”

The nodded, and we fell into silence again.

The door opened a while later, to reveal Stella. “Hello. How are we today, Jenifer?”

“Fine.” I told her. “Where’s my daughter?”

“She’s being bundled up and brought to you.” She told me, as she grabbed my chart where the nurse had written down my vitals. “Six pounds, seven ounces and a half. Not breathing complications.” She looked at us. “We did detect a little heart murmur, which we wanna keep an eye on, but nothing to be too concerned about. So you wanna know what happened after she was born?”

“Harry told me.”

“Kind of.” He told her.

“Do you want me to explain better?”

“I want my daughter.”

She smiled. “Of course. I’m going to go see what’s taking so long.”
She left, and Edward and the others took seats in the couch and chairs around, giving us some
space. Harry held on to my hand, strongly, caressing it with his thumb. He didn’t say anything, and
I didn’t either; all I could think was of my little Lime baby who I still hadn’t seen. Of course I
believed them when they said she was fine, she was healthy, she was perfect; but I needed to see
her. Touch her. Hold her. My heart was still beating erratically and heavily in my chest, as it was
since I knew there was something wrong before I went into labor. I just needed my baby; I just
needed to make sure she was safely in my arms.

The door was opened again, and Stella came in. I was just about to look away, bored to see it still
wasn’t my daughter, when I realized she was pushing a little cart before her. The acrylic little cot
was covered in a thin mattress, and in the middle of it I could see a bundle of pink blankets where
our baby laid quietly.

My eyes didn’t leave her from the minute they found her. Stella wheeled her till the side of my bed,
and carefully placed her hands under her tiny little body to lift her up and give her to me.

I felt… unprepared. Before I knew what was happening, I had a baby in my arms. A tiny, little, soft
baby wrapped up in an issue hospital pink blanket. She had big cheeks, red lips, pinkish skin and a
mess of dark, jet black hair. Her nose was delicate and tiny, her eyes were tightly closed and her
face was squished as she slept. Her ears were barely bigger than my nails; her entire head fit in the
palm of my hand. She was light, but her weight, her malleable, little body bended itself to fit in my
unprepared arms and it made me realize just how real she was.

I had my mouth opened in shock, and my eyes cluttering with tears as I tried to breathe deeply and
slowly so I wouldn’t scare her.

“Am –“ I started, and stopped to gulp so I would try not to cry. “Am I doing this right?”

Monica walked towards me, slowly, and touched my elbow. “Raise this a little more, there you go,
so you support her head, remember she doesn’t have neck muscles yet.”

I held Victoria with one arm and raised the other to touch her cheeks delicately. They were the
softest skin I had ever touched, and slightly warm under my finger.

“She’s real.” I breathed, watching a tear wet her blanket, knowing I was crying and not caring
about the others watching me. “She’s here.”

Harry passed an arm around me and leaned closer, resting his head chin on my shoulder to look at
Victoria better. He let out a long sigh, smiling.

“I’m so happy she looks like you.” He said.

“Oh, she’s not ginger.” I realized, sadly. “I wanted her to be ginger.”

He rolled his eyes. “It’s probably for the best.”

“We’ll just have to have another one.” I teased. “I wanna have a ginger baby, it’s the only reason I
married you.”

He grinned. “Okay. Let’s have another one.”

Stella cleared her throat. “As your obstetrician it is my professional duty to warn you that it is best
to wait eighteen months to get pregnant again.”

We giggled. “We’re just kidding, Stella.”
“Right.” Clara scorned. “Look at you two. You’ll be having another one in no time.”

“Can you blame us?” Harry asked. “Look at her. We make good babies.”

“We do.” I agree. “She’s gorgeous.”

“And when you’re that good at something it’s only fair to keep doing it.” Harry concluded, making me laugh.

“I guess that solves that deal we made before getting engaged.” I reminded him. “About having the first, and deciding if we wanted more.”

“Oh, yes.” He smiled, and took his eyes from Victoria to look at me. “Five?”

“Five.” I agreed.

“Oh, God.” Stella mumbled. “Please. Eighteen months.”

“We’ll see what we can do.” I teased, and the others laughed. “Okay.” I breathed, feeling much better than I had before. “Now let’s get to work.”

As soon as the Queen and Prince Philip and the Prince of Wales had been told about the birth, Edward started drafting the press release to be sent to the media. Through the Kensington Palace twitter account, at exactly eight in the morning of that 8th of May, the world was informed that ‘Her Royal Highness The Duchess of Clarence was safely delivered of a daughter at 2:13am’ – we figured they didn’t need to know about the ‘almost bleeding out’ part.

The traditional formal bulletin announcing the birth was drafted in an office in the hospital and sent by car to Buckingham Palace along with the tweet, and soon enough it was placed on an easel by the gates of the Palace, where a crowd of people had gathered to take pictures of it.

The bells of Saint Paul’s Cathedral, Westminster Abbey and many other churches across the country ringed loud to celebrate and the London Eye, the Big Ben, the Queen Victoria monument in front of the palace, as well as the Redeemer Christ in Rio and the Empire State Building in New York, as well as other landmarks in the commonwealth countries were all illuminated in pink in honor of the new royal baby.

In the TV, we watched as President Clinton, President Genro, of Brasil, and the prime ministers of the UK, New Zealand, Canada and Australia all released formal statements congratulating us on the birth of our first daughter.

“See that handsome man, Victoria?” Harry asked the baby when the afternoon news showed a video Justin Trudeau had released on Facebook about us. “He was almost your father.”

I gave him a sarcastic, stern look, before shrugging. “I wish.”

I laughed as he looked at me with utter outrage.

“Commemorative coins are being issued by the Royal Mint, Royal Canadian Mint, and Royal Australian Mint.” Monica informed us. “They need a photo as soon as possible.”

“Everyone wants a photo, they’ll just have to wait until they’re home.” Edward told her.

Unfortunately, because she was born prematurely through a C-section, both Victoria and I still had
a few days at the hospital to go. We convinced Stella to arrange so that she could stay in the room with me, instead of NIC-U, and Harry finally accepted to go home that night, when I told him I needed him to bring me some stuff.

I watched through Sky News on TV as the crowds went wild at the sight of him, and he waved at them as he made his way to the car. After he came back, with an overnight bag for himself and me, Thomas went outside to tell the media we would be staying in the hospital a bit longer.

I didn’t let Victoria out of my arms until I couldn’t stay away anymore that night, when I finally allowed a nurse to place her back in her little hospital cot after I had nursed her to sleep after feeding her for the first time.

I watched her face, tirelessly, memorizing every inch of it: every creek and dent, every color and curve. I counted her fingers and toes and caressed her thin brows gently. I held her hand as she wrapped her little fingers around my thumb, surprisingly strongly for such a small baby. I watched, in distress, as her face twisted in agony when she cried and with my heart on my throat, I learned the right way to check her diaper and change her. I rocked her gently after feeding her, and realized I could watch her forever.

—

My parents were the first to come by the following morning. Clara had helped me into the bathroom for a shower, and she blow dried my hair and helped me chose comfortable clothes that were more sociable than the hospital gown I had been wearing before.

Victoria was awake when they got there; barely five minutes before they walked in, Harry and me had been freaking out about her eyes being opened for the first time. As she was still too young, they were still too dark for the color to be distinguishable, but we were almost sure they were blue. I was almost crying at the thought that my baby girl would grow up to have her dad’s beautiful turquoise eyes - the ones he had gotten from his mother - when the door was opened and my own mother poked her head inside.

Something happened when I saw her that time; I knew I had been crying uncontrollably for the past thirty five hours, but when I saw my mother, as I held my own daughter in my arms, every tear I had been able to hold into me came fluttering out.

Mom didn’t say anything as she walked to us; she covered her mouth with her hands, watching Victoria intently as she approached, before laying a kiss in my forehead and leaning in to look at her granddaughter.

Dad was different; he arrived with his signature big smile, hurrying to hug Harry warmly, loudly greeting all of us in the room at the same time, cracking jokes and staring at me lovingly.

“Look at my granddaughter,” he said, smiling. “Oh, she’s so beautiful.”

“I know.” I whispered. Looking at my mother, I told her the only thing I could think of. “I love you.”

There was no secret about it. I hadn’t understood until that very moment what love was. I loved Harry, and I loved my family, and I loved my friends, but this very specific type of love, the type of love that made my parents risk everything, including their marriage, to try and find a better life for us in America, this type of love had been a mystery to me until I held Victoria in my arms.

As I did, as she wiggled her little body trying to find a comfortable position, I suddenly knew how
hard it had been for them – my parents -, to risk what they did, to let me go into acting, to let me stay in New York after moving back to Brazil. I suddenly knew how hard it must have been for them to be so far away, reading the terrible news about me in tabloids as I spiraled out of control. I knew how much it must have hurt them when I told them about Adam, knowing I hadn’t felt comfortable to do it beforehand.

As selfish as that was, it wasn’t until I held my daughter in my arms that I understood just how much they loved me, and suddenly everything I had done in my life seemed inappropriate. It seemed too little, too ungrateful. All I could do was look at them, tell them I loved them, and hope they knew I meant it.

—

Charles and Camilla visited us next, after lunch, after my parents went back to our Kensington apartment vowing to finish setting up everything that we still hadn’t done for when we brought the baby back home the following day.

Charles and Camilla were happy about the name we chose, and teasingly happy that Victoria wasn’t ginger, something Harry could only begrudgingly agree with.

Janine and Richard were next, and I could only smile when Richard was the first of us to cry upon seeing Victoria for the first time, and even more when he held her in his arms.

It was another twenty-four hours before they finally allowed us to go home.

Victoria was wearing a white, knitted wool set of pants and sweater – the set Alexandra had made herself -, with a white, knitted Saks bonnet which was a gift from Charles and Camilla. We wrapped her in the same knitted white blanket I had worn home as a baby, which had been handmade by my grandmother then, and was now safely keeping my baby warm.

Clara did my hair, curling the ends, and I did my own makeup, and wore a long-sleeved, red, loose knee-length dress, as a way of honoring Harry’s mother, who had worn the same color when taking him home from that very hospital.

We followed our security team and staff down the elevator to the ground floor, making sure Victoria was okay, and making sure we weren’t walking too fast so she would remain calmly asleep through her first press appearance.

“So here’s the plan,” Edward said, “You step out, you smile around, wave at the crowd, pause so the press can photograph you, then step down to the street so the people at the far ends of the sidewalk can see you. Then you give the baby to Harry so the press has that picture, did you think about answering questions?”

“We’re not gonna do that.” I told him.

“Will and Kate did it with George.” He argued.

“Yeah, and then they didn’t with Charlie.” I replied.

“And we’re just gonna let her with Jen the whole time.” Harry added. “So she doesn’t wake up.”

“No, it’s fine.” I told him. “If the noise doesn’t wake her up it won’t be the moving that does.”

“I think it’s safer to just let her be.” He insisted.
I stopped walking, and squinted my eyes at him, noticing something very little about the way he had said the word safer. I remembered that Victoria had been in my arms since she was first brought to my room, and had slept in her cob, only to come back to me when she needed to eat. The only other people I saw her with were my parents and Charles, and Monica when I went to change.

“Did you hold her?”

Harry looked at me. “What?”

“Did you hold her?” I repeated. “After the birth, after they took her to the NIC-U, when I was still recovering, or anytime, really, since she was born… did you hold her?”

Harry opened his mouth, considering my question, and looked around before shrugging.

“I mean… not really, I think.”

“Harry.”

“I just-“ he stuttered, walking closer to me. He stopped, looking around at our friends, “Can we have a moment, please?” he waited until the others were slightly out of earshot before continuing. “I just don’t wanna… you know, hurt her.”

“Why would you hurt her?”

“I don’t know! She’s so tiny!”

“Harry…” I smiled. “You-you always hold kids! Your nephew, my nephew, your niece, your goddaughters, my godson, your little cousins, every single kids who come see us in engagements! You don’t just hold them, you throw them around and play with them!”

“Yes, but it’s different!” he argued. He sighed, seeming overwhelmed as he looked at Victoria. He slowly raised his hand to touch her head over her bonnet. “She’s… she’s just so…”

I watched the love in his eyes, the love that I had spent the last few months watching grow there, the love I had watched burn alive the moment she had been born, and couldn’t help but smile and fall, once again, in love with him.

“Hold her.” I told him.

“I will.” He assured. “At home. I’ll sit in the couch, or in bed, put a bunch of pillows under my arms to make sure she’s safe, and-ooh! Oh! Ok-aay!” I took a step forward, and placed Victoria in his chest, trusting he would hold her, as he quickly, and a little desperately, did. “Okay. Okay. Okay.”

I bit a lip to avoid a grin watching as he so nervously wrapped his arms around her. He had unconsciously bent his knees and lowered his neck, and was now looking very stiff.

“Okay.” He repeated, breathlessly. “Okay. We’re doing this. Okay.”

“You’re okay?”

“Yes. I’m fine. I’m doing it. I’m holding her.”
“Yes, you are.” I smiled, raising his elbow under her a little. “Like that, that’s right.”

“Is that okay?”

“Yep, you’re fine. You’re doing great.”

“Okay.”

“Let’s go.”

“Okay.”

He didn’t move – not at first. He very slowly turned his body back to the end of the hallway where we were headed and took a gentle step, still looking stiff and with his shoulders and neck ducked.

“Harry!” I laughed. “Relax, straighten up! Come on.” I pulled his shoulders back, and he took a deep breath as he tried to stop looking so nervous. “Okay, breathe. Come on, you’re doing fine!” He continued to walk with me towards the doors, agonizingly slowly. “You can pick up the pace a bit.”

“I’m walking at a very reasonable pace, Jenifer, do not rush me.” He said, making me giggle.

Finally, they opened the doors for us, and the roar of the crowd quickly grew deafening as they saw us turn the corner and step out.

It wasn’t a large street the one in front of the Lindo Wing, and one side of it had been completely taken over by people. The first several meters in front of the doors were packed with photographers and correspondents from several news outlets. By both their sides, covering almost all the space in the large sidewalk until the end of the block, there were well-wishers, all smiling and waving, pointing their cellphones up at us, and waving push toys and flowers or signs, some dressed with the colors of the British flag, some waving actual British flags and a few Brazilian ones.

“Oh, God.” Harry let out, as we watched them, smiling, for a few seconds.

I knew what his ‘oh, God’ meant. It meant the sudden realization that this is what Victoria’s future looked like. Suddenly, as he watched this, he knew she would have a very similar upbringing to his: being followed by paparazzi, being spotted by well-wishers, being both hailed and hated for being born a princess. The cameras in front of us would not be in this street in just under a few hours, but wherever she went for the rest of her life, they would be there; ready to judge her outfit, her hair, her appearance, her choices; ready to deem her worthy or not of her position.

We both looked at her, sleeping peacefully in daddy’s arms, unaware of the turmoil her life would be; both of us wondered if there was anything we could do about it. If there was anything we wouldn’t do to protect her.

Chapter End Notes

Okay. So…. next chapter is the last one. And Chapter 100 is the epilogue. I’m starting to feel anxious about it. It now feels actually like its ending, despite the fact I wrote this ending a while ago. Also my academic life in college is almost over so I’m a mess over here. I chose Victoria’s name after an anon suggested it from all the names Jen and Harry considered in the Abu Dhabi chapter after she says I love you, and I hope
you’ll life it. I don’t know what else to say here except I can’t believe this story is ending and I can’t believe it lasted this long. And I can’t believe people read it. I’m so overwhelmed.

Thank you for reading it so far and I truly hope I have entertained you!

Next chapter: The world meets Victoria, Jen and Harry settle into parenthood, Christen her, and they make plans for the future.

Thanks for coming into this journey with me. I’m getting emotional
It was a loving image: nervously, Harry took a very gentle step forward, making sure he knew where the steps were, before climbing down them. After what looked like a long time, we managed to reach the sidewalk of the Lindo Wing.

“We did it!” He smiled, proudly, making me giggle.

As we seemed to approach, the press started going a bit more insane, thinking we would give them an interview. Instead, we just stared around, smiling and waving at the very loving people who had been there for so many days now. Some of them had been camping there even before I was admitted, a lot of them spent those three days there with us. The reporters were doing what they were paid to do, but those people, they were just excited to see us; they were just happy for us; they just wanted to congratulate us for our baby. They were, truly, who we wanted to see.

“Oh, God.” Harry sighed, emotional, looking up. “I cannot cry in front of all these people.”

I giggled, passing an arm lovingly in around his back.

“A little girl has a toy.” I told Harry, pointing at a little girl a bit after the reporters, who was frantically waving what looked like a teddy.

I gave Harry a look, as the girl was so adorably smiling at us, and he knew what I meant.

“Okay.” He said, and started following me as we walked towards her.

We avoided giving too much attention to the press, who now tried to not only turn their heavy cameras into the direction we walked, but also walk closer to where we were going.

The little girl smiled brighter and broader when she realized I was looking at her.

“Hi.” I said. “Is that for the baby?” I asked, looking at what I could now see was a ballerina bunny plush toy.

She nodded enthusiastically as she raised the bunny higher, and I walked closer to get it. “Thank you so much! That is so nice of you! Does she have a name?” I asked, about the bunny. The little girl blushed as she shrugged, smiling timidly. “Maybe we’ll let the baby chose the name then?” She nodded and I smiled. “Thank you so much!”

“Your Royal Highness!”

“Jenifer!”

Just as I started walking away, having left Harry a few steps behind, the other people around called. They waved more toys, flowers and even onesies at us, and since I was already there, it would just be rude not to talk to them as well. So I walked to them, one by one, grabbing their flowers, toys, letters, balloons and even handmade knitted onesies.

“You made this?” I asked a lady, who handed me a white onesie with the red stripes of the English flag across. “It’s beautiful, thank you!”
“How are you?” Someone asked.
“I’m good, thank you.” I smiled. “A bit tired, but good, and very happy.”

“Was the birth difficult?”

I looked at Harry, now a little closer, who smiled. “It was overwhelming, I think.” He told them. “But safe, thankfully.”

“She’s beautiful!” an old man told us.

“Thank you!” I smiled.

“She looks like her mother, thankfully.” Harry teased, making them chuckle.

“Is she not ginger?!” A girl asked.

“She’s not.” He told her. “She has dark hair, like her mother.”

“And what’s her name, Prince Harry?” an old lady asked, and Harry looked at me.

We exchanged a smile, knowing both that the press, though far, could hear us, and that we couldn’t lie to these nice people who not only camped outside the hospital, but also brought us gifts.

Harry smiled, after I nodded slightly to him, and looked at the old lady who had asked the question.

“Her name is Victoria.”

—

The months that followed were some of the most overwhelming we had ever had. As soon as the Queen and Prince Philip came to see us, on the same day we brought Victoria home, I tweeted her chosen names, letting everyone know that her full name was Victoria Diana Alexandra – after Harry’s mother and the Queen’s middle name.

“I still think Philippa would have been a good choice.” Prince Philip joked, that afternoon, when they came to meet her.

“Maybe the next one.” I told him, with a smile.

“Already thinking of the next one, are you?” he replied, grinning.

“Of course.” I returned. “I won’t leave your grandson alone until he knocks me up again.”

He laughed, delighted, and I smiled at the color taking over his cheeks.

Sitting in the couch beside Harry, the Queen had Victoria in her arms, rocking her slightly as wiggled her little arms around, now awake. She had never looked less like a Queen and more like a great-grandmother than in the moment, with our baby in her lap, as she made silly faces to distract her.

“Victoria, huh?!” She asked. “I like it. Strong name. Strong legacy to live up to.” I exchanged a smile with Harry. “She has your mother’s eyes.”

“I know.” Harry smiled. “She would have loved her.”
“Yes, indeed.”

“And you’re giving her titles, of course?” Prince Philip asked.

“If you agree.” Harry told them.

“Why, yes, of course.” His grandmother agreed. “Granddaughter of a future king, that’s her birthright.”

“Excuse me, ma-am?” the Queen’s aide came by, “The Prime Minister phoned, he’s already heading to the palace.”

“Oh, yes.” The Queen agreed. “I have a meeting with the Prime Minister.”

Harry held Victoria from her, and they stood up to leave.

“You’ll come up north for the summer?” Prince Philip asked.

“Yes, we’ll be heading to Norfolk at the end of the week.” I told them.

“Good.” The Queen said. “Bring her to Sandringham to see us, we have a present.”

“Another one?” I asked, referring to the pink teddy bear they had brought with them. “You’ll spoil her, ma-am.”

“Hopefully, yes. That’s the goal.” She grinned. “It’s all a grandparent can do, dear.”

“It’s a horse.” Philip told me, whispery, though a lot louder than he probably realized.

“Isn’t she a bit young to get a horse, granny?” Harry asked.

His grandmother smiled as she left.

“You’re never too young to get a horse, dear.”

My brother, Livia and Arthur arrived that night, and they had dinner with us, my parents, and Will and Kate, who brought George and Charlie to meet their first cousin.

“Look, that’s your cousin.” Kate told Charlotte, as she held her up so she could see Victoria inside the crib. “Isn’t she beautiful?”

“She’s pretty.” Charlie agreed. “And small.”

“Yes, she’s very small, which is why we’ll be careful with her, okay?” Will told them, and they nodded.

“When can she play with us?” George asked.

“You’ll play with her?” Kate asked him. “You won’t even let your sister play with you.”

“Charlie doesn’t know how to play.” He replied.

“Yes, I do!” His sister replied.

“No, you don’t know how to drive the car!” He returned, referring to the child-sized toy car they
had, which drove around with some small speed, like a real car.

“You don’t teach me!” Charlie cried.

“You have a car?!” Arthur asked, impressed.

“Yes!” George told him, excited. “I’ll show you!”

They both ran out of the room in seconds.

“George!” Will shouted after them. “Ask Arthur’s mom or dad if he can go, first.”

“I’m sure she’ll play with you, Charlie.” I told the little one, who still looked a bit sad after her brother left.

“Will she like to play dolls?” she asked.

“Of course!” I told her. “She’ll love it.”

“Okay.” She smiled.

“They look a bit alike.” Kate noticed. “The dark hair and clear eyes. Except Charlie’s are more greenish, like mine.”

“Her hair is more to the brown side, too. I think Victoria will have black hair, like mine.”

“I think we all know what’s more important here.” Will said. “She’s not ginger! Good for her!”

We laughed, and as if the tiniest of noises set it off, Victoria started crying.

“It’s okay, it’s okay, uncle Will didn’t mean it!” Harry teased as he picked her up.

“Oh, look at that. Uncle Will.” William grinned. “I was starting to think I was never going to hear that.”

“Want me to take her? Maybe she’s hungry.” I told Harry.

“She just ate, I think she just wants a hug.” He replied, touching her head with his cheek.

“... I’m never getting her back, am I?” I asked, smiling, and he chuckled.

“I don’t think so, no.”

“Will...” Kate sighed, hugging her husband by the waist.

“Yes?”

“I want another baby.”

We laughed.

“Okay.” William said. “Let’s make another one.”

—

We drove up to Norfolk at the end of that first week, and William and Kate drove up with their kids a few days later, after they were done with some of their engagements for the summer. We spent
the months of May and June falling into a new routine; getting to know Victoria, her needs, her wants, her ways to communicate.

My parents helped us adapt, and they left after a couple of weeks promising to come back for Victoria’s christening. Over the following weeks, Taylor, Selena, Orlando, Alli, Alex and George, Bee and Kit, and all of our friends came by to meet Victoria – and our new house, that most of them hadn’t seen yet.

Victoria was a calm child, as sweet as they came; she was curious and just slightly fussy when we didn’t allow her to discover things on her own. We released her first portraits late that month, and spent the following weeks enjoying the summer in Norfolk taking her out and allowing her to discover the garden as Vodka ran excitedly around us.

Every day was something new – the way she fell asleep, the way she smiled, the way she looked when we could tell she was pooping – we discovered all the new sides of her every day. We started to identify her cries, and be able to tell what she wanted, and we quickly realized what our parenting model was: as surprising as that was, Harry was the worrier one.

As much as we had prepared for the contrary, I was a lot more willing to allow Victoria to be her own; I was a lot more prepared to trust her strength and survival skills than Harry. After I had made him hold her for the first time, he barely ever let anyone do it, and it quickly became clear it was because he didn’t think others would do it right. He protected and pampered her and shot me a worried glance every time she cried.

My theory was that I was more comfortable letting her be because I had actually made her. She had grown inside of me, I knew what she was made of; I believed in her resilience. Harry worried about everything: he didn’t want to let her sleep in her room alone, he didn’t want to use anything that wasn’t organic, and when it was time to start introducing foods other than breast milk, he never agreed with buying the industrialized baby food, but rather, found out how to make it. As in from scratch, and that’s all she ate.

About the time Victoria was two months old, we both started going back to work. As hard as it was to forgive ourselves for leaving Victoria at home with her nanny, Harry had missed that year’s Invictus Games, because it had happened right after she was born, and he needed to quickly start leading the meetings to prepare the next one.

I picked my second patronage, a center which helped refugee children adapt to life in England, providing them and their families with language courses and shelter, and stated preparing our work together, as well as diving right back into the U.N., where we were now preparing the launch of a volunteer shelter website for refugees across Europe.

The summer wasn’t spent entirely on work – thought we did attend, for the second time together, Royal Ascot and the Trooping the Colour -, it was also a time for family celebrations.

Harry’s cousin, Beatrice, had gotten engaged at the beginning of that year and, in that month of July, we attended her wedding to her longtime boyfriend Dave Clark. Because she was far lower on the succession line, Bea managed to get a private wedding for herself, though it did create quite a stir in England.

The streets leading up to Windsor Castle were filled with people, and the press had come to watch us arrive in front of the Saint George’s Chapel. For that occasion, I wore a green and white, floral Oscar de la Renta dress with a white fascinator and heels, and soon enough Princess Beatrice of York was no more – she became Mrs. Beatrice Clark.
As if juggling the two jobs plus parenthood wasn’t enough, Kate and I started working together in another project: we called it ‘[CO]nsious’, and it was a joint effort to get women pledging to avoid using any beauty products which unnecessarily harmed animals. Our belief, which was what the result of our research showed, was that though there were other ways of testing cosmetics, companies still tested in animals, not even necessarily because it was cheaper, but it because it was easier. Vowing to avoid these products meant giving them a reason to adapt their producing methods, and it included also avoiding – as we already did – legitimate leather and fur. This meant both Kate and I publicly announced we would be avoiding most makeup products, including the big ones like MAC, which in itself was hard to do, but felt so much more important now that I had a daughter.

I wanted to set up an example for Victoria; having her in my life made me want to spend hours just watching her sleep, but it also gave an overwhelming drive to do more than I ever had before. Kate and I released a website and a phone app to follow [CO]nsious, which helped anyone see what brands tested in animals and which didn’t, and offered an easy way for people to share their own pledge to make the conscious choice. Quickly, the app and the initiative went viral, and we started not only reaching out to other public women and celebrities to do the same and promote the idea, but we also made serious plans to start lobbying for meeting with big cosmetic companies to be able to talk to them about going conscious.

In the middle of this new endeavor, however, we hit pause to drive up again to Norfolk, for Victoria’s christening. We decided to baptize her in the same church we attended Christmas service, St. Mary Magdalene, where Harry’s mother – and more recently, Charlotte - had also been christened.

My parents, the Artchets, Harry’s family, and some of our friends came at our invitation, and we chose, as Victoria’s godparents, Richard, Janine, Monica – my choices -, and Edward, Natasha, and Peter – Harry’s choices.

The public filled the street to the church as if it was Christmas morning, probably even more enjoying that it wasn’t as cold in August. We walked to Church after everyone, smiling and saying hello as we did, to the same loving people who always made sure to come to let us know they were happy for us, a sight which never ceased to fill my heart with overwhelming warmth.

I wore a cream dress for the christening, with a lace embroidered sweater, the same shade as the traditional gown Victoria wore. From my ears hung the yellow diamond drop earrings Harry had gotten me as a push present. In her head, Victoria sported her first headpiece, a light cream bow.

After we had all entered the church, including the Queen and Prince Philip – who kept making silly faces Victoria’s way to ease her mood -, the vicar started the service by welcoming us all and talking about the meaning of a christening ceremony. After the liturgy, we gathered at the front with the godparents, when the vicar addressed us:

“Parents and godparents, the Church receives Victoria with joy.” He smiled. “Today we are trusting God for her growth in faith. Will you pray for her, draw her by your example into the community of faith, and walk with her in the way of Christ?”

Our friends all answered, together: “With the help of God, we will.”

“In baptism this child begins her journey in faith. You speak for her today. Will you care for her, and help her take her place within the life and worship of Christ’s Church?”

Again, together, they said: “With the help of God, we will.”
“Christ claims you for his own. Receive the sign of his cross.” Said the vicar as he lit a large candle, and made the sign of the cross in Victoria.

At a distance, I could hear a faint snifflle, and I knew my mother was crying, which made me smile.

“Praise God who made heaven and earth,” said the vicar.

“Who keeps his promise for ever.” We, the congregation, answered in unison.

“Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God.”

“It is right to give thanks and praise.” We said.

As it usually happened since she had been born, I couldn’t stop looking at her. Victoria looked serenely curious, as she did, her now big, blue eyes hovering her surroundings attentively. I was so busy admiring her I almost didn’t hear the vicar call us to approach the baptism font.

“Victoria,” he said, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

I leaned her over the font, and carefully avoiding her bow - which I was grateful for, since it was Louis Vuitton -, he poured water in her dark, black hair.

After the prayers and the hymns, the vicar handed Harry and me a candle, which he lit, and looking at our daughter, said:

“Shine as a light in the world to the glory of God.”

And we all, with smiles on our faces and happiness in our hearts, uttered: “Amen.”

—

Parenting didn’t solve all my problems; I was still an anxious mess most of the time, and for the years that followed I would continue to be an overthinking, control freak. I never learned to slow down, and I never learned to cook, though for Victoria’s sake, I did learn how to cook well enough to keep her alive. We worked from home as much as we could, so we could be with her, and when the time came, we took her with us for our first royal tour abroad, where she dazzled the world as much as she dazzled us.

It was only when she was around that, for Harry’s joy, I learned how truly magical Christmas could be. When Victoria was around, everything felt magical, everything felt special, even the holyday that I had once hated, and which I now looked forward to every year, just because of the way Victoria’s eyes beamed when she saw Christmas lights.

Though I went on to write op-ed pieces about gender neutral parenting, ending child marriages in low-income countries, and making good choices to guarantee equality for children in the future, I continued to be a broken mess.

From time to time, I still needed to lock myself in the bathroom to cry alone because everything felt too overwhelming. Whenever the press wrote a ridiculous article about how I was doing everything wrong, all I could think was that it would be Victoria they would be attacking one day. It would be her that they would follow at night when she tried to have fun with her friends; it would be her that they slut-shame in the covers of their magazines; it would be her that they would link to every single boy she crossed paths with, and that broke my heart more than any ex-boyfriend ever could.
Though we did our best to protect her, to guarantee her privacy, to shelter her from the unfair craziness we brought her into, we both knew more than well that there would be very little we could do as time passed.

When she cried, in the middle of most nights, after the first exhausted, desperate sigh, I would thank God all the way to her room as I heard her; the crying, the loud sound that disrupted our home meant she was alive. It meant she was fighting. It meant that like we did, she wouldn’t be stopped.

The habit we had developed of singing to her when she was in the womb never died. After nursing her, or changing her, that’s always how we rocked her to sleep – by singing.

“When your tears are spent on your last pretense, and your tired eyes refuse to close and sleep in your defense.”

More than just singing, we made her promises. We picked the words carefully, knowing there were very important things she needed to know, she needed to remember.

“When it’s in your spine like you’ve walked for miles, and the only thing you want is just to be still for a while. If your heart wears thin I will hold you up, and I will hide you when it gets too much… I’ll be right beside you… I’ll be right beside you.”

I cradled her in the crook of my neck, feeling her soft cheek rest against my collarbone, and sang the words that I would keep repeating to her whenever she needed them.

“When you’re overwhelmed and you’ve lost your breath, when the space between the things you know is blurry nonetheless. When you try to speak, but you make no sound, and the words you want are out of reach but they’ve never been so loud…”

The most terrifying thing we knew was that Victoria would hurt. We couldn’t stop her from it, we couldn’t shield her from it. She would probably be running from the paparazzi for her entire life, and she would probably have her heart broken a number of times. We couldn’t stop her from dating bad guys or girls who would only approach for who she was, or for her looks. We couldn’t stop her from falling in love with people who didn’t deserve her, and my little blue-eyed Lime would probably still cry many tears that we would not be able to avoid.

“If your heart wears thin I will hold you up, and I will hide you when it gets too much, I’ll be right beside you, I’ll be right beside you, I will stay beside you… Nobody will break you…”

Because I knew how it felt to be broken, I knew how it would feel for her, and I knew I couldn’t promise to keep her unburnt and whole, but I knew I would try.

I knew I would teach her to stand up for herself, the way I had to find out on my own. I would have to teach her to speak louder when she was rudely interrupted, and I would have to teach her to only apologize when she actually did something wrong. I would teach her to spot creepy behavior in men and I would teach her to slap them in the face when they deserved it. I would teach my daughter the way home, so even when everything when wrong, she could always find her way back to Harry and me.

As I rocked us under the moon light in her bedroom that night, I suddenly, felt Harry’s arms around my waist, and he rested his head on my other shoulder as he danced with us.

“Trust me, trust in me. Don’t pull away…” He sang, laying a gentle kiss on my neck. “You sing, I’m bad at it.”
I smiled. “No, you’re not. I like it.”

“You have a Grammy.” He argued.

Grinning, I continued the song; our promise to our baby girl.

“Tears are spent on your last pretense, and your tired eyes refuse to close and sleep in your defense.”

I felt Harry take in a deep breath, inhaling the smell of my hair, and Victoria’s eyes started to flutter closed as she drifted into sleep.

“And if your heart wears thin,” I promised her, “I will hold you up, and I will hide you when it gets too much… I’ll be right beside you, nobody will break you.”

In silence, Harry and I stared off the window at the British starry night sky, with only Victoria’s soft, sleepy breathing filling the room.

“Let’s go to bed.” Harry whispered, his stubble and warm breath hitting my neck, sending chills all through me.

“But yet.” I replied, smiling at the baby in my arms, whom I loved more than I ever thought I could love anything. “We have time.”

We did – there was no rush anymore.

THE END*
*epilogue coming next week =)

Chapter End Notes

So………now what? Well, there’s MORE! Chapter 100 is the epilogue (you didn’t think I would come this far and NOT write a chapter 100 right?!?) and I still have a treat: I’ll post photos of all of Jen and Harry’s kids and texts straight from their fictitious wikipedia pages so you know who they grew up to be! I’m gonna post Chapter 100 next Friday, so thought this week I’ll post about each kid every couple of days so you get to know them like the world does before hearing the details from Jen’s POV. And I should also tell you I have some final things to say, but I won’t post that until Chapter 100 is out :) So… brace yourselves, we have a final week to get through. Meanwhile, let me know what you think of the ending? Love you.
EPILOGUE

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

I THINK WE DESERVE

A SOFT EPILOGUE, MY LOVE

WE ARE GOOD PEOPLE

AND WE’VE SUFFERED ENOUGH

After so many years, my brain was still accustomed to wake up at the slightest of noise. At first, my body knew it had to wake at the first light in the morning for my countless hours of work; then, even as I slept, my brain was scanning the house for noises of our children’s disrupted sleep. So that night, when I felt a sudden move in the bed, my eyes shot open to find Kevin had made his way up to us.

I sighed, staring at the dog, who quickly laid down and looked at me with flappy ears, as if pleading for me to let him stay.

“We both know if I let you stay I’ll have to let the others.” I whispered to him.

As if they had heard me, I suddenly heard the sound of paws in our hardwood floor as the other dogs made their way to the bed. Just as swiftly as Kevin had, Snuggles, Dora and Spiderman all jumped up on the bed and quietly found little spots to lay down in between Harry and me. Smiling at their cuteness, defeated, I just rested my head back in my pillow and pulled my eye-mask back.

It had been ten years since we had lost her, but I still missed Vodka every day. Dora had been the first to make her way into the family, when Vodka was still around. She was a big German Shepard that Victoria had wanted to name after her favorite cartoon character. A few years later, when Vodka had already left us, we adopted Snuggles.

He was a Pitbull rescue from a dogfight ring who just needed some love and care and quickly became the loveliest citizen of the house. He had been a gift to our other kids, who named him after his adorableness.

Victoria was three years old when the triplets were born – they had been the surprise that kept on giving, and we imagined would be the hardest thing we had ever had to do. We were right.

Victoria was too young to understand what the word triplets meant, or to understand that I was genetically predisposed to having multiple babies, but what she did understand was that one day she was an only child and in the next, she had two sisters and one brother.

Our oldest son, who had the same dark hair as Victoria and me, and my golden brown eyes, was very giggly. Victoria could say anything in a slightly different tone and he would laugh so hard he almost fell on his back – once he actually did. We named him Philip, in honor of the great-grandfather he and his sisters would never have memories of.

Prince Philip had passed away peacefully in his sleep just a couple of years before the triplets were born, of a heart condition. Though he was ninety-nine years old, his naughty smile and laughter remained the same, and so we were constantly forgetting he wasn’t going to live forever, and the
entire country was caught off guard at the news.

It was my first royal funeral, and I will always remember how suffocating the black dress felt around my body, and how heavy the headpiece weighed. I should have been used to it by then, but in truth, it was the pain in my heart making that day so uncomfortable; it was the knowledge I would never exchange whispery jokes with Harry’s grandfather, and the heartbreaking realization I had lost one of the only two people who mostly understood me.

We named our first son after him in the hopes that it would keep him close to us, even when he couldn’t be.

The other two twins were girls – one brunette like Philip, and the other ginger like her father. Our little girl with black hair had also the same golden brown eyes as her brother, but she looked much more delicate. She was sweeter and more loving, and just generally more sensitive. That little one we decided to name Elizabeth, though even in her name announcement we made clear that we would only ever refer to her as Lily – Harry’s mother’s favorite flower.

Our only ginger child had the same golden brown eyes as her siblings, and her personality was a lot more dramatic. We named her Mary, in honor of the main character in Harry’s mother’s favorite movie, It’s a Wonderful Life (although the press seemed to believe it was after Queen Mary). The name fit her well, because Princess Mary was quite contrary.

She was slightly possessive of everything – not only toys or books, but of attention. She enjoyed being admired and would scream very loudly when she thought she was being ignored; she would cry and demand to be heard until we managed to teach her that wasn’t the way to get what she wanted – which admittedly, took a while.

In private, we nicknamed Philip, Lily and Mary Giggles, Sweets and Moody, after their very distinctive personalities. Victoria was always lovingly called Lime.

They grew happy and loud in our big houses in London and Norfolk with our dogs and horses, dazzling us and our entire staff with their laughter and jokes. They grew around their cousin, George and Charlotte, who after Victoria was about one year old, also gained a new sibling: a little blonde sister Will and Kate had named Alice.

Their friends were always around to keep them company as well, Alli and George’s son Alex, Guy and Lizzy’s daughter Clarice, Natasha’s daughter Georgia, the Warrens’ Zalie and India and so many other babies that kept being popped in our circle of friends, and so our kids built their own group as they grew, together and as one big family.

Despite their age difference, George, Charlotte and Alice were always the best of friends to their younger cousins. Victoria, Charlotte and Alice, were specially close, and George and Philip grew to have a strong bond as for a long time they were the only boys amidst a sea of their sisters and girl cousins.

Queen Elizabeth kept the oath she made to Great Britain in her twenty-first birthday and ruled until her last living day, which came in 2026, when she was one hundred years-old. The triplets and Alice were far too young, but at seven years old, this was Victoria’s first funeral. We dressed her in black and laced a bow around her hair and she followed her cousins George and Charlotte to the Abbey as the well-behaved princess she was. The world cried the departure of Britain’s longest reigning monarch, and our family mourned the loss of the fiercest woman any of us had ever known.

Our sorrow was ended a couple of months later when Harry and I discovered we were expecting
yet another baby.

“Will you guys ever stop making babies?” William asked, cheekily, when we told the family the news.

“We had planned to stop after the triplets, but hey, shit happens.” Harry told him, smiling.

Little Princess Mary, quite contrary to how her sisters and brother felt, was extremely interested in my growing stomach. She was five years-old now, and could understand a lot more easily that there was a baby inside of my growing bump, which would come out at any point to play and live with us.

Lily and Victoria wanted a girl to dress up as a doll, and Philip wanted a boy because he was tired of being the only boy, but our little Mary just wanted to understand how the baby would grow and get to us. She put her ear to my belly every day, trying to hear her future sibling, and screamed in delight when she was the first to feel it kick. She incessantly asked us how the baby would come out until, attempting to give her as mature and truthful a response as we had planned to from the moment we were first pregnant, told her the most accurate truth we could gently master:

“Mummy will push the baby out of her pee-hole.” Harry told Mary one day.

Victoria was vaguely intrigued, Lily seemed disgusted and Philip just didn’t seem to care; but Mary could not stop thinking about it.

“Won’t it hurt?” She asked.

I sighed, a small smile tugging at my lips, and passed an arm over my only ginger child’s shoulders. “Just a little.”

“Then why do you do it?” Mary asked, intrigued.

“Remember last summer when we went up north and grandpa Charles took you guys and your cousins horse riding?”

Mary nodded, smiling. “We’re still riding a pony, but Vicky, Georgie and Charlie and Alice are on the big horsies now.”

“That’s true. Remember how Victoria fell three times, but instead of going back home she insisted on continuing until she could do it?”

“Yes.” Mary replied. “She had bruises on her legs at night.”

“She did.” I grinned. “And on the next day she went back to the big horse. Why do you think she did that?”

Mary shrugged. “She likes horses.”

“Yes, she does.” I smiled. “She likes them so much she would rather face the pain then stop riding. That’s sort of like mummies and their babies. The pain of bringing a baby out is big, but it only lasts a little. The love I have for you, Philip, Lily, Victoria, and the baby, will be forever.”

Mary was very confused. She did not understand how anyone could choose pain for anything. She was so confused she insisted that she wanted to come and watch the baby be born when it was time for it, which worried Harry and me more than anything had before.
“Mummy will scream and shout and probably look in pain for a long time. And I won’t be able to give you much attention until after a while.” I told her, patiently.

“It’s okay, mummy.” She said. “I wanna see.”

We made sure to explain where the baby would come from, and that it might not be a bright and joyful experience, but Mary, quite contrary, was firm in her wish, and so we promised she could come.

I finally got my chance at a natural birth at home that time, during which Mary stood nearby paying silent attention to all that happened.

“You okay, Mary?” I asked, again and again, with as gentle a voice I could muster through contractions.

“Yeah.” She nodded.

Mary stood behind the doctor when it was time for the baby to come out, even though we had told her she didn’t need to.

“You can wait outside, honey.” Harry told her.

“You promised I could stay!” She complained, and so we let her. “Won’t that hurt the baby’s head?” I heard her ask Stella, my obstetrician, just as I was crowning.

Stella looked confused at Mary, who didn’t seem bothered at the expression of pain in my face. “Babies are stronger than they seem.” She told her.

“How does the body know it has to push?” Mary asked, and through her work, Stella answered her questions as well as she could.

Though our little giggly Philip had campaigned whole-heartedly for a little brother to even the score a bit against his three sisters, it turns out our fifth child was another girl.

When her baby sister came out, Mary was the first to kiss her. She had blonde hair and brown eyes, like the triplets and me, and we named her Theodora. Mary looked after her like she was her nanny - we shouldn’t have been surprised when she informed us she wanted to be a doctor.

Theodora, whom we quickly nicknamed Theo, was christened just a few months before King Charles’ coronation, when he was 79 years-old. It was the start of a new era for Britain – and for the world. The world got Queen Camila and a new Princess of Wales: Kate, who shined in her role every day as she always had.

When Theo was 2, the triplets 7 and Victoria 10, and Harry and I left the kids with their nannies for a week long holiday back in Morgan Bay to celebrate our ten years anniversary. We stood in the same place we had kissed for the first time, and I realized I still loved him just as much.

We rescued our third dog that year, a half-breed whom they kids chose to call Spiderman, after their favorite superhero. That was the year the triplets started having proper riding lessons, like Victoria before them, and that was the year we started telling Victoria she could choose which kind of school she wanted to go to. As Harry had predicted, she wanted to go to a boarding school, because that’s where all her friends had gone and were going, and so she attended Marlborough College, like her cousins Charlie and Alice before her.

We always made sure our kids were exposed to enough art, music, theatre, and good books. We
read them all we could before bed, and told them about all the inspiring people they could mold their lives after. When it came time for them to choose, Philip decided to follow his dad’s footsteps and go to Eton, Mary went to Marlborough like her sister, and Lily took a different turn and informed us of her wish to attend military school, so she went to The Duke of York’s Military Academy, for the delight of her father and grandfather.

When I was forty-two years-old, and Theo was five, I surprised the world – and myself – with the news that Harry and I were expecting yet another baby.

“What will we call it?!” The kids asked, excitedly, when we told them.

“Well, I don’t know about you, but I’ve been referring to it as Last One.” I told them, who were too young to understand my joke.

Our youngest - and last - baby was named Vincent, after the codename I used for Harry when we were still secretly dating (of course to him all we ever said was that it was after Van Gogh). He had his brother’s (and mine) dark hair and Harry’s blue eyes, and grew up to become a mixture of all his older brother and sisters’ personalities: he was loud, caring, artistic, sporty and… yes, very loud. With so many kids in the house, the younger ones were bound to have to scream to be heard - but we never cared. We loved the chaos our army of six children brought.

Lily, our most sensitive and caring baby, decided to follow her father’s footsteps and go into the military; her high school graduation was emotional for Harry, who still couldn’t handle seeing her in her uniform without tearing up. Lily was accepted to Sandhurst academy, the same place where Harry had graduated, and afterwards wanted to learn to fly Apache helicopters just like her dad.

It was during their senior year that I was called to Eton to see Philip in the middle of the day. I drove there in a hurry with our security, as Harry was busy with work that day, and was informed by the school staff Philip had been taken to the see the nurse after a class with symptoms of a panic attack.

My handsome, dark-haired, golden-eyed boy had his father’s strong jaw and nose, and was looking exhausted and disheveled when I arrived to see him.

“I don’t feel like I can stop thinking about it.” He told me. “There’s so much to do. So much to study. So many people we can help with our position, and so little time. There are people that are dying and I can’t do anything. All they ask me to do is piles of homework I can’t seem to be able to finish. How am I supposed to find the time to do all of it?”

I didn’t have an answer – mostly because I was too busy feeling guilty – so I just hugged him. I had known it was possible that it would happen. Anxiety was, after all, genetic. And so as much as I had wished to give him nothing but strength, I ended up giving my boy my disorder.

“You just take one day at a time.” I told him. “And you try to remember that it’s okay to ask for help.”

Philip decided he wanted to help people – and so he planned on studying political sciences in college. Very similarly, Victoria had chosen to study law, to become a human rights lawyer - even as a teenager she had always had interest for my work with the UN.

And then there was Theodora. My little blonde was lively, over-excited and passionate about the arts. It took us a long time to realize that Theo was a performer.

Like her siblings, she had taken dance and music lessons from an early age, but unlike her siblings,
she loved the lessons more than she loved anything else in the world. She took ballet, jazz, piano, guitar, singing, acting and when it was her time to go to a big girl school, she chose a performing arts academy in London that her friends from ballet were going to. It was a day school, which meant she was our only child who didn’t leave the house for years – which I loved. It also meant some very tough questions had to be dealt with.

At first, we decided not to overthink this. We’d just let Theo do her own thing and see where it took her. Harry and I had vowed we wouldn’t make our children have to give up on who they were, and if Theo wanted to dance, sing and act, she would.

At eight years-old, her acting teacher told us we should start taking her to auditions. This involved a long process of explaining to Theo about rejection and about how she should never feel like she had to do something she didn’t want, but at the same time, we needed her to know that if she took a compromise to perform anywhere, she would have to keep it.

She was cast as Matilda on the West End; it was announced by the palace that this was a private engagement for the princess, who would be performing under the name Theo Clarence. Press, public and high society of London all had a lot to say about the little blonde princess who seemed to be a lot more Hollywood than royal, and we had to have difficult conversations with our daughter about the negative opinions of people who she shouldn’t care about.

I cried every time I heard her sing. I cried on her audition, I cried on her rehearsals, and I cried on opening night and every other performance I watched – she only did two a week, to be able to focus on school.

Theodora continued to sing and dance her way through life. She was Annie after Matilda, young Bonnie on Bonnie and Clyde, and at twelve did a run of Fun Home on Broadway in Manhattan, time during which I moved to New York with her, and found myself working in the UN headquarters there.

Richard had retired as a manager by then – his kids all knew their way around the business and Kidd was safely pursuing an academic career. But when he saw my daughter perform, he sat me down for dinner as if no time had passed from when he was my manager.

“She has a gift, Jenny.” He told me. “Like Payton. She needs to shine. You need to let her.”

We had hoped, in the quiet of our minds, Theo’s love for the performing arts would be a phase. We had thought she would grow tired of it, or impatient. But as tired and impatient as she was, giving up was never an option. She took her critics with her head high, used them to improve in any way she could, and practiced twice as hard.

At fifteen, she was cast for a special participation in Doctor Who, which was still running strong, with its second female doctor ever. The role that was offered Theo worried me, as they wanted her to play the daughter of Susan, the character I had played as my last project as an actress.

“You are allowed to do what you want.” I told Theo. “But you should understand they are offering this because they want to cash in on the press they’ll get by casting a royal.”

“And Jenifer Silva’s daughter.” She finished my thought.

She was smart enough to know she was offered opportunities because of who her parents were, but she was also smart enough to know it would be stupid to let her pride deprive her of those opportunities. And so my daughter shone in her role on a double episode which was one of the highest ranked that season. When the new one started, she was asked to come back for a permanent
role as the new companion, and this was how her career truly started.

She spent her teenage years in between school, Doctor Who and accompanying her father and me to the eventual royal event, like Trooping the Colour. After she graduated, we were called for a meeting with her grandfather, the king, who at ninety-seven years-old intended, much like his mother, to rule until his last breath.

Charles told his granddaughter she should, by all means, do as she must; but she should also consider that she could not have both worlds.

“The monarchy, as much as we have managed to modernize it, it’s still a traditional institution.” He told her. “And I’m afraid from this moment on you should choose what image you intend on portraying.”

At eighteen, Theo announced her wish to strip herself of her titles and to renounce her claim to the throne of England in the pursuit of a life in the performing arts. She would always be our daughter, but she was an actress more than she was a princess, and that was what her heart desired.

Finally, she was both free and old enough to play adult roles on musicals, and so she started sharing her time between the Doctor’s companion and Cathy, from The Last Five Years, and Cosette, on Les Mis, and she was the youngest actress to play Veronica Sawyer in Heathers.

Her run in Les Mis gained her an Olivier Award, and her increasingly dramatic role in Doctor Who gained her Emmy nominations that opened a lot of doors for her in America, where she moved to when the time came.

Like Theo before him, Vincent also chose to turn his hobby into his career. He loved horseback riding, and as he graduated, he started training with Harry’s cousin Zara to compete professionally. He went on to win gold in the Olympics, making us, and the two countries he represented, England and Brazil, proud.

Charles passed away at ninety-eight years old, having reigned for nineteen years, leaving in our hearts more darkness to be lightened, and a lot of beautiful flowers in the gardens he seemed to cultivate wherever he went.

That was the year we once again wore our black dresses and hats and gathered in the abbey in mourning. The triplets were now 25, and Theodora was 20, so they joined Victoria, Alice, Charlotte and George for their first big service. They also attended their first coronation months later, to watch as their uncle King William took on the throne, and the world was graced by Queen Catherine.

George, who had graduated from Saint Andrews with a degree in Art History, like his mother, worked as a curator in a gallery, and as buyer for a private collector for a couple of years before slowing down his career to learn more about what his future held as a king.

When his father was crowned, he was made Prince of Wales, and at twenty-eight years old, after almost a fourteen years long relationship, he married his high school sweetheart, a lovely girl named Olivia, who had studied English and was as graceful a future queen as anyone could have hoped.

Charlotte moved to Manhattan for university, and graduated Columbia with a degree in Business that she put to use by creating a shopping website with two friends, that quickly made her the richest of the family. She was too smart and successful to make the mistake of getting married, but she had a lot of fun for as long as she could before she met a third grade teacher named Brandon
who managed to make an honest woman out of her.

Alice, following her father’s footsteps, graduated with a degree in geography and dedicated herself for an academic career, going as far as becoming the youngest tenure professor in Oxford University’s history.

Victoria fell in love with an American lawyer she worked with in a case against slave labor in Qatar. He was somewhat older than her, but as she pointed out herself, not as older as Harry was than me. His name was Robert, and he won our affection when he chose to move to England to be with her, instead of asking her to move to America for him.

Mary had the same boyfriend through college – the son of a Lord she met in a formal ball in Oxford. They were the picture perfect fairytale couple up until we woke up to paparazzi pictures of him cheating on her in a party in Ibiza one summer.

“I did all you told me.” She complained, crying, as Harry held her when she came home that weekend. “I watched and made sure he wasn’t a jerk! He treated me right and was nice and polite, he wasn’t abusive. Why am I still hurting?!”

“Sometimes nice guys do bad things.” I told her, trying to stop myself to succumbing to crying. “Sometimes nice people have to suffer, and it’s not fair. But that doesn’t mean you did anything wrong.”

We had thought Theodora was in bigger danger for dangling in the Hollywood dating scene, but our beautiful ginger had been the one to get hurt.

She cried for a few days; we watched every movie she wanted and binge watched rom-coms until she remembered how to laugh. Then, she took a deep breath, a shower, and went to work.

She graduated with 4 A levels; got into Harvard, and went to med school in John’s Hopkins. She took residency in surgery and a fellowship in pediatric surgery. Mary was beautiful, fun and loved to party, but she had ambitions too big to waste her time crying for men.

When she finally slowed down enough, she met a lovely girl who was just as ambitious as she was. Her name was Ashley and she was a neurosurgeon working in the same hospital. They started dating and got married in a private ceremony at York Cottage in Norfolk a couple of years later.

We never made official announcements about her sexuality. Mary didn’t feel the need to come out as bisexual. She was a surgeon and a person living in a world where same-sex marriage had been legal for a few years, and because she wasn’t going to be queen – and so didn’t need to produce a genetic heir - her generation didn’t see as many issues with it as Harry and mine would have.

Lily, our sensitive and caring soldier, served three tours of duty in Syria and Iran. She was an accomplished pilot like her father and started taking part in the planning of the Invictus Games from the moment she turned twenty-one. She became Captain Clarence and went on to fall into the same pattern as Harry had in his career in the military – the exception was that Lily actually enjoyed the office job just as much as she enjoyed the action, and soon enough she was made Major Clarence.

Living in London also afforded her the opportunity to grow closer in touch with the friends that had stayed to make a living there, such as Clarice Pelly, who took on her father’s business as a club owner, and Alex Percy – Alli’s son -, who had graduated as a lawyer in the same year as Victoria.

Alex started his own firm in London, sharing his time between that and his learning to succeed his father as Earl Percy. He and Lily grew closer together and when he finally was able to open his
eyes and realize she had had a crush on him since she was a little girl, they started dating. In a few years time, Major Clarence succeeded Alessa McKenna as Countess Percy, though to us, she would always be Sweets.

Our fourth dog had been a gift to our youngest child, Vincent, when he turned five. It was one of the many corgi puppies the Queen had left behind. In the high of his creativity, for reasons we could never quite understand, he named the puppy Kevin.

It was as if Kevin, Snuggles, Dora and Spiderman could sense we needed babies after all of ours were off to school or to their careers. They would swiftly find their way into our bed and snuggle us as the kids would on weekend when we all wanted to sleep in, but we also wanted to be together.

Our apartment in London was still our safe haven in the middle of the city. We loved every inch of it, and knew it like the backs of our hands. Little had changed in the decoration over the years. We had added new paintings we acquired with time, and I managed my own Van Gogh collection. We added awards that Harry won for the innovation and good results of the Invictus Games, which grew to become as expected every year as the Winter Olympics.

[Co]nscious, the project I had created with Kate, grew more than we could handle, and we started employing people to help us guide it into the level we wanted. We lobbied and passed legislation about the legality of animal testing in the cosmetic industry until it was understood as the normal, instead of the other way around.

After eight years, I was promoted in the UN. Though they offered me a salary, I made a deal to revert that value into granting paid internships around the globe. I fought against child marriage, rape culture, the immigration crisis, and inequality in every possible way I could. Much like Theo had, at some point I had to realize my biggest asset was my name and title. And so I started giving interviews again. Talking about my kids and private life as a royal was a small price to pay to draw attention to important issues.

Ophelia did go on to become the youngest EGOT winner – for a few years, before someone else took the title from her. As I had wished, the show business industry had never died out. Hollywood remained beautiful and complexly problematic, and I remained watching from afar, as I had said I would.

To everyone’s surprise, Harry never grew quite bald, though his hair thinned out before turning gray. The wrinkles in the corners of his eyes grew bigger and made him look like he was always smiling, which I loved. As he had promised, he never shaved, and I still loved every part of him – flaccid muscles and thin arms - like I did on our first date.

My hips had grown bigger after six kids, and had refused to return to its usual size. My tight gap was nowhere to be seen and my once Victoria Secret catwalk-worthy flat stomach now sported not only my ulcer surgery scar, but two C-section ones and a lot of cellulite. My cheeks had grown fuller and my lips, once thick and perky, now were thin and light. My forehead sported lines that almost counted the time that had passed and my eyes, once hungry and ambitious for the limelight, how had wrinkles and exhaustion behind them.

The press criticized me for every single one of these very natural aging ‘problems’, but I refused to apply botox, as I knew I would have had I remained an actress. After a certain age, even dying my hair felt stupid, and I embraced the long, gray hair-do, making it as fashionable as I did everything else.

Our days were busy and at times, trying. We dealt with things people turned a blind eye to – people
with disabilities, physical or invisible, and people who had been stripped of every possible ounce of dignity a human being deserved. We spoke for those who couldn’t speak and we did it loudly and graciously, as we knew the traditional institution we represented deserved.

More importantly, we did it because it was who we were.

And every night, we came home to each other. We sat in the kitchen drinking tea as Harry cooked dinner, talking about the issues of the day, making plans and gossiping about our friends, family or kids.

In bed, I smiled as I laid to sleep, with an arm over Harry’s back, smelling his perfume and remembering each and every single one of the kisses, the hugs, the jokes. I thanked God for giving us to each other, and I thanked him, in my mind, for existing. For being. For not giving up on me.

It was a difficult journey, but when we held each other to sleep each night, we were able to breathe easily.

“You let the dogs in the bed again.” Harry said, drowsily that night, as Snuggles, Dora, Spiderman and Kevin snuggled their way into our mattress.

“I didn’t let them.” I replied, whispery. “They don’t exactly ask.”

He turned in the bed to face me, smiling. “Admit it, you love it.”

“You’re the one who always forgets to close the door so they can’t get in the room at night.”

He grinned, and closed his eyes, ready to sleep again.

“Or…” I said, raising a brow at him. “You do it on purpose so they will climb on bed with us, because you secretly like it.”

My husband sighed, still grinning. “I guess we’ll never know.”

I smiled, with my heart filled with love, and leaned in to kiss him gently.

“You know, Harry,” I told him, as he wrapped an arm around me, “you are the most interesting man I know.”

THE END

Chapter End Notes

I need you to know a few things – a few very important things about this story and how I needed it to survive. Fake It Until You Make It was in my mind for years in one way or another, although I didn’t really start constructing the characters as they came to be until after George was born. In December of 2013 I wrote the epilogue and first chapter, and immediately created the blog and started posting (because I’m stupid like that). I put not further thought into this, it was just about getting this weird story out of my head so I could maybe stop thinking about Prince Harry and this random actress I made up.

In late 2013 I had a particularly draining class about British literature where we
studied Doris Lessing’s book The Golden Notebook – a reading I do not recommend unless you wanna do some serious soul searching. My professor had us keep a notebook to try and get in the state of mind of the character, who did the same, and dared us to write whatever came to mind. As a result, I had a panic attack in class one day and things pretty much went downhill from there. I struggled and pushed through self-doubt and until a year ago, when I had another attack and almost dropped out of school because I was just so tired. I managed to find help and am now in therapy and taking meds, so I’m doing a lot better and a few months from graduating.

As I learned more about myself, it was hard not making Jen learn about herself too, but it was harder not writing her as I wish I could be: strong, independent, extroverted, the life of the party, social butterfly. A girl who had been through things a lot harder than I, but still managed to come out ready for the next problem. Inside, I am just as hopeless and pessimistic as Jen, and as I have written her, I started realizing she’s who I wish I can become one day.

I wanna be unstoppable in my career, I wanna be strong enough to be able to tell people to fuck off when they think they can walk hurt me, I wanna be brave to make hard decisions when I know the result will make me happy.

You need to know this: you gave me hope that I can do this. Not just survive, not just try and become the strong person I wrote Jen to be, but to keep writing. Either someone will read or not, I now know I like this. I want this. And I don’t know what’s going to happen, but it feels good to know that this little part of me hasn’t changed and so much else did.

You did that – whoever you are. Thank you for reading. Thank you for liking the chapters. For sending me every message, the ones with questions, or just saying hi, or just asking for an update. Thank you for talking to on the chat, and telling me where you’re from. Thank you for sticking through the horrible first few chapters when I still wasn’t sure what I was doing. Thank you for forgiving the grammar mistakes, the misspellings, the typos. Thank you for forgiving how generous I was with Jen’s career, and for reading through chapters with very little or no Harry at all, just because that was the narrative I needed to tell at that point (it’s okay if you skipped ahead, I get it, I do it too sometimes).

You, and Jen, helped me survive college and the last three years and I am at a little loss of what’s supposed to come next. I need to write my final research paper (on Pride and Prejudice fanfiction, which is kinda cool). I need to present it in front of professors who I’m afraid will judge me too harshly. I need to get a diploma and move to São Paulo and find a job. I don’t know how things will go, I don’t know if I’ll be okay. But I’ll always look back on this story and smile at how happy you made me and I can do is hope that I have helped you smile as well.

I have a thing for the dramatic so this is starting to sound really emotional, but it’s not a proper goodbye, of course. I have three other Prince Harry fic ideas in my head, which I will not be able to write until after I graduate, but I hope you’ll maybe give them a chance when I start posting next year. If you want to know when that happens, follow my personal blog @nataliawritesstuff – I’ll add a link to it when I start. I’ll also stick around there, reblogging stuff and and just talking if you want to. I’ll be around!

So, if this is where you leave me, thank you. For everything. And if you intend on coming back, I’ll see you next year. I hope you stay safe and happy. To steal from the
title of Chapter 23, goodbye… until tomorrow. Whenever that may be.

Love, Natalia.

If you're interested in future fics, follow my personal tumblr where I'll post future stories =)
nataliawritesstuff.tumblr.com

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