The Improbability of Me and You

by TheMoiralOfTheStory

Summary

Fake Dating AU (need there be a summary?)

Laura Hollis and Carmilla Karnstein have known each other for forever, but nosy family members and an impending wedding have pushed them into a situation that they can't quite get out of. Expect convenient situations, overly curious friends, and the possibility that Laura and Carmilla's relationship needs a serious re-evaluation. After all, friends don't kiss like that.

UPDATES-ON-MONDAYS

ON INDEFINITE HIATUS

Notes

Well this was a strangely structured creature. I was planning to do a oneshot but when the length exceeded my expectations, I decided to make it a multi chapter affair. I used to do FFnet a few years ago but I stopped so I'm a little rusty right now. So please bear with me as I stretch my literary muscles again.

And if you want, go ahead and follow me on tumblr at moirality.tumblr.com

I art sometimes, so feel free to check that out.
"Wow." You murmured to yourself. You wouldn't dare say anything louder because that would just draw too much attention. You wouldn't be able to function if too many people noticed you. But still, the view was magical. The sun was setting and the sky was such a vivid orange. It was impossible to look away. The sky was just so impossibly alive. The colors amazed you. The way the clouds shifted and how the sun illuminated those gaseous things mesmerized you.

Here you were, a child of five years, staring into the vast sky. While all the other kids were saying their goodbyes to their friends, or still having fun, you were here. Gazing into the great big infinity above your head. And you relished in your silence. And you relished in your solitude. There was no place you would rather be. The other kids wouldn't understand how your heart soared at what you saw. Content with today's version of the sky, you were prepared to return home. Your mama was there sitting on the park bench, saying her farewells to the other moms. Your older sister was there too, looking bored and distant. She was daydreaming as it were. Your destination was fixed, you were obviously going to go to them.

That was the plan.

Until you saw her.

When you turned your head by chance, there she was. Another girl stood a stone's throw away from you. Her hair was a dirty blond, almost brown. She had a pretty little dress on but that wasn't what made you notice her. The girl was looking at the sky, with a huge grin. She was just as enchanted by the sunset as you were. You had just realized that she'd has been standing there the whole time. Before you knew it, your heart began to pace. You veins were filled with excitement. You could feel your cheeks lifting as you smile broadly.

Then you forgot about mama and your older sister.

Instead, you immediately walk towards the other girl.

"Do you like it too?" You asked.

The girl looked at you without an awkward bone in her body. She didn't know you but the way she looked at you was the way one would look at a friend. "The sky? Yeah! It's so cool."

"It's so pretty."

She grinned. "No one else cares. But I do. It's orange!"

You finally felt like someone understood you. This person standing in front of you could be your friend. Because she understood how you felt when no one else did.

"I'm Carmilla. What's your name?"

She laughed. "That's a funny name, Carmilla. My name is Laura."

"Your name sounds funnier."

"Does not."

You suddenly felt happy. A great joy encompassed your whole being and you felt like flying. You
had finally found a friend. You wished to talk to her some more when your sister called for you. She was shouting your name and you knew it was time to go.

"Carm, we need to go." Your sister said as she finally got to where you were. Then her eyes drifted to Laura and she smiled. "And who is this?" She asked.

"This is Laura, she's my new friend."

Your sister grinned. "It's nice to meet you Laura, I'm Mattie. I'm Carmilla's sister."

"It's nice to meet you too Mattie! Can I hang out with Carmilla soon?" Laura asked immediately.

Mattie was taken aback but then she laughed. She affectionately slung her arm over your shoulder and pulled you close. "Of course, you can hang out with Carmilla any time. I'll go ask my mama first. Where do you live?"

Laura pointed to a certain street beyond the park. "Somewhere over there. I just walk here with my dad."

Mattie looked thrilled. "Oh? We live there too! You could come visit Carm."

"Really?"

"Yeah!"

Then you found yourself alone with Laura. Mattie had run off to talk to Mama about your new friend while you couldn't wait to hang out with her.

"So do you like cookies?" Laura asked.

Your chest swelled with pride. "I have cookies all the time!"

"No fair! My dad only let's me eat cookies once a week!"

"If you come to my house, you can have cookies any time."

"That's awesome!"

"Do you like girly stuff?"

"Not really, it's kinda boring."

You beamed. "Me too. I don't really like that stuff."

The more things you found in common with her, the more elated you were. You didn't know what the word was for it then, but perhaps it may have been 'soulmates'. She was perfect and you had felt like two parts of a whole with her. Your first meeting had needed to come to an end. Laura's dad would take her away and your Mama would come for you a little later. But the promise of seeing Laura again kept you excited. You had found your first friend. And you desperately hoped she would be your friend forever.
You wanted to go home desperately. Parties were the epitome of stupid and they always failed to stir your interest. To you, parties were the height of uncivilized civilization. But you knew why you were here. It was because Laura wanted to go, and you had to go with her. It was either that or she went alone and you could never let that happen. You had known Laura since you were five for fuck’s sake. After ten years of friendship, it was almost impossible for you to abandon her. Especially when one of her convoluted ideas had come to fruition.

So here you were, dressed in your usual punk rock ensemble of a red flannel shirt and ripped jeans. You had been playing with your red cup for the past hour because all the while, you had actually been watching Laura from the sidelines. You knew she had this massive crush on some high school punk. Laura was always persistent with her crazy ideas so when the aforementioned high school student asked her to go, she made you lie on her behalf.

"Please Carm, just this once. I promise to do your homework for a month. Pretty please... It's not everyday I get to talk to someone I like."

You rolled your eyes for the hundredth time and pondered over how she managed to convince you. But when have you ever been capable of saying no to her. As far as you knew, Laura's crush was some handsome poet she had come across in the local Starbucks. You sighed deeply before a loud noise took your eyes off your best friend. Apparently, a bunch of drunk seniors had been playing football near some expensive vase. You smiled at their impending doom.

Panic settled in deep within your gut when you looked back to find Laura. You couldn't. For the life of you, you couldn't find Laura. For fuck's sake, how hard was it to keep an eye on your best friend? But then again, it was Laura Hollis for crying out loud. Trouble was her middle name. You immediately dropped your cup, it had been empty anyway. You frantically crossed through the wild party goers in a valiant search for your best friend. You asked around and managed to get a few answers.

You finally found the boy Laura had been crushing on only to find him alone. You gritted your teeth, clenched your fist, and started quite an intimidating interrogation of him. Then you found out something interesting. While he knew who Laura was, he told you that she had gone off with somebody else. Last he saw her, she was traipsing off with one of his friends. They had headed towards the pool area with another bunch of people.

You quickly made your way to the pool and you were in for quite the sight.

Laura was but another face in the crowd, but it was clear that whoever she was making out with was definitely not a boy. It took a while, but you recognized the girl she was kissing. The girl was always within an earshot of the boy who you initially thought Laura had been crushing on. Admittedly, the girl was a cute brunette. You completely understood why Laura was so smitten with her. But then suddenly, you feel slightly betrayed. You knew everything about each other. You were best friends. If Laura Hollis was gay, you were supposed to be the first to know. Instead of confronting Laura, like you had wanted to, you backed off. She seemed happy and you were supposed to have her back.

Like the dutiful best friend, you went back to the sidelines, keeping an ever watchful eye on her. Not quite understanding why an odd feeling had nestled in the pit of your stomach.

You didn't realize that Laura would tell you everything tomorrow and that you had nothing to worry about. If anything, you didn't make a big deal out of it because even you suspected that you yourself played for the same team. All was well with the world, and Laura's crush was nothing but fleeting crush.
You groaned in frustration as your necktie refused to cooperate with you. You had been trying to fix it for have an hour to no avail. No amount of online help videos could help you. You were dressed to the nines today. And while you had initially thought to wear a dress to prom, you had a better idea. In a fit of rebellion, you decided to wear a suit. Because why the hell not. You were Carmilla Karnstein. You had developed a reputation over the years. If you came to prom wearing a suit, no one would look twice. Instead, they would high five you. You were fairly popular, and not in the bad way.

You were prepared to toss the necktie away when Mattie swaggered into your room without knocking. She had her usual teasing smile on her face and she immediately sat on your bed. Your older sister who was only your senior by five years was extremely amused by your predicament.

"You wouldn't have this problem if you just went with the dress." She stated.

You roll your eyes. "And where is the fun in that?" You reply.

She stood up only to look at you from head to toe. She spun you around without warning and stepped back in quiet thought. "Well if I have to agree with you on something, you're bound to break hearts little sis."

Then Mattie took the two ends of your necktie and magically produced a dashing knot. "And voila! Tell me I'm awesome."

You sighed and smiled. "You always are, thanks for the assist."

"You never mentioned who you were taking to prom. You going with Laura?" She asked.

A sudden heat flared and you found your bad temper. People had been asking that stupid question all month and you were tired of it. It was annoying and you didn't get why but it nagged at you. That stupid question ticked you off. "Why does everyone think I'm going with Laura?" You grounded out.

"I don't know. You're always together so I just thought... You both never mentioned any girlfriends so I just assumed. Well fine, if not Laura then who?"

You sighed and tried to calm yourself. "I'm going stag. Prom is overrated anyway."

"And Laura?"

You smiled to yourself. "The girl she's had this crush on for centuries asked her out to prom. I'll do what I always do and be her wing-woman."

"And you're okay with that?"

You looked at you sister dead in the eyes. "I'm always okay with that. Why wouldn't I be? She's my best friend."

Your sister had a strange look in her eyes but decided to think nothing of it. You put on your waistcoat, then you wore your jacket, and you were ready to go raise hell. Your sister moved out of your way and you descended downstairs. Suddenly you felt your phone vibrate in your breast
pocket. You wasn't sure who would call at this time but you answered without so much as glancing at the tiny screen.

"Hello?"
"Carm?"

You immediately felt worried. "Laura? What's wrong?"
"She's not coming..."

You gritted your teeth. "What do you mean she's not coming?"

"Apparently this guy that she's been pining for asked her to come with him at the last minute. And she chose him. She does like me though, it's just that she just likes him more..."

"This generation has no concept of obligation. She should have taken you anyway, what a bitch." You snarled.

"Don't be so harsh on her, she's not that bad of a person."

Oh Laura, you thought. Even when she was stood up and thoroughly betrayed, she still thought the best of people. You couldn't fathom how this happened to Laura of all people.

"You and I both know that's not true. She stood you up, what more do you need."

You heard her sigh. "I guess you're right. You're always right..."

"Are you still at your house?"

"Yeah? Why?"

You scrambled towards the rack that carried the car keys. You grabbed the one for your car and pocketed it. "Just stay put and don't go anywhere."

"Carm, wait—"

You pocketed your phone just as Mattie descended the stairs. She immediately noticed the distress on your face and you told her not to worry. You went out through the front door, stepped into your old beat-up muscle car and started driving to Laura's house. She literally lived five houses away from you. All the while, you could still feel your insides twisting. You just felt so mad. Laura never deserved this and you couldn't understand how she could be so forgiving. Maybe that made her a better person than you. You were okay with that.

You parked your car near the stoop and made a beeline for Laura's door. You rang the doorbell a couple of times before Mr. Hollis opened the door for you. "Oh, hey Carmilla."

"Hi Mr. Hollis, can I see Laura...? Is she doing okay?"

He sighed. "She's not doing too hot. She's in her room." He said as he moved his body sideways to let you through.

You mumbled a quick word of gratitude to Laura's dad as you made your towards her room. You had been at the Hollises' house too many times too count. One could say that you practically lived there. You had already memorized the house by heart and you didn't need to think to know which door led to Laura. It was the one white door at the end of the hallway. You walked towards it briskly
but the moment your hand connected to the doorknob, you slowed your pace. You pushed the door softly and the sight beyond it broke your heart.

Laura was in that prom dress she had been raving about since prom season had started. She looked so beautiful in it, it was perfect on her. Yet at the same time, she was crying. It always broke your heart to see her cry. She was lying on her bed, sobbing quietly. Laura didn't want her dad to know how sad she actually was. Why did she have to be so selfless? She deserved more than this. You slowly made your way to her side and sat down on her bed. Then your hand started to stroke her dirty blonde hair.

"She's not worth your tears."

She eventually looked up and you were met with her doleful brown eyes. She sat up and leaned against you, your arm just naturally went around her shoulder and you held her close. "I know. But sometimes you can't just reconcile what you know with how you feel."

"If you want, we could marathon Firefly. Or we could watch the first season of Veronica Mars, you always said that season one was the best season. I could go out and buy some Ben and Jerry's and this could be another girl's night. I'll even wear the matching onesies."

"We could."

"So what do you say? Forget about her, prom is stupid anyhow."

Then she broke your embrace and looked quite mad. "Prom isn't stupid. That's just you... This is our senior prom. This is the last prom we'll ever get. There's no going back from skipping out on this."

The look on your face spoke volumes about how you felt about prom. But all you could do was sigh. You got up from the bed and stood by the dresser. "You done?" You asked.

"Done with what?"

"The moping? If you still feel that adamant about prom, I'll take you. We'll dance, spike the punch, and raise all kinds of hell. We'll make her regret not taking you. Plus I look hot in this suit, imagine how my absence must be depriving the ladies of our high school."

Laura blinked once before a smile finally appeared. Then she laughed and all was right again. The world was alright when Laura was smiling. Your hand had been outstretched towards her and she took it. She sat down in front of the dresser and grabbed the eyeliner. "Give me a sec, my makeup needs some fixing."

"Take all the time you need. I'll be right here."

She looked up at you with that gaze that always seems to pierce through your walls. "I mean this Carm but thank you. You're always there for me. Most people don't give you enough credit when they say you don't care."

"Well duh, of course I care about you. You're my best friend. Who else puts up with my shit?" You replied.

"I care about you too. And I love you. No homo."

You threw your head up and laughed. You jokingly punch her on the arm. "I love you too, no homo. Now move Hollis or we'll be late."
Soon after, you would both find yourselves at senior prom, having fun like nobody's business. Laura's crush would be dumped by her boy toy for some hotter piece of ass and you both wouldn't care. You both would dance stupid dances and be perfectly in sync. You both would talk the night away. You both would go home together with a fun memory to look back on. What mattered was that by the end of the night, you had each other.

The sound was deafening. All around you, people were screaming, cheering and showing school pride when you would never dare to utter the words to the school cheer. But you knew why you were here. You knew why you took the time to sit in the bleachers with the rest of the plebeians game after game. Your best friend was down there, playing football like nobody's business. Laura was always good with football and now in your senior year, she was the team captain. Laura was always the it girl. Everyone loved her and nobody hated her.

You weren't as well loved as Laura, but people respected you. While you were the school's resident punk rocker, always breaking school rules and rocking it out with your guitar, Laura was the opposite. She was the one everyone liked. She was the star of the girl's football team. She was the central midfielder and a talented one at that. She could do anything, and she was magic on the field. You couldn't be prouder.

And no matter how aloof you tried to be, you couldn't help yourself. You felt tense. The score was tied 2-2 and there was only so much time on the clock. This game was the deciding game. Both teams were playing for the trophy and it was a real tight game. You immediately found Laura right in the middle of the chaos. She was drenched in sweat from head to toe but she still looked pretty good. Wearing her lucky number four jersey, she was still raring to go.

You knew that look on her face. You knew she had a plan and that she would call for a timeout any second now. True enough, she broke out the sign and the referee whistled. The players on the field gathered around Laura on the sidelines.

The timeout was only a momentary reprieve. You couldn't believe how fast your heart was beating. How couldn't it. This was Laura's last game. The game that would define her as a team captain for years to come. Then you heard the telltale whistle of the referee, and the game was on. Now on its final minutes, the match was approaching its climax. All eyes were trained on Laura and everyone had one question in mind.

What would Laura Hollis do?

But what happened next was a blur. Laura's play had started paying off and all of a sudden, the other team found themselves greatly outmatched. Laura's plan was an aggressive take-no-prisoners one. The ball was just moving across the field with such ferocious speed, even the people at the bleachers couldn't keep up. Then the ball made its way to the star midfielder. With Laura in possession, victory was a sure thing. No one else was more suited to be the central midfielder than Laura. She controlled the game in that position.

She charged through the middle and made her way to the other team's line of defense. She passed the ball to the team's striker and everyone just assumed that they would be making the goal. Then in a dazzling display of footwork, the striker made a feint and did a back pass back to Laura. The other team had completely forgotten about her. Then she made the shot. The goalie ran but the ball curved
Laura had made the final shot just before the buzzer sounded. You finally sat back to settle your pounding heart. She did it. You best friend had won the school a trophy. Something the school's football team hadn't done in five years. Just, wow. Even you were overwhelmed because here you were, smiling and grinning at a football match. Moments later, you watched your best friend get carried off to celebrate. You wanted to be right down there with her, but you knew you would never get close. So you settled for mysterious disappearing and made your way to the locker room. After all, you were there all the time. The team coach knew your face and always let you in.

So you wandered around campus aimlessly until you were sure the whole peanut gallery was gone. Then you snuck into the locker room and caught the last of the football team congratulating their team captain. They were all telling her to go to the victory party at some place and you knew she would go. You made your quiet approach and stood against the lockers just in time for Laura to face forward. Then she jumped, she actually jumped.

"Jesus Carm, you scared me!"

You couldn't hold your laughter. "But your bunched up face is hilarious, cupcake."

She shot you a look. "Whatever."

"So how does it feel? To singlehandedly win the championship for the first time in five years." You asked her.

She shrugged. "I don't know. I feel really happy but reality hasn't settled in just yet. My heart's still pounding and my ears are still buzzing. It's just so surreal. But I disagree on the singlehanded part. That was a team effort."

"Well it's soccer—"

"Football."

"Fine football. Well of course it's a team effort but with the way you were playing tonight, it's clear to everyone who brought it home."

She sighed with a smile. "I'm glad you're here though. I was worried when I didn't see you in the bleachers. You never miss my matches."

"I just had to hide out from the screaming. But I would never miss this game for the world. By the way, I could probably smell you from a mile away Hollis. You stink."

She laughed. "I can't really smell myself at this point. We all smell the same."

"Just change or something. After all, I'm your ride to your victory party and I refuse to let my car smell anything like you."

"You know about the party?"

"Who doesn't? But I'm pretty sure you're going."

She rolled her eyes. "Fine, pass me a clean shirt from that duffel bag over there."

You easily found her a new shirt and tossed it to her. "Aren't you going to take a shower though?"
"I was planning to stop by my house first."

You shrug as a response.

You looked elsewhere when Laura took her shirt off. Just because she was your best friend did not mean your were blind. Laura was always adorable as a child but she started dropping some jaws when puberty hit her hard. The whole football gig she'd been doing since elementary did wonders for her too. If you took the moment to look, which you didn't, you would see that Laura had a really toned torso. Plus her legs were fantastic. But you couldn't call her unfair because she worked for it.

Of course, her state of undress didn't last long. It was just a shirt after all.

After a few moments, you'd find Laura standing by the door with her duffel bag slung on her shoulder, beckoning you to go. Hours later, you would find yourself at her victory party, making merry like some prized idiot. It would be a chaotic party, but it would be fun. The night of course didn't end without the two of you doing something the student body would never forget. Something that involved beer pong, playing 'Never Have I Ever' and jumping off from the balcony and into the pool.

It was epic.

It was a Friday evening and you had no plans. You were now well within your third term as a college freshman at Silas University. And while you were glad to put all the high school drama behind you, you were quite dismayed at your roommate. Even though you and Laura put up a good fight against the school administration, you were both told that it was unfair to the other students if you both shared a dorm. The most they did was put you in the same floor, so you still saw each other quite often.

While Laura was thrilled with her ultra cool genderfluid bio major roommate, LaFontaine. You were stuck with Xena the warrior princess, Danny Lawrence.

To be honest, you were a little jealous of Laura.

She won the lottery when she was assigned the same room as LaFontaine. LaF was on the same page as Laura and they were instant friends. They both loved their geeky pop culture cult shows, and they both were adventurous. While you usually kept Laura out of trouble, LaFontaine was usually in trouble with her. But you knew they would never really put Laura in real danger, so you let them both be. Sometimes when you passed by their dorm room, you could hear them having another TV show marathon. It made you feel a little sad knowing that she had found someone who was as engaged in the show as she was. Very much unlike you, who was forced to marathon with her.

She even befriended LaFontaine's oldest best friend, Perry. Who was also rooming with someone else on the same floor. She on the other hand, was a total mother hen. She took care of her friends and since you were friends with Laura and LaF, that made you hers by default. While you found her neurotic at times, she had her moments. And you had to admit, you liked being pampered by her. It was an interesting change. But you digressed.

What made you a little more miserable was your insufferable goody-two-shoes roommate. You both got on each other's nerves on the first day and had never gotten along. At all. It didn't help that she had become miss popularity. How couldn't she be when she was such a proud member of the
Summer Society. Ever since she joined that dumb sorority, she had a slew of admirers knocking on their shared door.

Of course, since you were you, you had to retaliate. You used your growing notoriety, wore your best leather pants, and started bringing in "study buddies" into your dorm room. Naturally, Xena was furious. While you were used to dealing with her swooning admirers, she had to start dealing with yours. Messing with Lawrence was a total blast. Playing your music out loud also helped your cause.

The only time the two of you were ever civil was when Laura was in the room.

In fact, you suspected that the only reason why Danny would ever respect you was because you were Laura's best friend. It didn't matter if she understood why you were her best friend, because she understood that Laura chose you to be her best friend.

And now that Lawrence had gone off to do something for her stupid sorority, you had the dorm room all to yourself.

It was rare for you have this amount of peace and quiet.

So the first thing you did was help yourself to some hot cocoa you had stolen from Laura's room. Once you had a nice cup steaming next to you, you sat comfortably on your bed. You back was against the wall and you had a copy of Jane Austen's Persuasion. It felt like a night to read something romantic. Plus, you were in the mood for something written in the eighteenth century. And there was no shame in a little Austen every now and then. If you had to chose a favorite Austen hero, Captain Wentworth would be in your top ten. Plus even you had to admit, his letter had your heart stirring for a brief moment.

But the room was still far too quiet for your liking. So you put up some soft music, something along the lines of Norah Jones or Rachael Yamagata. Reading with music that had words was a walk in park for you.

And now your evening was perfect. You had your hot cocoa, your chill music, and your good book. It was the ideal alone time.

A few hours flew by and you found yourself deep within the book and drinking your second cup of hot cocoa. Anne Elliot had finally met Captain Wentworth when your insufferable roommate barged into the room. The sound of her crashing in and slamming the door was incredibly searing to your ears. You glowered at her as she rested against the door and you continued to do so until she finally looked at you.

"A bit early aren't we Xena? I thought you said you'd be back by midnight. It's just ten." You remarked blandly.

Danny looked ready to retort when she noticed the music playing, and your current state of reading. "Are you playing sappy love songs? And is that Persuasion."

You rolled your eyes. "For the record, these songs are chill songs. If you have something against Norah Jones, I will shoot you where you stand. And since when was I not allowed to read Austen."

She frowned at you. "You just don't seem the type. I figured since I'd leave you alone for the whole night, I would find one of your study buddies here when I came back. Having a dry spell fangface?"

You winced at the nickname. She started calling you that in line with your aversion to being active during the day and for just being all out nocturnal. As if that made you a vampire. An owl was
"Wouldn't you love that. But did it occur to you that every once in a while, I take breaks. Contrary to popular belief, I do get tired of hating the world. Every once in a while, I read."

She considered your reply and sat down. Her face had war paint on it and everything about her was messy and disheveled. "I take it you read P&P as well?"

"Obviously."

"And you've read Emma?"

"Obviously."

"So tell me. Darcy or Knightley?"

You put your book down and looked at her. "You do know I like girls right? Don't go asking me which one I crush on."

"Hey, I'm not completely straight either. I just wanted know who you liked better."

You thought about it for a while. "Definitely Knightley. He's not afraid to call you on your bullshit. And he won't baby you. After all, he let Emma fall down and he allowed her to get back up on her own merits."

"While I understand socially awkward Darcy's appeal, I have to agree with you for once."

Well, wasn't that a shocker.

You leaned forward and narrowed your eyes. "Why are you early?"

She sighed. "I'm hiding from the Zetas. We managed to get into some food fight with some of the bros. This should be a safe place to duck out. I think the fight's gotten way out of hand."

"Do you think some of them will go here?"

"Well no, but you're here. They'll run."

You smirked at the comment. "I'll take that as a compliment, Xena."

"But you do know they're actually scared of you. Ever since you singlehandedly crushed the heart of the Zeta president, the whole of Zeta Omega Mu is scared. Maybe the sight of their esteemed president in a ball of tears did the trick."

You smiled to yourself. "Ahh, good times. To be so notorious at such an early time in my college life. It's quite the achievement don't you think?"

She shrugged. "But don't you ever get tired of the notoriety. Being popular is one thing, but your reputation isn't exactly stellar."

"Sometimes. But it keeps people away." You replied, and then you realized it was the truth. You weren't like Laura or Danny. You weren't a happy-go-lucky socializing good person. You found it easier to play the part of the rebellious punk rocker. You also most certainly liked the aesthetic, if that was any consolation.

Danny leaned against the wall on her side of the room. "I still don't get how you're Laura's best friend. You two are like polar opposites and I've tried to find something in common between the two of you, and it's hard. I'm not saying you shouldn't be friends. I'm just trying to understand it."
You nodded slowly. Sometimes you wondered that too. "True. Every once in a while, I think she's too good of a person to be my best friend. But I remember how we met when we were five. We were both looking at the same stupid view of the sunset, and we both found it beautiful. She was the only person who understood how I felt, and we've been friends ever since. I'd like to think that she makes me a better person. I don't think I could survive without her. I'd be way worse if it wasn't for her."

Danny acknowledged your words and you were thankful that she wasn't seeking to antagonize you. "I don't doubt your loyalty to her. It's obvious you would do anything for her."

You shrugged. "It's a part of the job description."

"I know we don't like each other very much. But I think people don't give you enough credit when they say your don't care. Because you do, in your strange antisocial way."

The edge of your mouth quirked up. "Funny you should say that. That's exactly what Laura told me once." You said as you stood up and went to the little kitchen thing your dorm was equipped with. "So this is me giving you an olive branch. Do you want some hot cocoa? I stole some from Laura's room yesterday."

Danny laughed. "Stolen goods as a peace offering. Why did I expect something better? But I'll take it Karnstein."

You nodded and started pouring the powdered mix into an empty mug.

"So you like Austen huh..." Danny stated.

You started to fill it up with water. You didn't really have the patience to heat the milk via steaming, microwaving, or boiling. "I like literature in general. Once in a blue moon, I read something light. Like Austen. Sometimes when I feel poetically angsty, I read Poe. Other times when I'm really bored, I read from that section in the bookstore full of naked people on the cover. My tastes are fairly varied, it depends on the ebb and flow of my mood."

"So you have read Nora Roberts? Or something?"

You picked up the mug and handed it over to Danny without spilling it. She took it carefully and managed a sip. "Try Radclyffe. Books where the main attraction is heterosexual romance don't really appeal to me. I don't need to read a whole chapter on how straight people have sex." You said with disdain.

"True... So about this olive branch."

"What about it?"

"Do you have terms for our newfound... relationship of sorts?"

"Hmm... I won't bring my study buddies when you're around. I can be more careful than that, I just did it to spite you."

She smirked. "Clearly. But I can't do anything about the people who come looking for me."

You waved it off. "I'm an old hand at chasing away your starry eyed maidens and men. Not much of a problem."

"Well, I could tolerate your music. Just not so loud."
"How considerate of you. But my music is varied like my books. I just play the ear grating ones when you're around." You admitted.

"Figures. But you know what, let's just play it by ear. I think it's quite feasible for us to get along."

You finally grinned and you leaned over to extend your hand. "Deal." You said as she shook your hand to officiate it.

"And one more thing, can you not dump your acoustic guitar everywhere. I'll even buy you a stand for it. And keep your amp under your bed or something."

You rolled your eyes. "Fine."

Soon after, you would laugh about this night with Danny and the rest of your pals. It was in your personal opinion, that this odd night started your little circle of friendship. You never really had too many friends to begin with but this marked the time when you would make friends that you would cherish. Even after you graduated from college, the gang was always together. It would always be you, Laura, Danny, LaFontaine, and Perry. The five of you versus the world. And you would give anything to make sure that five of you would stay that way.

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The sound of your phone ringing for the hundredth time was beginning to get on your nerves. It was around six in the morning and you still had a good thirty minutes before you needed to do anything. After another round of ringing, you had given up trying to sleep. You scratched the part of your back you could reach and grab your cellphone from the dresser. After a few quick swipes on the touch screen, you pressed the flimsy thing against your ear. You closed your eyes in resignation and sighed.

"Whoever this is better have a damn good reason for calling at this ungodly hour."

"Is that any way to speak to your mother?"

You groaned inwardly. "No, sorry. I just had a late night yesterday."

"Are you still working for that music production company? I thought you hated it there."

You sighed. "I don't hate it mother. It just stresses me out sometimes. I didn't graduate with a degree in music prod only to hate it later on. Aren't you glad I didn't become some starving musician?"

You wanted to hide under the blankets. Somehow your mouth was working without a filter right now, and you wanted it to just stop. Nothing good came out of it when you were sleep deprived.

"I'm not here to criticize your life choices sweetheart. If I did, you'd be stuck in an office cubicle. I just wanted to talk about William."

You raised an eyebrow and sat up. "What about Will? Did something happen to him?"

Will, after all, was practically your little brother. Even though you were merely cousins. You both had all kinds of trouble together. It was worse when your sister was involved. The three of you raised all kinds of hell back when you were all kids.

"Nothing serious Carmilla. Calm down sweetie. I just wanted to tell you that an invite came in the
mail this morning. Your cousin's getting married."

If you weren't awake then, you most certainly were now. "Did you just put marriage and Will Luce in the same sentence?"

"I did. If anyone knew about it, I was hoping it would be you." Your mother replied.

"This is the first time I've ever heard of this. I don't think even Mattie knows. And she knows everything."

"You're right about that. I gave your sister a call earlier and she was just as shocked."

You run a hand through your hair. "Dear god. Will's tying the knot. Who would've thought?"

"Anyhow, it's clear that you're too sleepy to process this properly. I'll talk to tonight at dinner when you're less... cranky. And give my love to Laura. She's always such a sweetheart."

"Will do, goodbye mother."

You put the phone down and plunked back onto your bed. You stared at the ceiling for a good ten minutes before you heard your door crack open. You glanced and found Laura peeking through. She was still your roommate even now. "You awake? I was just making pancakes."

You groaned and make another effort to get off the bed. Luckily, you succeeded. Once your feet was planted firmly on the ground, you stretched a little and walked towards the door. "Fantastic. I have news by the way."

Laura moved out of your way and you both adjourned to the dining table. The smell of pancakes wafting in the air seemed to give you the right amount of jolt to stay awake. That and the smell of brewed coffee that Laura had just started seemed to help.

"Is it something bad?"

You shook your head languidly and craned your neck to the side. "Nah. It's something odd."

"Like what?"

"Will's getting married."

Laura did a double take at you. "Will Luce and marriage in the same sentence?"

You shrugged. "I know right."

"Damn..."

"Damn." You concurred.

What a strange way to start the day.
"So I guess I'll see you later Carm."

You glanced at Laura from the couch and managed a lazy smile. From where you were sitting, it was quite obvious that Laura was feeling extra pumped today. Clearly, that had nothing to do with the elusive pay raise that most employees sought. But if your best friend were to get that hypothetical pay raise, she deserved it. After all, working for the local news station as a small time anchor was no walk in the park. The pay was fairly shitty in your honest opinion but Laura loved doing the eight o'clock morning news. Also, you did promise to support her in all of her endeavors.

"I have dinner with mother and Mattie, so don't wait up for me." You mentioned matter-of-factly.

"If it gets too much, you can call me and I can bail you out." She offered.

You shrugged. "By all means please do. Anything to get them off my back."

"I take it your state of singleness still baffles them?"

"Yes well I'm sorry if I don't like relationships. Plus it's perfectly normal to be single at twenty six. They should know that. God knows how many times those two have watched Sex and the City." You groaned.

Laura looked at you with a strange face before she dumped her bag on the nearby table and sat on the arm of the couch. She wrapped an arm around your shoulder and sighed. "Hey, I like Sex and the City. It's actually pretty funny. But Carm, have you considered the fact that your mother and your sister have a point?"

You looked up and glowered at her. "What do you mean?"

"Well, ever since you came out when we were teenagers, you've been a veritable lady killer. Not that I'm not proud of your ability to bring all women to their knees, but you've never really had a solid honest to goodness relationship in your life."

"But I have you. Our love of twenty one years is super strong." You stated emphatically.

Laura laughed. "I love you too Carm. And no, this doesn't count. I mean an actual relationship. One where you take nice girl out to a nice dinner and well... date her."

"If only it were that easy. Maybe I'd believe you a little more if you were in a relationship yourself. If I sleep around, you're a serial dater." You pointed out.

Then it was her turn to scowl. "We were talking about you, not me."

"How's Tinder Hollis?" You teased.
"It's just peachy, Karnstein." She snarled before lifting her hands up as if to protest.

"You know what? Fine. I won't talk about your one night stands if you won't talk about my online dating. Capisce?"

You grinned triumphantly. "It's nothing personal Laura."

She rolled her eyes before grinning. "Whatever, nerd."

"At least I'm a cool nerd."

She shook her head and walked away from the couch. She slung her bag on her shoulder and pocketed her house keys. "If that's what you want to hear. See you later." Laura said as she exited the apartment.

You had been left to your own devices for only a couple of minutes before you stood up to stretch. While Laura was practically dressed for work by the time she made you both some pancakes, you were still dressed in your pajamas. Then again, Laura's news anchor job required her to be at the news studio early. Your job was a little more flexible.

As a music producer, your schedule was a little more fluid unless there was a tight recording schedule to be had. Your mother may have downplayed your job sometimes but you couldn't care less. You were hired by the recording studio you'd been eyeing since graduation, and you'd been on the job for four solid years. You were pretty much having the time of your life.

And if memory served, you had a recording session to supervise later today. A shower was definitely in order.

You groaned at your responsibilities before you headed towards the bathroom to shower.

You shifted a few knobs here and there before stopping the music altogether. You clicked the button which let you speak into the mic and frowned. "I just wanted to let you know that you sounded great sweetheart, but your vocals fell a little flat at the bridge. And David, percussion's too slow. Keep up with the tempo, thanks."

You leaned back into the comfy leather chair you had insisted the studio buy and looked at the clock. You hadn't realized how much time had passed. You press the button and spoke into the mic again. "My bad, have a thirty minute break you guys. There are snacks and coffee in the break room in the back. Help yourselves."

As soon as you had a moment to yourself, your boss showed up. She walked into the room and sat on the other leather office chair next to yours. You smiled to yourself. You boss was one smooth operator and she was one of the rare female badasses of the industry. You held her in high regard and had nothing but respect for her. She had a trilby on top of her rough blond pixie cut today, it was a trend these nowadays.

Your boss gave you a sideways glance and gestured towards the sound booth. "So this band..."

"They call themselves Metro Vinyl." You supplied.
Your boss scrunched her eyebrows. "How terribly hipster. However, it sounds alternative enough. But hey, we're not really a major record label so we can't be too choosy. Are they copacetic?"

You shrugged. "I dunno boss. Janis, the vocalist, has a really good sound. She's got this nice solid gravelly quality, I personally think it's marketable. Her bandmates are a bit of a wreck."

She leaned back into her chair. "Play me their demo."

You pressed a button on the board and the room was immediately filled with music. She listened to the song you had just recorded for a minute before she personally stopped the track. "I see what you mean Karnstein. How would you fix this?"

"I'd make the bass line stronger. Add a little groove to it because the melody's definitely got that feel but ends up sounding empty. Maybe we could change up the guitar effects, give the plucking a cleaner sound. This heavy plucking doesn't blend well. The percussion needs to be faster."

Your boss laughed. "That's a tall order. But I think you're on the right track."

"Thank you. Don't worry though, I think we'll still be right on schedule by the late afternoon. I'll get it done boss."

She stood up and nodded at you. "Good. That's why I hired you."

Your boss left the room just as the guitarist came in. You recalled that his name was Alex and you called him over. You started immediately discussing the points you thought could make the track sound better. Luckily for you, Alex and the rest of his bandmates were quite open to suggestions and there was a good repartee between you and them.

You entered the sound booth with them and borrowed one of the Fenders. You began plucking on the strings with a different effects pedal. "See, cleaner sound? I think it makes quite the difference." You suggested.

The vocalist was quite impressed. "You play guitar like a pro, Carmilla." She praised you as she casually placed on hand on your shoulder. You most certainly didn't miss that.

The guitarist stepped in. "Yeah, you're rocking it."

You smiled. "Yes well I do my best. I'm afraid my bass and drums could use some work. Especially the more complicated drum lines. Man, I've got nothing on Travis Barker. Hell, just listening to Panic! At The Disco's arrangements makes me want to cry. That's why I produce music instead of slumming it with you guys."

The whole of Metro Vinyl laughed.

You had a good feeling with this band.

"Alright you slackers. Let's do this one more time, with the new arrangement." You say as you moved back into the your side of the studio. You cued them in and and started recording their track.

You were glad to be right. You managed to improve their track by ten percent. Which was not bad by your standards. This band had hope yet. They could earn some good money if they were marketed to the right demographic. Hours passed as you recorded a couple of tracks with them, and soon it would be around five in the afternoon. After you all did the final touches on the band's twelfth album track, you called it a wrap. There was quite a lot of clapping and hugging. Lots of handshaking too. You walked them to the entrance of the studio and promised to keep in touch, and
to contact them immediately if there was any changes to the album. You promised them that you would master their songs to perfection and that they did good.

Three of the four man band left the studio but the vocalist, Janis, stayed behind. She stood rather close to you and you knew what she had in mind. You weren't oblivious to her obvious charms and in fact, you both had been casually flirting with each other throughout the whole session. She leaned in close to you with a wicked grin and slipped in a piece of paper into your hand. "Listen Carmilla... If you ever feel like hanging out, give me a call."


She gave you one solid wink before removing herself from the premises. While you tried to be an upstanding citizen, you couldn't help but stare at her ass as she walked out through the door.

God bless that ass.

You would definitely be calling her soon.

But another day. Today, you had to brave the barrage of questions from both your overbearing mother and your nosy older sister. May god have mercy on your soul. If you had one.

You knew it, you freaking knew it. This happened every single time you went out to have dinner with your mother and your sister. It didn't matter if they were divided or united, they asked the same things. What was up with their fixation on her significant other, or rather the lack thereof. They always made it sound like who you were dating was the most important thing about you. Bullshit.

The only reason why you came to these stupid dinners was because they were your family and you loved them despite their inherent nosiness.

To think the evening was going swimmingly before they start prying into your life.

If there was anything pleasant about the evening, it was the food. Today's restaurant was Mattie's choice and when your sister chose food, she chose well. Plus the wine was excellent. Thank god for that because you needed the alcohol to get through the night. The one thing you didn't understand was how you fooled yourself into thinking they would never ask.

You briefly contemplated on your options. It was easy enough for Laura to call you but that felt like such a cop out. You could, of course, bear the brunt of it all. But that would give you a massive headache. You didn't even understand why this mattered so much to you. But maybe it's because you were getting tired of it all. Year after year, they asked the same stupid question. They started pestering you the moment you were old enough to have a relationship. Maybe it was a family quirk, you had no idea. Mattie didn't used to be this bad. It was only when was nearing the end of her twenties when she started adopting your mother's philosophies in regards to you.

Dear old Matska used to raise all kinds of hell back in her day. Now she was just a walking, breathing, carbon copy of mother dearest. It was a pity watching the mighty fall. Mattie was still a ball buster in heels, and she was still a powerful woman, but she wasn't so fun anymore. Sometimes on a rare day, she could still be the fun one. Nowadays she had too much responsibility to be impulsive.
And here she was, being a significant member of the "Let's Judge Carmilla" committee.

"So Carmilla, are you ah... seeing someone." Your mother asked a couple of minutes ago and you hadn't answered her. Not yet.

You glared at the both of them in response instead of actually saying something.

"Oh, come off it Carm. It's a harmless question." Mattie casually stated.

You rolled your eyes. "If it's so harmless, then why do you keep asking." You retorted.

Your mother looked at you with sad sincere eyes and you might have felt a little bad for being this rude about the topic. But you had every right to be pissed. She placed her hand on top of yours.
"Listen dear, we're just worried. You've never had a relationship your whole life. We both care about you and would hate for you to be alone."

"I have plenty of friends."

Mattie sighed. "But a relationship is... different. There's nothing wrong with being single and independent. At least, not without a fight. Try it once, and we'd never bother you again."

"I'm perfectly content right now Mattie. Don't force it." You stated firmly.

"But at least tell me you've tried dating." You mother asked quite emphatically.

You took a large sip of wine and inhaled deeply. "I've tried it mother. And I'm still here alone aren't I?"

"Maybe you're just not trying hard enough."

Okay, that was it. You stood up from the table abruptly. The plates and the glasses shook as you stood and both your mother and your sister were quiet. You usually bore their questions with more patience but you felt snappish today. You didn't feel like dealing with their bullshit.

"Carm? Are you leaving. For heaven's sake, just sit down. We'll stop asking." Mattie said.

You gritted your teeth. "That's not the point. Sitting down won't solve anything. If anything, all you ever do is make me feel shitty about myself on the sole basis of not having a girlfriend. Why can't you appreciate that I have a job, one that I love doing. Why don't you two ever talk about that, huh? Instead, all you ever talk about is who I'm dating. Like that matters."

You picked up your jacket from your chair and put it on. "And you know what? Did it occur to both of you that maybe I did have a girlfriend and I just didn't want to subject her to the two of you!"

And on that note, you stormed off. Not knowing how your words would come to bite you in the ass.

You returned home in quite a rush. You didn't let Mattie or your mother stop you from leaving the restaurant. The anger you felt seemed to have come from nowhere. At the same time, you knew exactly why your were angry. They had no right to keep badgering you year after year. Was this their idea of a charity project? That poor Carmilla was just so sad and alone that she needs help finding someone to love? God, how callous can they be to your feelings. It wasn't as if you didn't
share their frustrations.

Every once in a while, you felt lonely.

Not lonely in the sense you had no friends but lonely in the romantic sense. You've done your fair share of casual dating but you had never gotten serious. Not with anyone. Sometimes you just yearned that connection. Sometimes you think to yourself that it must be nice to be in love. But then you wake up every morning alone. You didn't need your family to tell you that you had no one. Why couldn't they just accept that you were fine as you were. Would that be so hard?

As soon as you closed the door to your apartment, your immediate thought was to talk to Laura. If anyone could make you feel less shitty, it was definitely her. So you dumped your bag in a corner of the living room and strode towards Laura's door without a sound. In this apartment, doors were never locked unless someone had a girl over. All you had to do was quietly twist the knob and cracked the door open. You stuck your head into the room. The table lamp was the only thing illuminating the room. It was very typical of Laura. She disliked sleeping completely in the dark. Even when they used to have sleepovers, she would ask to keep the lights on one way or another.

"Laura? Are you awake?" you called out in hush tones, you weren't quite sure if she was sleeping.

You saw her head slip out from under the blanket, then you had noticed the patch of light beneath it. She was probably reading on her Kindle, or something to that effect. Laura pushed the blanket away and sat up on the bed, her hair was supremely messed up but as always, a bad hair day would never deter Laura from looking good. Always.

"What's up? How did dinner go?" she asked.

You were prepared to rant about them like you always did. Laura had always been a patient listener and even if she did have opinions, she never voiced them out unless she thought you needed it. But you already knew what she would do. She would hear out your problems, probably rub your back as you spoke, and she would definitely give you one of her Hollis Bear Hugs. Instead of telling her so she could do all those Laura Hollis patented things, you decided not to.

You smiled instead. "Dinner was nothing more than the usual fare. I was just checking up on you, you should sleep. You day job doesn't want you with eye bags."

Laura looked at your for a while and it was quiet as you waited for her response.

"Alright. Good night Carm."

"Night, Laura."

Then you shut the door.

Chapter End Notes

I know it's short but all in good time.
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

I'll put this up here now but I just wanted to let you guys know that my problematic Internet will persist for two more weeks. That being said, I also do not have a laptop right now and am editing on mobile. So if there are any awful typos or bad formatting, please tell me. If my updates are later than usual, you now know why.

Carmilla Karnstein was a creature of habit, much as she tried to deny it, so you knew something was eating at her when she had been waking up an hour early for the past week. You usually woke up earlier than Carmilla due to your job, being a news anchor and all. But it was odd finding Carmilla at the dining table so early in the morning. Ever since you two had been sharing the same apartment for the past four years, you were the one who made breakfast. Not her.

And yet for seven days straight, she was making breakfast.

Not that you minded. Carmilla was actually a pretty good cook when she wasn't being lazy.

Today was another day where she beat you to breakfast. When you woke up today and walked out into your little island of a kitchen, you found her there. Carmilla was already having a cup coffee while frying some bacon in the pan. She noticed you coming and smiled tiredly. "Bacon and Eggs?"

You raised an eyebrow and went for the blue Tardis mug on the shelf. Carmilla only spared you a glance as you poured some coffee for yourself. Then you took a sip, sighed blissfully at the jolt of caffeine, and sat down. "Yes please." You stated.

Carmilla placed a plate of bacon in front of you before she moved to the fridge to get the eggs.

"Why are you up so early?"

"Is it early? I didn't notice..." She replied halfheartedly.

It was way too early for her BS.

"Cut the crap Carm. You've been doing this for a week. Just talk to me. What's wrong?"

Carmilla sighed as she cracked the eggs into a bowl. Yeah, your best friend had a flair for the dramatic. Every aspect of her life had to be done with style. It couldn't happen normally, because that would be too dull for her. "I think I may have fucked up."

Your head quickly snapped in her direction. "Define fucked up."

"I said something I shouldn't have and now mother and Mattie are pestering me."

"Like what?"

She turned to face you and her poker face cracked, she looked at little worried and that was cause for concern. "We had dinner a while back... I snapped because I didn't feel like dealing with their shit. So I may have made scene but here's the best part."
Then Carmilla added some milk into her bowl of eggs and began to beat the mix with a fork. "I was hella mad. So I told them that maybe I had a girlfriend and that maybe I just didn't want to subject her to them."

"But you could easily clear that up. Just tell them the truth."

Carmilla looked even more worried. "I'm afraid it's escalated. Because I was so angry that dinner, Mattie and my mother think that I was being serious. Now they want me to introduced her to the family. Now they're browbeating me into bringing her to dear old William's wedding."

"I can vouch for you. You family loves me, they'll believe me."

Carmilla dumped the egg mixture into the plan. "They wouldn't. They'd think I told you to say that."

You stood up, approached her slowly, and put a hand on her shoulder. "Carm, you have to think positive. Pessimism in general never gets us anywhere. How can I help?"

Carmilla gave you a look. "Not this time Laura. It'll be shitty, but I guess I'll have to be a disappointment for a little while longer."

"Have you considered that maybe you're taking this a little too seriously? This is far from the end of the world Carm." She glared at you.

"For you maybe but you know how my family is. This thing will hang over my head like a cloud. If I were to die the most successful music producer in history, all they would remember was that I lied about being a relationship."

You grimaced and grabbed your phone. "That's it, I'm calling backup."

Carmilla dumped the eggs onto a plate and haphazardly put it on the table. "Who the hell are you calling."

"Your favorite people of course." You replied with a grin.

Carmilla's eyes grew wide and she stomped towards you with great vigor. "Oh no, I know that look in your eye Laura. You're planning something. Whatever it is you've got wrapped in that pretty little head of yours, drop it. Drop it right now."

"No, this is for your own good Carm."

"If you call the Bobbsey twins and Xena, I swear to god Laura I will—"

You put a finger to her lips and stopped her from talking. "Shush... Yes! This is Laura. LaFontaine, round up the gang. We're staging an intervention at my place. For who? It's for Carm. You're the best LaF. I'll see you tonight." Then you closed your phone.

"Laura. What have you done?"

You kept your stance firm. "Suck it up Karnstein. You like hanging out with the four of us together. Admit it."

"I like it when we're not staging interventions for my own person." She snarled.

"Don't be snarky. It's too early in the morning for your sarcasm." You shot back.

"Fine. Are you gonna eat your breakfast?" You exhaled quite loudly.
"Yeah, I'll be there in a sec."

Carmilla sat on her side of the table with great drama. "Fan-fucking-tastic. At least those eggs won't betray me after I poured my heart and soul into them, not like certain best friends in my life."

"A little louder Carm, I don't think the people in the eastern hemisphere heard you. Don't you have other things to annoy?" You snarked right back.

Carmilla ran back to her room, abandoning her breakfast and leaving you clueless.

"What the hell are you doing?" You shouted.

Moments later, you were answered by the sound of the amp reverberating some noise. Before you could do anything to stop her, Carmilla had use her hard rock effect pedal and started to raise all kinds of hell in her room. You liked her when she was doing cool smooth Santana riffs. You hated her when she was doing contemporary screamo riffs.

You walked to her door, cranked it open, and popped your head in. "Real mature Carmilla."

She didn't even spare you a glance.

But she did flip you her middle finger. With the way you rolled your eyes, you wouldn't be surprised if your pupils were at the back of your head. Hell, you wouldn't be surprised if your landlord kicked you out at this rate.

While Carm was usually a mature adult of sound mind and of sound body, she could be rather childish. Especially when she was being lectured or being told what to do. She always had a rebellious streak that reared its head whenever some form of authority was involved. Much as you valued her friendship, she could be a handful. Instead of dealing with your twenty six year old best friend who had reverted to being ten, you decided to take a shower.

Unlike certain best friends, shower heads didn't have extreme mood swings and actually liked your singing. Dear god, this was going to be a long day. And you were going to need some Tylenol.

"Once again, I am Laura Hollis."

"And I am Elizabeth Spielsdorf."

"And this has been Good Morning Styria!"

"And we are now off air!" another voice called out.

You breathed a sigh of relief and leaned back into the crappy chair you had to sit in for an hour. You never understood how a chair could be so crappy tha it could ruin your lower back in an hour. But this was the local news station and the show you anchored was literally a near imitation of a certain show in the faraway land of freedom.
"God, that was one too many 'ands' Laura." Betty sighed.

"The things we do for journalism."


"Something like that. I stepped in during an emergency and apparently I did good. So they offered me the morning news gig. I know we've been doing this for a few months now, but what made you ask?"

Betty smiled charmingly and looked quite genuine. "This industry is a hard business. It's a game of luck and opportunity. I just enjoy knowing a little bit more about us lucky ones. After all, each and everyone of us has a different relationship with Lady Luck." She stated.

You cocked your head to the side. "I never really thought about it that way. But you make a good point."

"But you know, I could call you extremely lucky. It's not everyday you land this job in four years. You're definitely heading places. Just rough it out with the small fish for now." She added and you trusted her words. She had been doing this for a while longer than you. "But hey, this talk is too serious. Could I interest you in some lunch? Or are you busy?"

"It's an eight hour shift, but lunch would be great." You replied.

Betty flashed you her television smile. "Great. It's still early so I'll see you later. Go have fun chasing some stories." She walked away and you sighed in relief.

You had met her precisely six months ago when you got the morning news gig. Betty was quite the seasoned journalist so she intimidated you when they brought her to the station to be your co-anchor. The studio bigwigs may have liked you enough to give you the morning show, something most people watched to pass the time, but they didn't trust you to hold your own. So they got Betty, your certified babysitter.

But she turned out to be incredibly down to earth and she never gave Laura a hard time.

However, Betty was right about luck.

This news anchor gig was an extremely lucky opportunity. Laura thought she would have had to suffer a couple more years. She was simply a writer for the station after she interned. When one of the news anchors of the more important evening news couldn't make it, you stepped in and the rest was history. Apparently, the executive producer was impressed. But sometimes, you couldn't help but feel that you didn't really deserve this. You once told Carmilla how you felt and she did what she always did. She told you flat out that you deserved whatever good thing you had coming your way.

But yeah, you still couldn't help but feel that way.

Then there was Carm.

Carmilla was overthinking again. That usually made her exceptionally broody and the worst roommate ever. Carmilla's habits were tolerable at best but whenever she ran into her mood swings, she subjected everyone around her to emotional whiplashes. You were used to it, but that didn't mean you enjoyed it. Still, she had been your pillar of support throughout the years. You wouldn't have minded helping her out for a change. Because throughout your long history together, she was always the one who ended up saving you from all kinds of trouble.
So the least you could do was host an intervention on her behalf. It was either this or she would regress into her protective bubble and the latter was worse.

You ran a hand through your hair. Did you actually piss her off this morning? She was usually the suffer in silence type, she would never tell you how she felt unless you pried it out of her. So maybe you did piss her off. Or maybe you didn't. Sometimes you just couldn't tell when it came to Carmilla Karnstein. That fact gnawed at you because you were such an open book to her yet you yourself couldn't read her at all. Did that make you a failure as a friend?

You brought out your phone and texted her. '

Are you mad at me?'

You didn't have to wait long because she replied within five minutes.

'No'

You frowned. 'You sure?'

I think I'd know if I was mad' she replied.

'Really?'

'Yes really, don't worry about it. Please don't tell me you're actually stressing over this'

Aha. Guilty as charged, you thought.

'Of course not'

The next came precisely three minutes later.

'Liar liar, pants on fire'

You laughed to yourself.

'Fine. You're not mad at me. See you later.'

'Later Hollis'

You smiled to yourself. At least she wasn't mad at you. You straightened out your blazer and rolled up your sleeves. Your morning broadcast may have been done, but your work was far from over. There were stories to chase and you had best get started.

You watched your tiny roommate move back and forth like a woman on a mission. It made quite the sight. At the height of 5'2, she looked ridiculous trying to get their place all set up for that stupid intervention she had planned. You honestly couldn't care less, but Laura was compelled by some unknown force to be a stellar hostess. Even though it was just their best friends coming over to hang, she still wanted the apartment to be presentable. So there she was, cleaning and readjusting the furniture to suit her organized needs.
In the past hour, you had watch her switch the throw pillows around a dozen times and rearranging god knows what.

What made things even funnier was that she did this every single time people came over. The process never ceased and it always amused you.

"Laura."

You watched her hair flip along with the sharp turn of her head. "Yes?"

"Calm down. It's just our friends. They couldn't care less."

You stated languidly, patting the empty spot next to you on the couch. "Have a break."

She looked like she wanted protest but she settled down and did as you asked.

"Listen sweetheart. I bought the wine, and you know me and my exceptional taste. Plus, Perry's bringing some cheese. That and Lawrence said she was going to bring in some chorizo from that Spanish restaurant nearby. We're good."

You managed to get her to stay still until the cavalry showed up. You were the one to stand up and get the door but you already knew who you'd find. There in a neat little row arranged by height, were the three ginger musketeers. Danny was the first one to barge in because she had been carrying some things from her work and she wanted to ditch it somewhere pronto. Perry followed almost immediately because the cheese would die without her care. LaFontaine simply swaggered in after everyone else and went straight for Laura.

You guys had two really nice couches you managed to get from an auction so they became your designated chill zone. Rather, the apartment you and Laura shared was generally the designated hangout for everything. Your job paid well and you had talent for sniffing out cheap but high quality vintage furniture. It was in your honest opinion that your apartment was the best.

It was only moments later when everyone was gathered at the center with a glass of wine in hand while a wooden board full of cheeses and meat was situated on the coffee table.

Laura took a swig and started tonight's agenda.

"Alright guys, time to get down to business." She said from her spot on the couch next to you.

Danny, who was sitting directly to your left, slung her arm over your shoulder and grinned. "So fangface, what did you do this time?"

"Laura's overreacting." You said with a caustic smirk.

"You were in a bad mood for a week. I wouldn't call it nothing." Laura retorted.

"You have a track record Carmilla. This means something." Perry pointed out as she ate one of the softer cheeses.

You groan loudly. "Fine. Mother dearest and Mattie think I have a girlfriend."

"So what? That's easy to clear up." LaFontaine remarked. You narrowed your eyes at them.

"I had dinner with them a while back. They got on my nerves so I snapped. I told them that maybe I had a girlfriend and I didn't want to subject her to them. Apparently, my very angry delivery of that statement has convinced them that I must be telling the truth. Laura thinks we should do something
about it. I personally think that it's no big deal."

"But Carm, remember what you said this morning? You told you were ready to settle as the family disappointment. I can't just let that slide, it's not fair to you."

"Yes, but I'm over it. I was stressing over nothing and I've moved on now."

"We know how your family is Carmilla... If you tell them you made up your girlfriend, it would probably haunt you to your grave." Danny added.

You closed your eyes in irritation. "But that's none of your concern, all of you. I can deal with it. How many times do I have to say this. It's not a big deal."

"You could actually fake it though."

Your eyes immediately shot towards LaFontaine, their nonchalance about your predicament was becoming quite annoying.

"Excuse me?"

LaFontaine smiled carefully. "I mean, you could find a girl and pretend to date her for a while. Then you could break up with her under your family's watch and they would be none the wiser. It's practical, and it would save you decades of subtle commentary towards the nonexistence of your love life. I personally think it's the least painful solution."

You were all quiet for a while before Laura broke the silence.

"You have to admit, it's not a bad idea." She said as she looked directly at you.

"While I usually disagree with LaF, they have a really good point this time." Perry agreed.

Danny crossed her legs and looked contemplative. "It's feasible. But where would we find someone?"

"Maybe from Carmilla's line of broken-hearted lovers?" Perry suggested.

"That would be messy. Try someone new... Maybe online?" LaFontaine countered.

Laura shook her head. "No, that's a horrible idea. Take it from me, online dating would take forever. Plus, Carm's way too picky."

"Am not." You snarled.

"Really fangface? Nearly everyone you've gone on a date with is a ten." Danny scoffed.

You grimaced. "No one asked you Xena."

Then you leaned forward and addressed everyone with a serious look. "Hey, are we seriously considering this. This is literally the worst idea I have ever heard. And I have heard tons of idiotic ones in my twenty six years of existence. Come on guys..."

"We are being serious. This solution is the easiest to get away with. Just put on a show for a couple of months and you're good to go for the rest of your life." LaFontaine grounded out for all to hear.

"I can't pretend to like someone." You blurted out without a second thought. "That wouldn't be fair to the poor hypothetical girl!"
"What about a potential booty call like... ugh what was her name again. From that indie band... Janis! Yeah, what about her? She's easily a ten, she's in the music industry so you have something in common, and she's not looking for anything serious. How hard would it be to convince her to go for it? I bet all the pretending would be fun." Laura suggested and she was quite enthusiastic about it.

You winced at the outburst. "Sure, Janis is hot. But I can't do that to her either. Plus she's currently in an up and coming band. She's gonna be busy."

"Not for a few months. You're still recording their album. Until that album is finished, her schedule should be quite flexible. You told me that yourself." Laura insisted.

Danny looked at you with a creepy smile and you suddenly had a horrible feeling. "Sounds like a good candidate Carmilla."

"Hey! Don't talk about this like it's a done deal." You whined.

Yes, you whined indeed.

"Carmilla sweetie. Just accept that this is what's best for you. If you want, you could even sleep on it. You might have a clearer head tomorrow." Perry crooned like a concerned mother. You usually relied on Lola Perry as the voice of reason, so her compliance just sealed the deal for you.

The four sets of eyes on you only served to add more pressure to your already chaotic state of mind. You sighed in resignation and drank half your glass of wine. "Fine. I'll give her a call soon. Let's just pray that she bites. Are we all happy now?"

"Very. But now that our first order of business is done, let's proceed with the rest shall we? So Danny, how's life?" Laura asked with a cheeky grin.

You leaned back into the couch and shut your eyes. Just what have you gotten yourself into?

Well, this was it. All or nothing.

You dialed in Janis from Metro Vinyl's number on your phone and placed it next to your ear. The dial tone in itself was quite nerve wracking enough without the imminent embarrassment she was bound to suffer in a few seconds.

Lucky or not, she picked up fairly quickly.

"Hello? This is Janis Cavanaugh speaking."

You breathed in deeply. "Janis? Hi, this is Carmilla."

"Oh, what's up. Is this about our album or..."

"Well, it's certainly about something. But it's not a professional call any more than it is a social call. I need to ask you something... But not on the phone. Maybe over dinner or something."

"This is either you putting the moves on me or you easing me into something. Should I be afraid?" She replied but her tone was light and playful.
You smiled. "Sweetheart, if I was putting the moves on you, you would know it. But I digress. I was thinking eight o'clock at the Blind Pig this Friday."

"I'm up for it sure. You have to admit though, this sounds ominous. Are you sure you're not a serial killer?"

You chuckled. "Guess we'll have to find out, now won't we?"

"I'll see you on Friday then."

"See you on Friday."

Then you ended the call. Yeah, you were totally screwed. There was nothing to save you now from your impending doom. You knew that everything had gone to shit when deep down inside you've started to believe that your stupid friends were right. They did make good sense.

You groaned out loud.

Ah, fuck me.
Chapter 4

In my head, Janis looks like Lynn Gunn. A girl can dream.

The Blind Pig was practically the place to be for good conversation and good booze. Soft alternative music filled the room, giving it a casual feel, while the lights were all dimmed down to make things feel more private. It was one of the lesser known gastropubs in the city and on Fridays, they had live bands playing. You were somewhat acquainted with the owner so quite a few bands that played here were your referrals. Often times though, the bands playing were on point.

Good music, good ambience, good food.

What more could you want?

At least you could break the news to your future girlfriend with style.

Honestly though. The whole plan rested on the off chance that this girl would even agree to such an absurd request. But you had to admit that the logic was sound. And this beat decades of subtle remarks about how you were so socially inept, you lied about having a girlfriend.

Still, you tried to remain positive and hopeful. Rather, you had Laura's voice in your head, telling you all sorts of inspiring things. Because no one could do positive more than Laura Hollis could. She was the literal soul of optimism and was therefore, the manifestation of positive thinking in your inner psyche.

But for this pseudo date, you practically pulled off all the stops. You picked your favorite place to hang out in, you came in early, and you even put on your nicer clothes. Not that you were awful at fashion. Dear god no. Your fashion sense was superbly on point. With this in mind, the mere fact that you dressed above your usual standards was proof of your dedication to this date. You needed this to work.

You had been watching the entrance this whole time, and there she was.

Thank god.

Janis Cavanaugh of Metro Vinyl walked in looking like she just walked off the cover of Rolling Stones. She pulled off the leather and plaid look very well. Somehow, maybe you could survive this whole ordeal after all.

Oh yeah, she was definitely a ten.

She immediately found you and her smile changed her face. That smile could easily melt hearts and weaken knees. And yeah, she clearly knew what she was doing. She was a predator of sorts, just like you.

Yes, this was going to be more than tolerable.

Hopefully.
"Hey you." She greeted as she sat down opposite you.

"I'm glad you could make it." You replied and true enough, you were glad.

"I hope you didn't wait long. I was caught up with something, I'm sorry." She apologized.

"It's perfectly alright. I was the one who called you out here. But hey, serious talk should come with a little alcohol and food."

You quickly ordered for the both of you. The Blind Pig was home territory and knew which dishes were to die for. As for the drinks, you pulled a little bit of your magic. Ordering for the ladies and guessing what they preferred was a standard trick of yours. It was effective for good reason.

"So what is this about? I'm getting mixed signals about this whole thing. I'm not sure which part of my gut I should trust." Janis asked you outright and you appreciated her candor. Why spout bullshit when you could just be straight to the point.

"You're not wrong. But before I say anything I'll probably regret, please know that I hold you with the utmost respect." You stated.

She smiled, but it looked like one of those smiles that masked your true feelings. "Uh huh... At least tell me I'm here because you find me the least bit attractive. All that flirting kinda gives a girl hope you know."

You shrugged and tried to keep a friendly face. "I don't flirt with just anybody. But yeah, I'm going to ask you for a big favor. It would probably consume at least two or three months of your life. You don't have to do it. But I would owe you big time if I did."

Now she had this wary look in her eye, but you had to admire her poker face. "Does it involve my band?"

Smart girl, protecting her band like that. If her first thought was to keep her band from potential exploitation, she was going to do some good in the world. Better her and her struggling alternative band rather than some stuck up ungrateful pop singer.

"No, I promise I'll only need you socially."

"You're lucky you're charming you know. But I would prefer that you just ask me upfront." You sighed loudly.

"This wasn't my idea. But would you be my fake girlfriend?"

Her poker face dissolved in less than a second and her face was just blank. As if she was still trying to process the question because clearly, she was expecting something else. It was obvious that she was steeling herself for something far more worse than being someone's fake girlfriend. She had to blink twice before a grin formed on her face, and she had begun to laugh hard. While her laugh was cute, you couldn't help but feel a little insulted with how amused she was.

"Okay, I was definitely not expecting that."

"Don't say I didn't warn you."

She leaned forward. "Allow me to be frank. But I fail to see how you can't score a girlfriend the old fashioned way. I'm sure you know this Carmilla, but you're hot."
"I did know that, but thank you." You replied with an all knowing smirk.

"There has to be a good story behind this."

You considered your next words carefully. "I assure you there is. The gist of it is that my family thinks I have a girlfriend and they want me to bring her over. I've been stalling them for an official dinner date but eventually, they'll pick a day for me anyway. If they found out that I made up my girlfriend, they'll never let me live it down. They'll keep making snarky commentary about how I had to fake a girlfriend for the rest of my natural life, which to them is the worst thing I can do."

"And you're going to counter that by having a fake girlfriend?" She asked but you noticed she was trying her best not to laugh.

"It's not a genius plan. But we could break up after a month or two and they would handle that better than my perpetual singleness." You pointed out.

You watched Janis contemplate with mild interest. She had an interesting face when she was in serious thought. Then you watched her smile and you may have had some hope for your stupid plan. "Okay. I have to admit, that I'm intrigued. And I'm flattered that you chose me for this... endeavor. But what would pretending to date you entail?"

"You would need to show up at every family dinner in which your presence is a must. I wouldn't want to subject you to them all the time, you'd die. My cousin's getting married next month so we'll have to fly out of town. But we would only be for around there for two weeks. Then we'll be back in good old Styria. That's basically it. The terms of fake dating are negotiable. Our break up needs to be a matter of public record. Rather, my family needs to be painfully aware of our mutual separation."

"Hmm. A couple of dinners and two weeks out of town. Then a public breakup. It doesn't really sound like a hardship if you ask me."

"You don't need to decide anything right now. Just give me your answer as soon as possible."

Janis ran a hand through her hair and the gesture was annoyingly attractive. "Why wait when I can tell you 'yes' right now? It sounds fun. I mean, this is way more interesting than just a weekend of fun. You and I both know we're not looking for anything serious. If anything, this sounds like a fun diversion."

One of the waitresses swung by with your meals and placed it on the table in a hurry. It was a Friday after all, the place was a full house. Then she ran off to attend to some other table.

Janis eyed the food and groaned. "For someone who doesn't date, you sure do know how to pick a restaurant." She remarked.

"Thanks... So you're really agreeing to this?" She grinned and nodded.

"Well yeah! I've got nothing to lose. I'm sure I'd have fun one way or another."

"I bet you would. But there's one more thing..."

She raised an eyebrow. "Oh?"

"You'll have to meet my friends. It was their idea and they're really hellbent on seeing this through. You'll have the five us helping you pretend to be my girlfriend. I'll say this as early as now, my friend are obnoxious. You don't have do everything they tell you to do."
She laughed and looked like she had just come across a challenge. "Meet the friends huh? I think I could handle that."

"I hope you don't regret saying that."

"So when is this?"

You had to admit that you felt bad telling her that the peanut gallery wanted to meet her tomorrow. But hey, mission accomplished right?

It was mission accomplished indeed. The whole gang was going back to the apartment for the new addition. After you looked at the results of your effort, you couldn't help but smile and pat yourself on the back. Now that Carmilla had finally made the effort to help herself, you and the rest could deal with the rest. Now you all had the job of briefing the new person in the least amount of time possible. How hard could it be to give someone the crash course to Carmilla Karnstein?

"Hey Laura, come over here." LaFontaine called.

You crossed your apartment from the little kitchen island with a glass of iced tea in hand. You walked over to what you had considered the conversation pit of the living room. Your joint apartment with Carmilla was a simple two bedroom affair but the main reason why you both bought it was for the living room. It came with this huge living space where the whole gang could hang out. And now, it filled you with some degree of joy to know that your new guest liked it.

"Janis right? I've heard good things about you from Carm." You greeted as you handed her the iced tea. She smiled amiably.

"Thank you, and you must be the roommate."

You sat down on the couch with Janis and LaFontaine. So far it was just the three of you in the apartment. Carmilla was still finishing things up at the recording studio, Perry had insisted on making a lasagna, and Danny was Carmilla's designated driver. The recording studio was literally in Danny's way so that was a done deal. But this was an opportunity in itself. You had Ms. Cavanaugh to yourself and LaFontaine was practically your partner in crime.

"Yeah, that's me. I'm Laura Hollis by the way."

Janis gave you a sideways glance. "Carmilla never said you were cute... It's unfair how attractive individuals gravitate towards each other but I digress. How long have you known each other?"

"About twenty years now?"

"Twenty one." LaFontaine corrected you.

Janis looked impressed. "Long time. Did you two ever..."

"No! Dear god no. Carm's practically my sister." You blurted out.

Janis raised an eyebrow. "That's a pretty strong reaction. You sure about that honey?"
"I'm pretty sure. Why does everyone ask that question?" You replied exasperatedly.

Janis grinned and leaned back into the couch. Just from her smile, it was easy to imagine why she easily caught Carmilla's attention. "Do you really want me to answer that?"

"Well yeah! That would solve one mystery." You replied eagerly.

"You're both attractive people, you're both queer, you both know each other well, and you're both walking stereotypes. The classic blonde and brunette as it were. But yeah, it was a little rude of me to assume. My apologies." Janis stated in one breath.

"She's polite. Carmilla's mother would dig that." LaFontaine pointed out excitedly.

"I suppose knowledge is power..."

"So what's deal with her family. Don't get me wrong, I'm a hundred percent on board with this. It's just that the fact that we're doing this at all is red flag." Janis asked.

You thought about it for a moment. "Well, there's no doubt that her family loves her. I can attest to that. They just want her to be happy. But they can be a bit much and Carm doesn't take criticism well. Her family loves to nitpick so it's not a good combination. In fact, they haven't gotten over how Carm never told them she was gay. They had to walk in on her with some girl from the cheerleading squad. So yeah, they can hold grudges pretty hard."

"Yikes."

"Yikes is right. Mrs. Karnstein can be overbearing at times. But you should be more worried about Mattie, her older sister. Unlike her mother, she bites. And to save your the awkwardness, Mattie's adopted so steer clear of that conversational route." You added.

"Noted. Anything else?" "You'll have to wait for everyone else. We agreed that we would do it together so Carm could filter out the info. All those secrets, you know."

Then you heard your ringtone and checked out your phone.

'We're all coming up now. You didn't tell her anything bad did you, cupcake?'

'Don't you trust me?' You texted back.

'With my life perhaps, but not with her'

Typical Carmilla. She always needed to have a comeback.

"The cavalry is coming." You announced.

"Should I be scared?" Janis asked.

"Depends..." LaFontaine answered.

"On what?"

"If Danny likes you." You both filled in.

Because out of the five of you, Danny was the overprotective one. Once she considered you family, she essentially did everything she could to keep you guys safe. Whether it was blowing off potential stalkers or keeping you all out of trouble, she was there. If Danny didn't you like you, you should
As if on cue, Carmilla entered with Perry and Danny trailing close behind her. She tossed her bag onto the nearby table and walked over to you with a suspicious look. "Did you say anything to her?"

You gasped mockingly. "Carmilla Karnstein! What have I ever done to deserve this treatment."

"Hiding your cookie stash from me for starters." She replied with a smile before finally look at Janis.

"Howdy there fake girlfriend." Janis gave a little wave.

"Hey you."

You put their exchange under great scrutiny. It was in your honest opinion that their interest in each other was purely aesthetic. The looked good together and there was some chemistry but it was barely palpable. Still, they could pull it off.

Then Danny showed up with her friendly face. After all, she hadn't determined whether or not she liked this girl. Friendly was good. She rested her arm over Carmilla's shoulder, her height difference was obvious. "You must be Janis."

Janis smiled and leaned over to shake Danny's hand. "You must be Danny."

"I've heard some things about you." Danny replied.

"Good things I hope."

"Yes, but that remains to be seen." Danny replied with a flatter tone.

You watched LaFontaine whisper a few words to Janis and she seemed to ease down. Probably some words of encouragement or perhaps a word of caution about Danny. Carmilla frowned and casually removed Danny's arm from her person. "Play nice Xena. Don't forget that this was your idea too."

"I am playing nice. I don't know what your problem is fangface." Danny replied. She obviously tried to hold her laughter, but she failed. She kept breaking into a smile. Carmilla shook her head and looked over to the kitchen where Perry was.

"Hey Perr, we're gonna start the inquisition now." She called out.

Perry shot out of the kitchen in a jiffy and soon, the whole gang was nestled into the pit. It was Laura, Janis, and LaFontaine on one side and Carmilla, Danny, and Perry in the other.

"Okay, how do we start this?" Carmilla asked.

"This is interesting. We're all giving a lecture on How-To-Be-Carmilla's-Girlfriend-101." LaFontaine remarked.

"Laura should start it. She knows Carmilla like she knows football." Perry pointed out.

"Oh? You're a football kind of gal? Did you play?" Janis asked.

"Are you kidding? Laura lives and breathes it. She played central midfielder in high school and was the team captain. She got through college on a football scholarship." Carmilla bragged.

"Impressive. I wouldn't have pegged you as the athletic sort. You look like you would trip over
You glared at Carmilla. "We're here to talk about you, not me."

"Fine then, let's talk about me."

"Basically we moved into the city proper for college, but we grew up out in the suburbs. So I guess could call us Styrians through and through." Laura started.

"Elementary was fairly uneventful though." Carmilla said with a bored expression.

"So how long are we supposed to have been dating?" Janis asked.

LaFontaine raised a brow. "That is a fair point."

"If Carmilla's been hiding her from her family, it must have been a while." Perry added.

Danny shook her head. "It could be that it's a new relationship and Carmilla doesn't feel like sharing yet."

LaFontaine leaned forward and their eyebrows scrunched together. "For practicality's sake, a single month sounds fair. You guys will be intimate enough, yet you won't be a hundred percent serious. At least they wouldn't be breaking any questions about marriage. One month, I mean who does that? Ask questions I mean."

Carmilla laughed before she crossed her legs and smirked. "Mother would. But you're right LaF, one month is good enough."

"Fancy. We could say that we met through work, which is true. So do we have a meet cute?"

"Cheeky. But yes Carm, do tell me you have a meet cute?" You said with a light mocking tone.

"What in the frilly hell is a meet cute."

"For shame Carmilla, I thought you learned a thing or two from our weekly romantic comedies." You gasped.

She groaned. "You know I sleep through those."

"Long story short fangface. A meet cute is the part when the guy meets the for the first time. Girl and girl in this case." Danny spared them trouble.

Carmilla massaged her temples as if she had a sudden headache. "Okay then. We flirted with each other throughout the whole recording. She slipped me her number, I called. I don't think it needs to be extraordinarily cute. That wouldn't be realistic."

"Mattie could settle for that story. If she can accept it, it'll fly right by Mrs. Karnstein." You affirmed.

"So with that new information in mind, let's continue." Janis said sweetly.

"One month's worth of dating. She doesn't need to know everything, which is great. But let's talk about boundaries. Is there like kissing?" Danny asked, of course she did.

Carmilla grinned and raised an eyebrow. "What do you think Ms. Cavanaugh?"

"Oh I don't know... You tell me." She replied.
LaFontaine shook their head and made some kind of telepathic exchange with Perry based on the looks they were giving. "Looks like feigning interest won't be a problem." They said.

You had already settled that earlier. But knowing their boundaries and whatnot was something you never wished to hear. Hearing about Carmilla's conquests is one thing, her being a professional despoiler of virtue and all, but to hear about Carmilla and intimacy in the same sentence? That was bizarre and it was too much information. As you told Janis earlier, you felt nothing but familial love for Carm. You would never want to know the details of your brother or sister's love life to that degree right?

"I wouldn't want to know. You two should probably talk that out without four other people in the room." You grounded out and it came out a little too harsh. That was not intentional and you had no idea where that came from.

"Of course, let's continue the crash course." Janis replied after looking askance at you.

"Excellent." Carmilla said nonchalantly.

And so the whole affair would last until the late afternoon. It was a fairly productive afternoon and things were looking up. It made everything seem real now and to be honest, you were a little excited. Faking a relationship was one thing, but you really wanted to see Carmilla in one. That literally never happened with Carm and her lone wolf gig. But yes, this was actually happening and somehow it would all work out.

Would it?

Despite your high hopes for this little deception, you couldn't help but feel a something odd deep in your gut. Something told you that things were going a little too well, and there was bound to be some complications. Soon.

And if you knew something about your gut. It was rarely wrong.

All the more reason why this had to work.

As stipulated by the whole fake dating agreement, Carmilla had gone on an actual honest to goodness date with her fake girlfriend. It was quite interesting watching Carm look like an average person for once. She was actually asking about what to wear and what to say, not that she needed help on either front. She was just naturally charming and she always knew what to wear. Still, the slight fidgeting was quite the show.

But it was nice being the one to wait on your friend for a change.

Plus, you had the whole apartment to yourself.

That almost never happened. Whenever you were home, usually Carmilla was right there with you. Opportunities like these were rare. These were dance-in-you-panties moments, which was one of the many things you did. Specifically, you danced in your underwear with your music for once, instead of Carmilla's. That and you could actually watch your movies in peace without any snarky side comments about your characters.
And the only reasoned why you watched romantic comedies was because Carmilla refused to digest your usual fare of cult movies.

To this day, Carmilla only remembered Serenity because of that badass chick who killed everybody at the end of the movie. Honestly, a multidimensional character with layers was just reduced to 'that badass chick'. What an insult to River Tam.

To think she had the brass to call herself your best friend.

Still, the peace and quiet ain't half bad. Right now you were watching another one of your geeky movies with a glass of wine in hand. It was apparent that the older you got, the more drawn you were to wine. It was so much more sophisticated. As compared to all those shots at the local bar near Silas University, this was a vast improvement.

Boy, those were wild days.

It's strange how you all seemed to quiet down after college. Here you were, working for the local news station. It was a step forward in your career but you were still a tiny fish in the pond. Everyone was relatively tiny fish. Danny was in her third year at her firm, LaF was still working on their Phd., Perry on the other hand was on the kitchen staff of an up and coming restaurant in the nicer part of town.

The only who didn't seem to be struggling as much was Carmilla. But it was always a facade. She didn't always tell you, but sometimes it was clear that her job frustrated her at times.

Being an adult was hard.

Why would kids ever want to grow up?

You sighed out loud and finished up the last of the wine in your glass. You glanced at the wall clock and leaned your head back. It was around ten thirty in the evening and Carmilla had yet to return. You may have enjoyed your alone time for a while, but inevitably you missed her presence. It was too quiet.

Just when you were prepared to hit the hay earlier than your usual time, Carmilla finally came home. Speak of the devil.

"I see you're still up." She stated the obvious.

You shrugged and turned off the TV. "It's not that late. How did your date go?"

Carmilla smiled in that mysterious way she always did. "It was... fun."

"I take it this means that you'll be more amenable to dating in the future?"

"Don't get your hopes up Hollis. How's dating on your end?" She replied.

You stood up and placed the wineglass on the nearest surface you could find. "I thought we weren't going to talk about my online dating."

"Humor me."

"I haven't gone on any dates since the last we agreed not to talk about it." You replied with your arms cross.

"That was like what... weeks ago? I thought you were hopeful."
You chuckled softly. "Yes well I figured I shouldn't try so hard. I'll just take a break from that scene and give my profile a rest."

Carmilla walked to where you were, which was the couch, and sat down with you. "I guess even the voice of optimism needs a break every once in a while."

"So tell me about your night. Like I always do when I go out on a date." You asked with your head tilted and a sweet smile on your face.

Carmilla's mouth quirked up at the gesture. "Well... she took me to one of those underground live concerts. She's got friends in special places you know? Hooked me up with some interesting people in the industry. I found a band that would fit in with our label. But it was fun, being with so many people from my field. We all knew what we were talking about. It was nice."

"Any sneaking around?"

"Maybe some sneaking."

"And?"

"And what?"

You nudged Carmilla with your elbow. "You know what I mean." She laughed and gave you a weird look. "I don't kiss and tell Laura." "Yes, and I'm Lois Lane." Carmilla looked at something else. "Let's just say that convincing Mattie and dear old mother would not be a problem, touching wise. But..."

"But what?" Then her gaze met yours.

"I like Janis, but I'm not sure I can sell the whole starry eyed routine."

"You've been dating for a month, technically speaking. You don't have to be in love." You assured her.

"Yeah but they have expectations. I've been avoiding relationships so much, what if they have these ridiculous standards for who I date? What if she's not up to scratch. Then they'll have another thing to hold over my head. What if they think I just dated her just to appease them? I mean—"

"Hey, chill. They won't suspect a thing. If you want, I could come along for the first meet up so I could ease them into it. Make sure things go smoothly if you're that concerned. It wouldn't be weird since I am a family friend at this point." Carmilla nodded slowly. "Right okay... I would appreciate that."

"So when is the first family meeting?" A crease formed in the middle of her brows.

"It's this Wednesday, we're having lunch at that restaurant Perry's working in. For extra support of course, plus that restaurant of hers is a the critic's favorite this season."

"I know she's not the head chef, but she practically runs the kitchen for a nobody chef. But yes, the extra support would be welcome." Carmilla ran a hand through her hair and laughed softly. "I swear to god, we sound like we're doing some covert operation. It's like an episode of Person of Interest."

"You actually remembered a show. There is hope after all." She narrowed her eyes at you.

"I happen to like that show, don't get all high and mighty now short stuff."
You stood up from the couch and put a hand on her shoulder. "Don’t stay up too late and don’t forget that I always have your back. Okay, short stuff?"

Carmilla touched your hand lightly and looked up to meet you. "Of course. Always. No sleep or you’ll never grow."

"Will do" you replied.

Then you walked over to your room and entered it quietly. But then you doubled back and cracked the door open by a tiny fraction. You popped your head out. "Good night."

You watched her wave back without turning her head. "Night."

You had best mark Wednesday on your calendar. That would make for an interesting lunch. After all, you were to play wingman for your buddy. What could possibly go wrong?
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Posting this a day early because I won't be able to on Monday. So yeah, I do write a bunch these chapters in advance. Now you know. But do I have a plan?

That is a good question. I'm not so sure.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Oh dear god. Someone, just shoot me.

The whole idea was just unreal when you were all just talking about it from the safety of your loft. Now that you were actually here in the restaurant, things suddenly became so real for you. It was actually happening and all you could think of was how surreal everything was. You never imagined that today was the day you'd bring a girl to meet the family. Albeit she was your fake girlfriend, the irony was still there.

Then you looked to Laura who was standing beside you and you felt relieved. At least she had your back. Today was surprisingly nerve wracking but if you were going to sell this, you would need to calm down. You tried to enjoy the scenery instead, the distraction could help you relax and stop your palms from sweating like crazy. It also didn't help that Janis wasn't here yet but she had assured you that she was well on her way.

Perry's restaurant was actually a high class establishment located in some fancy country club. It was exactly the kind of thing your mother liked, which made it perfect. So here you both were, standing out on the veranda where your reservation was. Perry had swung by the both of you earlier just to see how you were doing, but she had ducked back into the kitchen. The lunch hour rush had started and she was needed in the back but she promised to make things go as smoothly as possible.

Your foot had been tapping relentlessly and it eventually bothered Laura.

"Carm, calm down. She's coming."

"Well she's late." You spat.

You gave Laura a once over. She looked nice today, maybe she could distract her family. Laura was a charmer and she just had a way with your family. They loved her to death so she could easily take the edge off. That and she would be a pleasant surprise. You didn't tell your folks that Laura was coming and they could never say no to her. "Just breathe in the clean expensive air. Relax, it'll go swimmingly. Do you want a hug?"

"No." You seethed.

"Fine, no hugs. Just breathe in and out. Come on, we've worked on this. You and Janis look natural and I'm here. It'll be okay... It's not like you to panic." Laura said with her voice full of concern.

"I'm all kinds of things Laura, but I've never lied to my family about something this big before. Maybe it's my guilty conscience but whatever it is, it's bothering me." You said as you ran a hand through your hair in frustration.
"Okay, wow. This sure has escalated." She remarked sarcastically.

"Laura..."

"Fine, I'm sure she'll call us any moment now—"

You heard the iconic Doctor Who theme song playing out of the blue, and you knew whose phone that belonged to. Laura had jumped at the sound of her own ring tone. But she pulled out her phone and pressed it against her ear. "Hello?"

You watched her face change drastically and she tore the phone from her ear and put it in speaker. "Hey, Carmilla? You there?"

You crossed your arms. "Janis? Please tell me you're on your way."

"I'm really sorry honey. I'm afraid I'm caught up in something and I can't get out of it. Not for a couple of hours..."

"Where are you right now?" Laura asked.

"I'm at a precinct. Some idiot rammed their car into the cab I was in. No one got hurt, at least not seriously. But it did cause some tremendous traffic and I did sprain my wrist. Looks like I won't be playing the guitar for a while. That and the cops won't let me out, not until they take my statement. They sure seem to be taking their time." Janis said in a burst. She sounded quite distraught and quite apologetic.

"Well, I guess I'm f*cked."

"I'm so sorry Carmilla. If only I left the house sooner, this wouldn't have happened."

You breathed in deeply. "It's fine. Don't worry about it, I'll handle this. It's not your fault and you shouldn't feel guilty about this."

"Do you need any help? Danny's with a good law firm. She could come in and get you. You'd be out way earlier than you'd be without her." Laura insisted.

"It's fine, I can handle this. I'm not the guilty party after all. I'll be well on my way by the end of the day. You go worry about the family." She replied.

"Stay safe." You heard yourself say and you meant it.

Then the phone went dead. Laura pocketed it and this time, she was the one who looked worried. But only Laura could feel the panic yet stay levelheaded. It was the journalist in her that kept her prepared for any situation. Right now as you watched her, you could tell that she was trying to come up with a solution.

You put your hands on your hips and stepped forward. "Laura, it's over. Let's just have lunch, endure it, and carry on."

"We can't let you get out of this looking worse than you already do. Remember, it's either we do something or you suffer at least two decades of snide comments. Your choice Carm."

You felt your phone vibrate and you flipped it out. You gritted your teeth at the text and shoved it back in your pocket. "That was Perry. They just got out of the car. We don't have time to come up
with something Laura. Let's just tell them the truth."

Oh no.

Laura had that look in her eye.

Shit.

You backed away slowly. "Laura, whatever you're thinking. Drop it. Right now."

"I'm not thinking anything!" She retorted.

"I know you Laura, drop that thought." You watched her eyes move quickly to the side and somehow you knew that your family was right behind you. Before you could turn around to look at them, you found yourself being yanked down. What happened next was blur because before you knew it, the unthinkable had just occurred. All you could think of was this.

Wow.

Laura Hollis was kissing you.

It didn't register. Not until your eyes were closed and your arms were now wrapped firmly around her waist. You had no idea why but, your best friend's lips felt so incredibly soft. It reminded you of smooth silk, delicate and light to the touch. It was like all the gears in your head had just clicked into place after years of spinning endlessly. You could feel the blood pumping fast and you didn't feel inclined to stop. There was a frisson of heat in the way your lips slid against hers. Your lips tingled with delight as the strange sensation spread to your toes and your fingertips. You didn't expect this. You'd never thought of kissing her before and yet her lips were all you could think about. You felt like you were floating in the air with the wind beneath your wings, carrying you to god knows where. Even the way she lightly massaged the nape of your neck felt really good.

Before you could do anything else, Laura had broken off the kiss. Your foreheads were touching and you could feel the heat of her breath on you. Your face felt flushed and you couldn't help but notice her eyes. They were hazel, you had always known that, but you had never noticed the gold flecks hidden within them. Her pupils were dilated and her breathing was harsh, just like you. You cleared your throat and broke away from Laura. She was already miles ahead of you while here you were, standing like a deer in the headlights. She turned to look at your folks and had the smarts to look embarrassed. Like they hadn't intended to put on a show. Like it had just happened for no reason. But it did. It did just happen with no rhyme or reason.

You turned around and you found your mother and Mattie with shocked expressions. That was new. This was the first time you had ever seen them look this shocked. Keeping a poker face at all times was the family trait. Mattie, looking beautiful and dressed to kill as always, was the one who stepped forward. "Laura... We didn't expect you—"

Laura didn't meet Mattie's eyes on purpose and you felt a little swell of pride. She was quite the actress now wasn't she? "I that is... I mean we— we didn't know you were standing ah... there."

Laura stuttered.

Mrs. Karnstein looked quite flabbergasted. "Carmilla honey, did it occur to you that if you were dating Laura, we would like to have known about it?"

You quickly got your act together and sheepishly intertwined your fingers with Laura's. "Mother... It's just that I didn't know how you'd take it. It is Laura after all..."
Mattie quickly recovered. "In all fairness dear, everyone thought you were dating at some point."

Laura’s eyebrows bunched up together. "When?"

"I mean, you were both single. And you both shared an apartment. It was kind of suspicious. It's nice to know that those suspicions were not unfounded." She replied.

You looked at Laura and smiled at her. Then you kissed her temple and you actually made her blush, that was interesting. You were going to have a strongly worded talk later. One about boundaries perhaps? "So mother, Mattie, meet my girlfriend." You introduced as a formality.

"But Laura darling, we already consider you family." Your mother replied without a second thought.

You quickly put yourself in between your "girlfriend" and your mother. You smiled amiably and put on your most charming tone. "Maybe we should sit down. I hear the food at this place is fantastic. We can talk all we like once we're no longer famished."

"I second that. I haven't eaten a thing today, my morning meeting ate up some valuable time." Mattie said as she took her seat. You all sat down according to plan. The one difference was that Laura was sitting where your girlfriend should sit. This was going to be problematic in the long run, but it made sense for now. Never mind the fact that Laura had the softest lips you had ever kissed. That didn't matter at all. In fact, you had completely forgotten about it already.

Really.

You didn't even remember the way how her lips felt on yours.

Not in the slightest.

To sell your body language, you and Laura sat closer to each other than the usual. That and you were still holding hands under the table. "I already took the liberty of ordering a set menu in advance. I have a friend who works here, they'll handle it. I did leave the wine list for your perusal. I figured you both would appreciate choosing the wine."

"Right you are dear sister. As if I would let you pick the wine." Mattie retorted as she snapped her fingers.

One of the waiters immediately showed up in his pristine white suit with a napkin nearly hanging on his forearm. "Yes Madame?"

"We'll take a Cabernet Sauvignon."

"We have an excellent bottle from California, aged nine years."

"Good, that'll do for now."

"Very good Madame." He said firmly and left to do his thing.

The real interrogation started the moment you all had wine glasses filled to satisfaction. As per usual, your sister had picked a good bottle. You casually swirled the liquid and sniffed it before drinking it. As soon as you had settled your wineglass back on the pristine table, it had started. "So how long as this been going on? And right under our noses too." Your mother asked.

You looked at Laura and remembered how she used to drone on and on about the rules of improvisation. From here on out, you were going to tread lightly. "We started dating two months
ago.” You started. It was better to stick to the original story and Laura was a part of its inception. She could easily bluff it, right?

"But maybe we had a little something going on for a lot longer than that." Laura continued.

"I guess we just... gravitated towards each other." Then you suddenly felt her hand grow tense and you could tell she was nervous. You rubbed your thumb against her hand to reassure her and you tried to smile at her.

"Well, if it's any consolation to you both. We didn't plan this. Rather, even the fact that we're dating at all is shocking to me." You said before looking Laura right at her big brown eyes. "But I feel like I've wasted too much time with this one."

"We spent a whole year dancing around each other before we figured out that we started to have feelings for one another. It was... an interesting year." Laura added.

Okay, so good so far. It was acceptably vague, which was good. Too much detail would expose the story for the sham that it actually was.

"I thought it was curious that you only mentioned having a girlfriend weeks ago. We pressed you for details but you refused to give us anything. My feelings are hurt Carm." Mattie said with a grin.

"I feel nothing but respect for your feelings" you replied.

"So how's work going? The partners at the firm still being jackasses?" Laura asked, quoting Mattie from something she said before. She was also changing the subject, which was very clever. You didn't how long you could afford to be vague.

Mattie smiled warmly. "Unfortunately so. Men can be ignorant but no matter, I will succeed. Like I always do. Tell your friend Danny that she should come work for us. Corporate is much more fun than pro bono litigation."

"I'll pass the offer on but I don't think she'll bite."

"A shame, she's quite good for her age." Then the salad came and you were all now distracted with the dish before you. That was good, that meant you didn't have to converse for the most part.

"So how's work going for the both of you?" Your mother asked.

"I'm still at the local news station." Laura replied.

You mother smiled ever so slightly. "I know dear, I watch you every morning. Is being a journalist working out for you? If you need any help honey, you could always ask us. The Karnsteins are always here to help."

You watched Laura smile bashfully. "Thanks but no thanks. Carn's already my pillar of support. I'm good."

"And Carmilla? How's the music business doing?" Your mother asked with inquisitive eyes.

This was bizarre. You suddenly understood how Alice felt when she dropped into Wonderland. All your life, your family had pestered you about relationships at every single family affair. Whether it was Christmas or Thanksgiving, all they ever asked was if you were dating someone. Now that you were, they were talking to you like normal. They were finally asking normal questions. You were glad they weren't giving you hard time. No doubt that was Laura's influence. But still, you couldn't
help but feel insulted. Was your position in the family only validated by dating someone?

It was ridiculous.

"It's doing fine mother. I just signed another band to the label recently, our profit margins are up this quarter. Looks like our studio is here to stay." You replied politely.

Laura looked at you and squeezed your hand. "You okay?" She whispered.

You held onto her hand like your lifeline. "I'll be fine."

"We can leave."

"No, I can handle it."

"So what are your living arrangements like? Now that the two of you are together now?" Mattie asked.

"We still keep the two rooms. But I stay at Carm's more often than in mine. The apartment's still the same. Not much has changed actually."

"See here, we'd use yours except your sheets are itchy." You remarked with a light tone.

"I was being cost efficient. Your sheets are ridiculously expensive and hard to wash." She retorted.

You grinned. "Just admit it cupcake, you like my bed."

Laura pushed you away indignantly and you somehow felt triumphant. Perhaps getting her embarrassed could be your new hobby. Right after you read her the riot act of course. "Point being, the apartment's fine." Laura concluded rather briskly.

Yes, the apartment was fine. Thank god you and Laura were on the same wavelength. It was fairly easy for the both of you to lie together. Well, you weren't lying about the sheets though. Her sheets were horrible. You caught her napping in your bed one time. You couldn't bear to wake her up because she seemed so comfortable. It was like she was melting into the soft sheets and the even softer mattress. After that one time you caught her, you never brought it up. It became your little secret.

"So I take it you'll be bringing Laura to William's wedding?" Your mother asked.

You shrugged. "Naturally. Who else would I take?"

"Good, at least our attendance is settled."

Then you leaned forward. "Would you happen to know who dear old William is marrying?"

Mattie looked irritated as she cut into her salad. "Some woman I've never even heard of before. And I usually know everything. I dislike unknown variables."

"What does the wedding invitation say?" Laura inquired.

"Some woman named Sarah Jane. I don't recall her full name but does it matter? She'll be taking William's name anyhow." Mattie spat.

"So no one knows who she is... Would you like me to find out? I'm a journalist. Finding out who she is would be a walk in the park." Laura offered.
"It's okay darling. We'll just have faith in William and be surprised." Your mother replied kindly. It was no wonder that your mother had a soft spot for Laura. Even more so now that she knew you were both "dating".

"So when do we fly out." You asked your mother.

"The wedding is happening in two months. It's all quite a rush. We'll be there for two weeks, however. It's taking place in this nice private estate in the country side. We'll have private accommodations on the estate of course. The other guests will have to book their own hotel rooms."

"Sounds like fun, right Carm." Laura said looking genuinely excited as she nuded you with her elbow.

You smiled at her. "Mhmmm. Whatever makes you happy." You said before lowering your voice so only Laura could hear. "Happy girlfriend means I get laid." You joked.

Laura gave you a look that said she wasn't going to take your shit. "Even if I was dating you, you wouldn't get laid that way. Not with me." She replied in an equally lowered tone.

"Glad to know it. We need talk."

"Later. Fake this first."

"You know Carm. I never imagined this would happen but now that it has, allow me to be frank. I don't know how to quite explain it, but you both fit. I think you're good together." Mattie said rather sincerely. Sincerity was rare with Mattie.

"So Carm, if you hurt Laura here, I will personally ensure your early demise. Laura honey, if she does anything bad to you, you tell me right away." Mattie continued with a teasing smile.

You shook your head. "Gee sis, thanks for the vote of confidence."

Then two more waiters showed up and took away your plates and replaced it with the appetizer, it was some kind of fancy dish with seared scallops. But fine dining was not your forte, like you would know what the dish was. "On a separate note, I forgot to mention that William's engagement party is happening around a few weeks from now. It's a formal affair so do get something nice, the both of you." You mother finally added with a smile.

"Any other dates I should know." You inquired.

Your mother lightly shook her head. "We'll keep in touch."

You breathed in deeply and steeled your nerves for a really long lunch. If you already wanted to go home this badly after the appetizer, you simply couldn't imagine the other dinner dates, and the whole wedding. But that was the least of your concerns right now. The one problem you had and the one problem that needed to be settled was one the same.

What should you do about Laura? Hell if you know. But this was going to be exceedingly messy.
The whole cab ride back to your apartment was searingly quiet. Neither of you had spoken to each other and had settled for casually looking out at the window. There was even a visible distance between the two of you as you both sat the furthest away you could from the other. It was disconcerting. The tension was almost tangible and there was a clear elephant in the room, or the cab in this instance. The most you did was spare a glance at Laura. Not because you were furious at her, that was part of it, but because your mind kept wandering back to the kiss.

For crying out loud, it was just a kiss.

With your best friend.

The one person who knew you like you knew yourself.

You'd always thought that if you ever shared a kiss with her, it would be weird. It would be exactly like kissing your sister and that thought alone grossed you out tremendously. No, it wasn't that simple. You had an undeniable reaction to her. You couldn't deny that you kissed her back without a second thought. You couldn't deny that you wanted nothing more than to run your tongue past her lip or even worse, you were overcome by the urge to kiss her everywhere, breathing in her scent like a depraved woman as you went by. It was especially worse because you weren't expecting it, whatever you felt then must have been god's honest truth. Of all the things to come at you from out of the blue, this was by far the worst.

Finally, the cab ride of awkwardness was over.

You paid the driver and immediately walked out of the car without waiting for the change. Instead of waiting on Laura, you stormed into the building. You barely noticed that Laura tried to chase you down but you refused to give her the satisfaction. Right now, the part of you that was angry was the dominant one. You pushed back your confusion back in because you would need your anger. Laura needed to understand that this was not okay. In fact, this was worse than the alternative. It might have been better to let your family have their snide opinions of you. No one would get hurt there. It was far less messy to just tolerate them. It wasn't like you saw them everyday.

But fuck. You saw Laura everyday. This was a complication of biblical proportions. This whole thing was disaster waiting to happen. Did she even consider her actions? Did she regret it now? Or would she justify it like she always did. As if she would ever admit she was wrong. It was just so like her to make it sound like she was in the right.

"Carm, slow down."

You ignored her and chose to the climb the stairs. Their place was on the fourth floor, it wasn't much of a climb. Finally, you walked into your apartment and when you knew Laura had close the door, that was when you turned on your heels to face her. "Honestly. What the fuck Laura?! Were you even thinking when you decided that you would be my fake girlfriend?" You shouted.

Laura was taken aback by your sudden outburst of anger but she clenched her first and stood her ground. "I was trying to help."

"Yeah well you just made everything a hell of a lot worse. How the fuck do we explain to Mattie and my mom that we broke up once this is all over. Even if we can get away with pretending, it's just impossible. Do I walk up to them and say: Hi mother, I'm sorry I broke up with Laura. But we're still best friends and ihaving dated her is not weird at all. In fact, we're still living the same apartment!"
"I've thought about that. All our friends live in this apartment complex, one of us could just room with Danny."

"If anyone's doing any moving, it better be you. I've invested too much time into this apartment and I refuse to leave it just because you made a bad decision."

Laura walked up to you and gritted her teeth. Then she shoved a finger towards your chest."Hey! This apartment has my blood, sweat, and tears into it too! I know it was rash, but it was the best thing I can think of. Can you think of a better way to fix this because I sure can't. If we left things up to you, things would never get resolved. You're always complaining and whining about them, I don't think I can handle any more of that for the next two decades. The problem is that you don't do anything to help yourself."

"I'm pretty sure my whining pales in comparison to faking a whole relationship. Laura, you're the expert. You tell me."

"Expert on what? Relationships? Unless you're blind Karnstein then you'd I haven't dated anyone seriously. Ever. When it comes to relationships, I'm just as shitty at it as you are."

"Well I'm sorry if I dislike forming attachments to people. Something you seem so eager to do." You seethed.

"I guess we're using scathing remarks now. How about let's just solve this problem first instead of taking stabs at what I can't do!"

You ran a hand through your hair out of habit and paced for a few steps. Eventually you let in a deep breath and felt your anger slowly subside. You started to feel less and less tense, and instead you were getting more and more worried. There was silence between the two of you and something had to be said. There was just something grave hanging up in the air.

"I'm sorry... I didn't mean to. That was unfair of me." You apologized with a calmer tone.

"It's alright."

"What the hell do we do Laura? We both didn't sign up for this. This was supposed to be clean, painless." You finally said. Your own voice sounded strange to you because you sounded weak and tired.

Then you went onto the couched and fell onto it. You closed your eyes and allowed your body to just sink in. Without looking, you knew Laura was standing behind the couch, behind you. It was her scent that gave her away. It was always some kind of fragrant perfume along with some strange scent you had always associated with her. Then you felt her arms slowly wrap around you, like she always did after a fight. Sometimes you couldn't help but think that her hugs solved nothing. Then there were times like these where it made the heavy feeling in your chest lighted. Like she was there to share your burden. "I'm sorry too Carm... I wasn't thinking."

You exhaled. "Apology accepted. But you didn't deserve my anger."

"But you were right. This is something else. We're approaching dangerous territory... Sorry about the kiss by the way, it was the first idea that popped into my head. It seemed like a good idea at the time."

You finally cracked a smile and looked up to meet her. "You better be sorry, it was like kissing my sister." Sure it was. But you had to lie. It would just be more complicated if you admitted that it affected you. You watched her eyes instead. You tried to see if there was any visible change in them,
"My thoughts exactly. Never again." She concurred.

It was odd but you felt disappointed. Should you feel disappointed? Was that okay?

"So what do we do now?" You asked.

"We talk. There's no other way to go. We'll just have to be fully committed to faking this." She replied quietly.

You groaned as she left you briefly only to join you on the couch. She put her feet up and leaned onto the backrest. "Maybe this could go more smoothly with alcohol." She said.

You raised an eyebrow. "What's it going to be, sweetheart?"

She frowned at the endearment. "Seriously?"

You batted your eyelashes. "But we're dating now."

She rolled her eyes, got up from the couch, and stomped into the kitchen. You heard her open the refrigerator. "I'm having a beer." She announced.

"Sounds fancy. Get me one too."

She came back to the couch and passed the open bottle of Corona to you. You glanced at it before taking a good swig. Ah yes, that hit the spot. Some days, you felt like having wine. Then there were days when an old fashioned beer would do the trick. "Okay, so where do we stand on kissing?" You asked.

Laura sat down and put her feet up. "Only in public. But only when we have to. We'll oversell it if we're too heavy on the PDA. Maybe on the cheek or something. But just that."

"Okay, ixnay on the lip locking. Hand holding then."

Laura drank from her bottle. "Definitely yes. That's the easiest thing we can do as a couple."

"I suppose it's a good thing we're so comfortable with each other." You pointed out with a grin. "So where are we on pet names?"

Laura gave you a warning look. "I think we're fine as we are now." You reached out to play with her hair, hoping to get a rise out of her. It was always fun to get her riled up for no reason.

"Oh no. We can't have that. I always give nicknames to people I'm romantically involved with. It would be odd if I skipped out on you. So... Cupcake? Sweetheart? Buttercup? Creampuff?"

She swatted your hand away. "Fine, do whatever you want. Be creative."

"Fantastic."

"But you have to let me hug you more often." You narrowed your eyes at her and smirked. "Fine. Hugs galore it is."

"What else do couples do?" She asked.

You had to laugh at that one. "Are you seriously asking me that question? I've never gotten pass the
first date. First base maybe, but not the first date."

"Hey, I don't get second dates either. I really wouldn't know."

"I suppose I'll improvise. Hey Laura."

"Yeah?"

"Between the two of us, who's the big spoon and who's the little spoon?" You grinned deviously.

You watched her face grimace and it was glorious indeed. "Seriously?"

"I personally think I'm the big spoon."

She made a disgusted noise. "As if. You curl up like a shrimp when you sleep. You're obviously the tiny spoon."

"Nah. That would ruin my reputation. "What reputation?" She scoffed.

"Haven't you heard darling? I'm a lady killer apparently." You replied.

Laura winced at the endearment. You watched her reactions with some shallow amusement. You propped up your elbow on the couch backrest and rested your head on your knuckle. "You really hate it that much do you? Well tough shit... Cupcake." You added.

"God I hate you." She snarled.

"So what were your plans for today?" You followed up.

Laura shrugged and looked out the window. "Nothing actually... I'm free the whole day."

"Great. Since we're in this grand deception for the long haul, how about a social experiment? Wanna watch a movie?" Laura's eyebrows furrowed together.

"Like on a date? Is this for practice?"

"I'm bored. You're bored. And I've seen all the movies in this apartment. Do you have a better idea." You said as you stood up from the couch and popped into your room to change into something more casual. You heard her follow you to your door.

"Can I pick the movie?"

"Sure. I take it that's a yes?"

"Obviously. It's been a while since we went out to watch a movie. Don't forget to call Janis. Let her know she's off the hook now."

You sighed. "Yes ma'am."

"You know, this is kind of exciting you know. So are we going out as friends or..."

"I'll let you decide."

In all your years of existence, today really took the cake. This was by the far the most infuriating, confusing, irritating, and bizarre day ever. All you knew was that whatever it was you felt for Laura was a fluke. So you shoved that deep within your mind, hoping you'd forget.
Because whatever it was you thought you felt.

It couldn't happen.

It shouldn't happen.

Not with Laura Hollis.

"We don't have time to get sidetracked LaF." You frowned.

"Just a quick pit stop Perr. Then we can check up on Carmilla. That girl could use some chill." You replied.

You watched Perry sigh very loudly. Her wild manic hair was tied up into a pony tail today and you both were on your home. After a quick trip to the grocery store, you were a couple of blocks away from the apartment complex you all lived in. It was an interesting set up. It's like you all never left college, because all of you guys rooming together was reminiscent of your dorm days. If there was anything you did miss, it was rooming with Laura. But her sharing an apartment with Carmilla was sort of a given.

Those two were as thick as thieves and virtually inseparable. Their relationship was curious because personality wise, you couldn't imagine the two of them ever getting along. But they did, and they were as close as you and Perry. They had known each other for almost as long as you've known Perr, and that was quite the feat. Sometimes you did wonder if the two of them felt more than they did for the other. Then you remembered all the stories they told you about themselves and yeah. They were simply sisters born from different mothers. Your soulmate didn't necessarily have to be your romantic partner after all. Sometimes two people were just meant to be together, even if it was platonic love. It was clear that those two would do anything for each other.

"Fine, we'll buy your stupid ice cream. Don't blame me if your blood sugar goes up again." Perry scoffed.

"It's just a pint Perr. And you like Ben and Jerry's too." You pointed out.

"Fine, a quick stop then. Why didn't you buy this earlier?"

"It would've melted." Her eyebrows scrunched together.

"Fair point." You were looking elsewhere when you realized that Perry had stopped walking alongside you. You stopped for her and looked in the direction her head was turned. Something clearly caught her attention.

"LaFontaine?"

"Yeah?"

"Your eyesight is 20/20 right?"

"Yeah, why do you ask?" She pointed at something.
"I'm not blind right. That's Carmilla and Laura holding hands. Please tell me I'm mistaken." You squinted your eyes.

"Great Scott! Well I'll be damned, it is Carmilla and Laura."

"Are they—"

"Perr, call Danny. There's something they're not telling us and boy would I like to know what that is."

This was an unexpected development. But not an unwelcome one.

Plus, the view ain't half bad.

Chapter End Notes

From this point forward, I aim to be shameless.

Aim being the operative word. I will try my best.

And once again, check me out on tumblr at moirality.tumblr.com
Chapter 6

It was strange.

You knew some conspiracy was at work when your friends hadn't made any contact. Maybe one day of nonexistent communication may have been within the limits of normal, but for them not to talk to you for three days? It was bizarre. But it wasn't just you, they hadn't spoken to Carm either. They were clearly up to something and even when you tried to call them, they were mysteriously occupied. For crying out loud. Carmilla may not have cared about the lack of interaction but you did. People didn't just disappear without you not noticing.

You were a journalist for the love of Cthulhu.

Of course you were going to ask questions.

What were they thinking?

But the sudden disappearance of your friends was the least of your problems. This new conundrum that you had singlehandedly created was going to be very problematic. Your newly founded fake relationship with Carmilla was going to have to take priority and even now, you still didn't know how far it would go. They definitely had to put on a show whenever Carmilla's family and relatives was involved. But what about everyone else? Your friends were definitely the key people who needed to know about your new arrangement with Carmilla.

But what about your coworkers?

No, you only needed to put on a show for the family. You were still going to be friends in other social situations. Carmilla was still allowed to bring home girls if she wanted and you were still allowed to go online dating. Your life wouldn't have to be put on hold. It was like acting on a stage. You only had to pretend when you had an audience. That wasn't a hard concept to comprehend.

But even you had to admit to yourself that you weren't one hundred percent okay with all this pretending.

Because you couldn't lie and tell yourself that you didn't enjoy the feel of Carmilla's hand in yours. But that was a complication you didn't need, and Carmilla didn't need to know about it.

She definitely didn't need to know that you forgot to stop yourself at the restaurant.

You merely planned to do a quick peck while her mom and her sister were watching. After all, with such a display, they surely would have believed that you were dating. That you weren't cajoled into pretending to be her girlfriend. You didn't expect that you would momentarily forget yourself. That was something you did not plan.

But that was all just Carmilla.

She was just more experienced than you. Clearly Carmilla knew how to kiss a girl because damn. But it was all just technique. Whatever it was you felt was merely her talent at work and nothing more. That, you were sure of.

Now it was Saturday morning and what had spurned you into action, when you should have been sleeping in, was the smell of waffles wafting through the air. At first, you were happy about it. But then you remembered, you didn't have a waffle maker. That and Carmilla was supposed to wake up
to brunch, not early breakfast. If anyone was nocturnal, it would have been her. So you crept out of
your room at nine in the morning, dressed in your bunny pajamas.

You took one look at the kitchen and the dining table before you swore under your breath.

Seven hells, it was too early for this.

You backtracked to Carmilla's door, which was directly opposite yours. Your rooms were just
mirrored, structurally speaking. You knocked real loud before you heard her complain.

"Too fucking early!" She whined.

"We've got company!" You yelled back.

"Fine, give me a sec." She retorted.

It was only moments later when Carmilla showed up in a tank top and plaid pajama bottoms. She
had tied her hair into a messy bun and her dark tresses were strewn about all over the place. You
couldn't help but think her unfair. She was one of those people who woke up looking perfect. The
makeup just enhanced her already wonderful features, it was seriously not fair.

"What do you mean we have company?"

"LaFontaine, Perry, and Danny are camped out in our kitchen as we speak. The good news is that
Perr is making us breakfast." You informed her.

"Huh, Perr's making breakfast? There is a god after all." She said sarcastically.

The two of you entered the kitchen space with great caution and sat down at the dining table. From
what you could tell, Perry was cooking up a feast and LaFontaine was handling the coffee machine,
leaving Danny to glare at the both of you with wild abandon.

"What the hell are you glaring at Xena?" Carmilla snarled.

"You tell me fangface, is there something you're not telling us?"

"Most people don't use their house key benefits to break into their friends apartments, Lawrence.
What is wrong with all of you?" She added quite vehemently. The morning was doing wonders to
her mood.

"Does it matter?" Danny shot back.

"Of course it does. What if I had a girl hiding in my room. I wouldn't want her to wake up to... all of
this."

"But you don't." Danny stated.

Carmilla groaned. "If you care for me at all, pass me a cup coffee and shut up."

Danny did as she asked without a second thought. It was interesting watching their habits that they
retained since their college roommate days. It was always cats and dogs in their dorm room but no
amount of fighting would stop them from doing something for the other person. Whether it was from
lending books or just making more hot chocolate, they would do it. It was oddly domestic.

After one generous sip of coffee, Carmilla looked like she was getting her caffeine high. She actually
moaned a little and she sighed blissfully. "I will marry whomever invented coffee."
"If it was a man?" You asked.

"I don't care. As long as he won't mind me having girls over."

LaFontaine interrupted you all by placing plates on the table with practiced efficacy. It was clear that they did this all the time. "Food incoming."

Then Perry started putting breakfast on the table. If she wasn't your friend, you would have kissed her. Breakfast looked amazing. You and Carm got by with average cooking skills. Perry was a pro and she was a chef in an esteemed kitchen. Of course her food was amazing. From what you could see, she took the courtesy of bringing in some food from her place with LaF.

"Well go on, dig in guys. It's better to start the inquisition when we're not hungry." Perry said with an eerie smile.

"Inquisition...?" You asked.

Carmilla looked at you and you nodded.

Somehow, they had figured out what happened. If anything, it was probably Perry who told on them. She was the one keeping tabs on them throughout the whole meal. She even texted you when the Karnsteins arrived and you were sure she saw you out.

Perry definitely knew Janis was nowhere near the premises. You weren't sure if she even knew about the kiss.

Well, this was certainly a very interesting morning.

"Fine, ask away. I for one will be eating the poached eggs." Carmilla stated as she helped herself.

Everyone sat down at the table and things were quiet for a moment. All you heard the was the sound of tableware clinking against plates. Then you watched LaFontaine give Danny a look and she nodded. It made you wonder why your friends had to be so dramatic about everything. You were pretty sure that while they were at least eighty percent concerned, they were twenty percent amused.

"Take it away counselor." LaFontaine said with a grin. Yeah, they were clearly having fun.

"Right then." Danny said as she put her fork down. "Ms. Karnstein, Ms. Hollis, you were sighted walking along Graz street. Can you confirm this to the court?"

"Gee Lawrence, you just had to shove your fancy law degree in our faces. Need I remind you of how you constantly woke us all up at odd hours just to weep over the death of your social life."

Carmilla quipped.

"Your honor, I object." Danny snarled.

"Objection sustained." LaFontaine replied.

You wanted laugh. "Since when did LaF become the judge."

"Danny promised." LaF replied with a grin.

Carmilla tried to hide her smile and failed. "If you have a question then just ask it. There's no need for this stupid excuse of a cross examination. You'd think we'd have grown up a little by now."

"Danny and LaFontaine would like to know what happened on Wednesday." Perry said outright.
You didn't mean to but you and Carmilla immediately gave Perry a look at the exact same time. While your synchronicity usually made for a good party trick, this was not a party. Right now, it just added to the situation. For crying out loud, this wasn't even a proper situation. Your friends really were just overdramatic people.

"Why are we all beating around the bush? If you all want to know so bad then let's just say Janis couldn't make it and Laura and I had to improvise." Carmilla answered vaguely.

"Define improvise." Danny said.

"Essentially guys, you're looking at Carmilla Karnstein's girlfriend." You said with a smile as you pointed to yourself.

Perry looked unsurprised and even if she was, she showed no indication of it. In fact, she looked like a curious bystander but nothing more. LaFontaine was the one who looked like they just found the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Like they had discovered the scoop of the century even if it was far from that. Danny on the other hand looked unreadable. But her eyes were intense and that was usually a bad sign. Well, she usually played devil's advocate so maybe that could be it.

"Say something guys." You said.

"Don't tell me Janis bailed out on you." Danny said in a low angry tone.

You immediately shook your head. "She got caught up in a tiny accident. She's fine but the police held her for hours for her statement, amongst other things. Her wrist is sprained so we forgive her."

Danny frowned. "Typical police. Okay fine, but in what world is this arrangement okay. This is going to ruin your friendship, even if it's not real."

"Yes well some people didn't think things through on Wednesday. But that's not important... The show is only for mother and Mattie. It's not for everybody else. To the rest of the world, we're just friends." Carmilla stated languidly.

Danny crossed her arms. "What if they hear about it from the outside? Like what if they see you with someone else? Or what if their friends tell them that you're with other people? What then?"

"Mother only hangs out with rich matriarchs. Mattie has similar tastes, she's just more youthful..." Carmilla replied weakly.

"No but they have eyes everywhere. They probably wouldn't keep tabs on you if it was Janis or any other girl. This is Laura we're talking about, they'll be quite invested in your relationship now. Undoubtedly, they will now pay special attention to you guys. Don't you remember that one time—"

LaF started.

"Oh right. Don't remind me." Carmilla cut her off.

Danny looked even more concerned. "That doesn't make things easier. Would you consider making things public on social media? Like in Facebook for instance? It's an easy solution."

"But that means everyone sees that. We would have to pretend full time." You pointed out knowing full well what social media could do.

"Fair point." Danny admitted.

"So the big question is... How far are we going to take this?" LaFontaine drew out slowly.
Carmilla sighed long and hard. She finally ran out of coffee and put the mug down with a rather loud thump. All eyes were now on her and she raised an eyebrow at you all. Then she ran a hand through her hair and put on foot up on the chair. She always sat like that around the apartment. It was a very lazy posture.

"You wanna say something." Danny asked Carmilla.

Carmilla smiled in that weird way she always did. Usually when she had something in mind. Based on your experience, it was rarely something good. "Yeah I do actually. Since I'm the reason for all this and this is really just my problem, I would like to have a proper say in this."

"Well fine, speak." Danny replied.

"I still think this is stupid. You make it sound like it's the end of the world even though this whole thing is just so trivial. The only thing at stake here is words, and those don't deserve nearly as much effort as we're putting. However, we're in this mess and we need to follow through. Luckily for you, I'm willing to commit to this little side project of ours full time. If you need me to stop having dalliances, I'll do it. If that means going public on Facebook, I can do that too. All I need to know is if Laura is just as willing as I am because lord knows there's no other way but forward. And besides. Who cares what people think of us? We know the truth, we'll still be friends. Consequences be damned."

"Carm, you're talking about faking a real, honest to goodness, relationship. All aspects of our life will be affected except for what we have in this apartment."

Carmilla stopped smiling. "So? That didn't seem to stop you. I think it's high time you owe up to your decisions, eh Cupcake?"

"You are still mad at me." You accused.

"I'm not mad at you Laura." She hissed.

"Then why are you putting this on me?"

Carmilla leaned forward. "Because you kissed me. So you tell me." She nearly yelled.

"Who kissed who now?"

There is a singular moment in everyone's life wherein they say something they would ultimately regret. Often times, this moment was usually accompanied with a certain expletive. Now was one of these moments and if you and Carm weren't involved, you would have found this hilarious. But Danny didn't really like surprises and this one would definitely put her through a whiplash. The timing was just so comical really. Suddenly it was quiet again.

"Did we not mention that...?" You asked reluctantly.

Perry nearly dropped the glass of water she had been holding this whole time. "All I knew was that Laura probably took Janis' place. I had no idea that... well you know."

"It wasn't a big deal guys. Laura did it because my folks were watching." Carmilla said matter-of-factly.

"Yeah, it was like trying to kiss my sister." You said with a touch of disdain.

"See, nothing weird." Carmilla added.
Somehow, the strange looks they were giving you showed that they were anything but convinced. Still, they all decided not to comment on it any further. After all, what was there to talk about?

"Okay, whatever. So you guys are gonna go public then?" LaFontaine asked in a rush, probably to move the conversation along.

"Yeah, I guess we are. Don't worry your pretty little ginger head about it LaF." Carmilla stated with finality.

"But we'll lay low for now. We'll handle this guys." You added for extra measure.

Everyone seemed satisfied with the way this whole project was going. As soon as everyone had eaten through Perry's breakfast feast, they headed out to do whatever it was they did on a Saturday. With the exception of you and Carmilla of course, you both lived here after all. Naturally, your three friends offered to do the dishes as an apology for arbitrarily showing up but you refused them. If the dishes could keep you occupied then you would do them.

Thinking just hurt your head and this mess was surprisingly stressful.

Before you knew it, Carmilla was standing right beside you. She was wiping down the freshly washed dishes so you wouldn't have to. If was typical apologetic behavior and it was highly unnecessary. The both of you were high strung right now for good reason.

"When do we start?" She asked softly.

"Whenever we're ready." You replied.

"Your way or my way?"

You looked at her with a smile. "I suppose the louder the better."

"Well then, let's hit The Hungry Light. Our old pal Elsie could use the business, plus the women in this city need to know I'm no longer on the menu." Carmilla said rather mischievously.

"You didn't ask if I was free today." You joked.

Carmilla raised an eyebrow and smirked. "Why? Do you have a hot date?"

"Now I do."

Carmilla had to blink at that one. Was she surprised at your ability to flirt? Probably. But did it weird her out? Not in the slightest. Her mouth immediately turned into a crooked line before she started laughing. She had to put the plates down in case she might drop them. "You've got game Hollis."

"Do you think I go to Tinder dates with the personality of a fish?" You retorted.

"No, I just thought you bumbled through your dates. I assumed your date would find you adorable."

"Gosh Carm, you just say the nicest things."

She smirked. "You're welcome. So Laura, if we're gonna do this right. We better do it with a bang."

You put out a fist towards her. "I wouldn't have it any other way."

She bumped your fist.
"Let's go break some hearts, shall we?"

The Hungry Light was one of the bars you actually liked. It had a good aesthetic and the people here weren't shallow. Sure the music was blaring, and sure it was crowded, but the DJ actually played good mixes. That and the drinks here were solid. This was the only club you could go to and not be repulsed by the ambience. It was an added plus that you were good friends with the esteemed proprietor, Elsie.

The gang and Elsie had quite the history together. Naturally, it had all started back in fourth term freshman year of college. Once the five of you had started hanging out regularly, you all met Elsie. At the time, she was a college senior but boy was she loaded. No one at the time could figure out why seemed to have unlimited funds. Laura had insisted on investigating, just for kicks. Naturally, you, Danny, and Perry agreed to keep an eye on Laura and LaFontaine. After all, those two always got in all sorts of trouble.

It wasn't very investigative.

All you guys did was follow Elsie around and turns out, she had been running some kind of underground club. How she started that is not known to this day, but let's just say Elsie liked the five of you for being ballsy. Now that underground club had become The Hungry Light and you guys were her favorite customers.

"Looks like a full house tonight." Laura shouted above the music.

"It's a Saturday! It's ladies night of course, all the men here probably swing the other way. This sounds perfect if you ask me!" You yelled right back as you immediately slipped your hand into hers. Laura's head snapped in your direction and you shrugged.

"This is a public as it gets sweetheart! Might as well get used to it!" You replied.

Before the both of you could even cut through the crowd, you found yourselves being redirected. Two bouncers suddenly grabbed you both by the arm and had managed to drag you into one of the private rooms. There was only one person who would ever do that to you. Knowing her, she always had a flair for the dramatic, hence the bouncers. As soon as you entered through the large doors, your ears were finally saved. As soon as the doors closed, the party music was muffled.

Then Elsie showed up.

"How's it going Bonnie and Clyde?" She greeted.

You hugged her tight. "How's business?"

"Copacetic."

Elsie let you go to hug Laura.

"Why does everyone keep using that word?" Laura asked as she gave Elsie a tight squeeze.

"It's more mafioso that way. It's in line with the swag aesthetic." Elsie replied.

You shook your head. "Yeah, we lost you there."
All Elsie had to do was snap her fingers and one of the waitresses swung by. "A round of drinks for the ladies."

"Right away boss."

It was now only the three of you in the private room. You all say down on the fancy couch while the music blaring outside was reduced to a lone speaker letting the music into the room. It was one of those outrageously red rooms but the ceiling lights were dimmed and majority of the light came from the floor. It was quite cozy and intimate. Usually the richer customers booked these private rooms but being friends with Elsie had its perks.

You and Laura were sitting next to each other, but there was a small distance between the two of you. You both weren't sure if you wanted to break the news so soon to Elsie. If Elsie found out, the news would spread faster than you can blink. Sure it was advantageous but you wanted the news to spread at your pace.

"So, where's the rest of you?" She asked.

"It's just us today I'm afraid." Laura answered.

Elsie was watching you a little too intensely. Her arms were crossed and her expression was practically unreadable. With the way she operated, you wouldn't have been surprised if she really did have ties to the local mafia. She just seemed like the type to have friends in underground places. "You both seem tense." She stated.

"For starters, you don't use bouncers to shove people into strange rooms." You quipped.

Elsie smiled. "Fair point. So tell me, when did this thing start?" She asked as she pointed to the both of you.

"Excuse me?" Laura sputtered.

"I saw the both of you entering like a couple. Are you going to tell me I'm wrong? Come on guys, you know better than to hide things from me." She replied.

The two of you were silent.

Elsie frowned. "Seriously? You come to my club and expect to casually hold hands without attracting attention. You know better than that guys. So come on, tell me. Are you two dating?"

You looked at Laura and she shrugged.

"Something like that." You answered.

Her face was blank for precisely five seconds before she grinned widely. The way she smiled reminded you of the Cheshire Cat. "Finally! I should have known you'd finally make your move Karnstein!"

Your eyebrows furrowed and a crease appeared in the middle of them. "What?"

Elsie seemed thrilled. "Oh man. You should have seen you back in college. You were always following little old Laura here like a lost puppy. It was only a matter of time. I mean, whenever the two of you were in them room, I could feel things heating up. If you know what I mean."

You glanced at Laura and she looked absolutely horrified. Then you realized that you mimicked her
expression.

"Umm... Yes?" Was all you could say.

"Oh. Did I interrupt your date? I am so sorry. You know what, free drinks on me tonight. I'll take care of your tab, you kids go have fun."

Before the both of you could say another word, you had been thrust back into the partying crowd. The difference being that the DJ had decided to slow thing down with softer mixes so you could actually carry a conversation. When you turned back to look at Elsie, she had already closed the doors on you. Still, that was weird.

Then you felt Laura slip her hand into yours and it was your turn to snap your head. You both smiled and intertwined your fingers together.

"Well, you better get used to it... sweetheart." She quipped.

"Cheeky."

In fairness, there was some merit to holding Laura's hand. You'd never had reason to do it before, but it was nice. Pleasant even. It was like the one thing anchoring you to the ground amidst the chaos of everything else. Then Laura tugged you into the crowd and at first, you weren't sure where she was taking you. Then you saw the dance floor and you were prepared to resist.

"I don't dance." You stated firmly.

"You did in high school." She pointed out.

"Yes well I'm old now and dancing is stupid." You replied.

Laura laughed. "Come on. We haven't done this in ages. If you're old then what am I?"

You raised an eyebrow. "The fountain of eternal youth. Just no, Laura."

"Yeah, but remember senior prom? How about the victory party."

You rolled your eyes. "I was eighteen and drunk."

"Well go get drunk. We're doing this."

Ultimately, you resigned yourself to going along with Laura's every whim. Honestly, when have you ever refused her? You allowed yourself to be dragged into the crowd of dancing fools. It was crowded and maybe someone did jab you with their elbow but Laura still held your hand. With her guiding you, it made you feel less claustrophobic about this whole mess. Finally, you both found a space for the both of you amidst all the people.

Along the way, there were some people you recognized and some people who recognized you. But you ignored all of them. After all, the point of this excursion was to make a point.

"Come on, just follow my lead." Laura said.

"In case you haven't noticed. Dancing to party music is not my speciality." You replied.

"Then we won't dance like that. Just trust me."

You sighed long and hard.
"Okay." You finally said.

All she did was smile at you in that Laura Hollis patented way. Then she slowly took a hold of your other hand and you could feel yourself gradually becoming calm. As if right on cue, the DJ had gone on break and the house decided to play one of the generic tracks. The first song that started to play was Martin Garrix's mix of Summertime Sadness. It was a bit old now but Lana Del Rey could never get old.

"If I look stupid—"

"Oh come off it. I love this song."

"I know. You must've played this song a hundred times the moment it aired on the radio." You scoffed.

At first Laura was just getting you to do simple things. The usual partygoer's fare of dance moves and everyone else would be none the wiser. It was slow at first because she was working on getting you into the groove. Getting you to start moving your body rather than just bobbing your head. As the song had started to build up, you started to feel a little more flexible to her evil plans. By the time Lana Del Rey had started the chorus, Laura had you dancing with the best of them. Your dance moves weren't exactly the best but you couldn't deny it. You were having fun.

Then the music slowed down again.

"Look at you dancing like a plebeian."

"Don't remind me." You replied.

"Ready to go again?"

You shook your head. "I'll take a raincheck."

"Just for the next song."

You rolled your eyes. "Fine."

The next song had a different tempo and ambience altogether. It was quite obscure so even you didn't know what song it was. But when you looked around you, everyone had started dancing with their girlfriends or boyfriends. It was suddenly very reminiscent of prom. When you looked back at Laura, she seemed nervous. It was odd because she had been so confident earlier. She avoided your gaze and settled for looking the floor.

"I didn't mean this but yeah. Would you mind dancing like that?"

You didn't reply. Instead, you guided her hands so that her arms were resting around your neck. You watched her eyes as you did it, to see if she would run. Instead, you couldn't tell what she was thinking. Her usual clear eyes were oh so very hazy right now. Without wanting to, you eyes were immediately drawn to her lips and you remembered the kiss. You had spent these past few nights trying to forget and just when you thought you had, it came back. You weren't used to this.

Of all the people to be aware of, it couldn't be Laura.

You wanted to go back to when you didn't notice every tiny detail about her.

"No, I wouldn't mind at all."
Then your arms slowly snaked around her waist and carefully, you tugged her towards you. You held her lightly, afraid that Laura would run and see you differently. You wouldn't be able to handle that. You wanted Laura to look at you the way she did for the past twenty years. Without another word, you both began to sway slowly to the music. It really was like prom. Back then, you danced like this with her and it meant nothing. But unlike prom, something had changed. No matter how minute, how diminutive it may have been.

The problem with change was that it could never go back.

Laura's head was rested at the crook of your neck but somehow you knew, she could probably hear the sound of your beating heart. You couldn't help but wonder if your heart was beating fast, you sincerely hoped it wasn't. You could smell the shampoo off her hair and the scent was mixed in with something that was exclusively Laura's. You could never figure out what it was, but it always made you feel like you were home.

You almost didn't notice it but the song was finally coming to a close.

Laura finally lifted her head to look at you and there was this pause. It was as if the air had become thick with something that wasn't oxygen and it was becoming increasingly harder for you to breathe. Before you knew it, Laura had pulled away from you. You were still standing there, looking very much like a fool. This was the second time Laura had left you dazed. There were time when you could read Laura, and there were times like these when Laura was more like the world's most guarded safe.

Then her hand found yours again and you found yourself being anchored to the ground. Wordlessly, she dragged you away from all the people. You followed her without protest because with the way you were now, the crowd was sure to swallow you up.

When you finally found yourself back outside, breathing in the cold Styrian air, you finally seemed to have had a grasp on yourself again. But at the same time, you realized that you had been bereft of her hand.

"We should probably head back." You heard Laura say. Her back was facing you.

"Hey Laura." You called out.

She turned around.

And true enough, something was different.

The one thought you had that was so prevalent in your mind was a truth you had always know. However, knowing something was different from understanding. What it meant to you was different. Even when the meaning had suddenly come from deep within you, from some place even you didn't know had existed. You knew it like the back of your hand. But why were you so stricken by such a simple thought? Why were you slowly being consumed by this all encompassing thought?

Was Laura always this beautiful?

"What is it?"

"I had fun tonight"

Then Laura smiled and it lit up her whole face. "Me too."

You finally understood what your gut was trying to tell you. It was something you often read about
in books. It was that inevitable feeling you get when you meet certain people. It was summarized in one sentence that you had read in too many novels.

She smiled and you just knew.

You were ruined.

To what capacity? You had no fucking clue.
Pacing is a bitch

But yeah, I'm debating over the next chapter so we'll see how that goes.

Her lips were pressed against your cheek for an extremely brief moment, but whatever sensation you felt lingered. It was simply an innocent kiss on the cheek, it was something she used to do all time. Back before this whole mess started, you used to feel nothing. Now that everything had changed, her single chaste kiss made you feel everything. Whatever it was you were feeling, it was not normal and you wanted it to go away immediately. This was something people you were attracted to should make you feel. Not your best friend.

Wasn't there some kind of BFF code against this?

"Thanks Carm." Laura said with her usual unassuming smile.

"I didn't do it for you." You quipped. Sarcasm was an effective defense mechanism for good reason.

Laura gave you a look that told you she didn't believe you. "Sure you did."

"Seriously Hollis, all I did was pull your chair. Are you going to kiss me on the cheek every time I'm polite?" You retorted.

"Well no, but I figured it was appropriate."

You settled for groaning inwardly. You had always known Laura Hollis would be the death of you. You never could have guessed as to why though and it wasn't pleasant. If you ever survived this whole fake dating schtick, if Laura didn't leave the apartment then you would. This was definitely going to end badly, that much was obvious. But the fact that you couldn't even look at her the way you used to was highly problematic. This was going to end disastrously.

"Mattie and my mother aren't even here anymore. You didn't have to put on a show." You snapped.

Laura's smile disappeared and you immediately regretted snapping at her. She didn't do anything, it was all on you.

"Why are you in such a bad mood today?"

You breathed in deeply and avoided her gaze. Laura always had a way of seeing right through you even when she didn't know what you were thinking most of the time. She may have known what it was about but she definitely knew something was up. She knew you too well.

"I woke up on the wrong side of bed this morning." You lied through your teeth.

Laura was definitely not convinced because she spent precisely ten seconds just searching your face. She was probably trying to see if you were lying. She also probably knew by know that you were.
But in the end, she chose to let it slide. "Anything I can help with?"

You decided to throw her a bone.

"A hug could help." You said with an apologetic smile.

Then she grinned like an idiot and you couldn't help but smile on the inside, as if you would give her the satisfaction of actually doing it though. It always struck a chord within you whenever Laura was anything less than okay. That's why you always took it upon yourself to keep her smiling. It was sort of your job ever since you both swore to be friends until the grave. You opened up your arms and looked away.

"Make it quick Hollis. This is a rare offer."

Laura gave you one of her Hollis patented hugs and you couldn't help but inhale sharply. Proximity to Laura was going to be difficult now. This was simply going to be so much fun. Her scent pervaded your senses and you resisted the urge to hug her back. These newfound "feelings" for Laura needed to evaporate. Because otherwise, you were afraid of what you would do. Thankfully, Laura released you immediately. You didn't have to suffer anymore.

"Feeling better?" She asked.

You rolled your eyes. "Whatever. I need to go back to work." You stated.

"Well, don't let me hold you up." She replied.

You stared at her for a while before you sighed in resignation. This time, you tried to throw yourself a bone. There's a time for resisting urges and there's a time for a little indulging. Now was a time of the latter. If you didn't indulge yourself everyone once in a while, you would implode. So leaned in close and kissed her on the forehead, ignoring the tiny amount of joy you felt as you did it.

"I'll see you later, Laura."

She made a tiny wave. "You too. But Carm?"

Your back had already been turned but you immediately looked back and you couldn't help but sigh for the hundredth time. Hollis really rocked that dress. "Yeah?"

"You know you can talk to me right?"

You shoved your hands in pockets. "I know."

Laura took a careful step forward and lightly touched your arm. "You've been awfully quiet lately... I sort of miss our late night talks. Nowadays, you just go straight to bed. So if there's something—"

"Look, don't worry about it. Work's just been piling up lately." You lied again.

Laura looked like someone kicked her puppy.

Oh dear god. What have you been reduced to? At this point, you were practically at Laura's beck and call. All she had to do was make a face and you would walk on hot coals just to see her smile again.

"You know what? Let's have a movie night. We can watch Imagine Me and You again if want. We'll have hot cocoa and it'll be like high school. What do you say?" You finally said with a hopeful smile on your face.
Her face just lit up and you could have fallen to your knees right then and there.

"I'll hold you to that. Later okay? Now go on and make music." She said but she looked happier this time. Excited even. Dear god, sometimes she was so easy to please. You couldn't decide if that was a good thing.

"Will do." You replied quickly. "You sure you have a ride back to the news studio?"

Laura shrugged. "I'll take an Uber."

"You'll text me when you get there?"

Laura rolled her eyes dramatically. "Don't be such a mom. Just go, I'll be fine."

You were finally satisfied by that and immediately turn on your heels. It was a sad unfortunate thought that while it used to be easy to be yourself with Laura, it was now the hardest thing to do. She was your better half and yet here you were, lying and pretending. What you hated was the relief your felt the moment you knew Laura was out of sight. This sucked monumentally. When was the last time you lied about anything to Laura? It almost never happened. The only lies you ever told her were probably when you stole her clothes or when you were preparing her for some surprise. You had never lied about things in your life. If you did, you usually told her by the end of the day.

So yeah, Laura had a point. The two of you talked about anything and everything. And now you were reduced to some lovesick puppy and a liar. What has the world come to?

Ever since this whole mess started, all you wanted to do was curl up on your bed. That and pretend you could go back to when things were so much simpler. Back when Laura was just Laura.

Now she wasn't even that.

All of sudden, your best friend had become someone who could set you on edge with just the sound of her voice. This wasn't supposed to happen. You thought it would go away. It was easy to assume that you were only confused because her kiss made you feel things. Things like that always complicated thing but no. Her ability to make you feel uneasy just got stronger and stronger. Nothing you did diminished what you felt with every tiny gesture of affection she made. It was the worst. If you were to describe, it was like the water flowing out of a dam. It just kept coming and you didn't know what to do.

But if you were being honest. This was new territory for you. You knew what it was to be in lust. All this touchy feely crap? This was a first.

For today's lunch with the family, you drove with the same old beat up sedan you had since high school. Your mother berated you for keeping it but it was the first thing you bought with the money you earned from a summer job. Laura even pitched in. Now, you could have bought a better car but nah. Your old muscle car had charm. All you did nowadays was keep up with the paint job and maintain it. There was no way in hell you would part with it.

Plus, it was hard to think when you were driving. You were careful that way. So in a way, this was good for you. That and the studio had a few recording sessions lined up. You could focus on those instead of the impending disaster your fake relationship is going to be once this all blows over.

Once you got in the car, you started the engine, and shoved in an old Joan Jett cassette tape in the stereo. That was one thing you never upgraded. You told yourself you would buy in the end, the car stereo stayed the same. Old school had it perks and while you kept all your cassette tapes, Laura had lost all of hers. She couldn't control the radio, which was a good thing. Lord knows you didn't need
another round of Backstreet Boys.
You sighed out loud.
Wasn't there someone you could talk to about this?
Well... Usually it was Laura.

This time you groaned aloud. If you had to pick a person, Danny Lawrence was a safe bet. Even though the two of you got along like Tom and Jerry, you both had your moments. Plus, she saw you at your worst whenever Laura wasn't there. Maybe you could actually talk it out. While you were usually a fan of burying your feelings deep down within yourself, you might actually need some help this time.

With that in mind, you revved up the engine a little. Then you released the handbrake and shifted to the first gear by reflex. Once you had Joan Jett blasting on your stereo loud and clear, you finally drove off to work.

"What's this? Are we out of the honeymoon phase already Hollis?"
You glared at your co-anchor with the intensity of a thousand suns. To no avail of course, you couldn't make a scary glare. The most you could get across was that you were definitely not amused. Carmilla usually laughed it off whenever you glared. The only one who took you fairly seriously was Perry but you knew she was only being polite. Betty on the other hand was smiling at you like she was quite the sunflower, most likely to spite you. Like everyone else, she had no idea your girlfriend was a fake.

Having met Carmilla a few times herself, she wasn't surprised when you broke out the news. In fact, she was quite thrilled about the whole thing. Especially when Carmilla sent you a bouquet of flowers for show. The broadcasting crew and the writers freaked out all over it. Everyone was gushing about your newfound relationship. Everyone except you. You were really okay with the fake dating part. What you hated was broody Carmilla. She played the girlfriend thing very well. In fact, it looked so easy to her to fake intimacy when you had to calculate your every action. But then every once in a while, she would do a complete one-eighty on you and suddenly become standoffish.

You remembered when Carmilla brought you lunch a couple of days ago. She showed up at Danny's suggestion but the mere gesture was enough to make the whole studio tease you for the day.

Also, you didn't know how, but Mattie had heard about Carmilla's "sweet" gestures. She brought it up one lunch and was quite ecstatic about it even though you were sure no one told her about it. The whole "eyes everywhere" thing was not unfounded after all.

Overall, everyone was taking your new relationship quite well.

The only thing that wasn't going swimmingly was Carmilla herself.

"Even if I was, how would you know?" You replied.

Betty shrugged and sat down at the corner of your desk. She casually slipped of her hair tie and set her blond hair loose. "You look like someone stole your sweet roll." She stated matter-of-factly.
"And how sure are you it's because of my relationship?"

Betty gave you a look. "Really now? I've been working with you for half a year. You're not that hard to read Hollis."

You sighed in quiet resignation. "Okay fine. Carm's been a little broody lately. But in all the years I've known her, I'm pretty sure it'll blow over." You said.

"Are you sure about that? It may have been true when you were just friends. But a romantic relationship? It's a entirely different creature. The old rules may not apply."

"Yes. But I've known her since we were five. I know something's wrong the minute she does something weird. She's brooding, so something is definitely bothering her."

Betty shrugged again. "Okay, go talk to her. Communication is always key."

"Sounds like solid advice there Spielsdorf."

She grinned at you. "Yes well it's not everyday I see Laura Hollis in love. It's quite an amusing sight for me I assure you."

You immediately flushed. "What? No one said anything about—"

She waved you off. "Yeah yeah, whatever. But everything's satisfactory in the bedroom though?"

You turned even redder. "I'm not saying."

Betty threw her head up and laughed. "Okay okay. I'll stop but I will take that as a yes."

You felt like becoming an ostrich so you could bury your head in the ground. At least you could hide from the embarrassment then. But if there was anything good about this, it was that no one would second guess your fake relationship. Which was good. The Karnsteins would be pleased. In fact, you may pass the scrutiny of Will Luce.

Will may have been Carm's cousin but they used to be extremely close. They might as well have been siblings back in the day. Will stuck around until middle school but he went to boarding school in England. You knew the two them were emailing each other constantly. Upon entering adulthood however, they had met a grand total of five times. Will was based in London now and not in Styria. Plus, he was getting married soon. His engagement party would be the first time he and Carm would see each other in a very, very long time.

Carm didn't talk about it but you could easily tell she was bothered by it every now and then.

With how close they were, it must've hurt to have hear about his marriage from her mother. Now matter how much they may have drifted apart, Carmilla deserved to have heard the news from Will himself.

But that was another problem too, the engagement party that is. It was already happening soon and while you and Carm were already dress coordinated, her personality was going to need some work. Not if you were going to fake a whole evening with her. She would need to lighten up for starters. You needed her when she was all charming and charismatic. Not when she was all brooding and what was the word... mercurial?

"Anyway Hollis, give your girlfriend my regards. In the meantime, I need you help following a lead. If we're lucky, this could be tomorrow's headlines. You in?" Betty said with excitement.
"Where do I sign up?" You grinned.

"Right now. Quit your moping and let's go. Whatever your problem is, it's nothing make up sex can't solve." She joked.

"Betty!"

"Please, Carmilla is head over heels for you. It's painfully obvious. I'm sure she'll forgive you no matter what you do. So come on. Let's go."

You sighed as you let Betty string you along. Work would definitely keep you occupied.

But honestly? This would all be so much easier if you actually dated Carmilla. But you didn't so more's the pity. It's not that you were super interested in Carm. That would be weird and awkward. She was practically your sister at this point. But it was nice to have such intimacies. After all of this was through, maybe you should invest in a real proper relationship. That would be nice.

This fake relationship was sort of giving you hope for a real one.

You sat in one of the record company's many meeting rooms. There were at least two in the the current studio you were at. It was one of those modern industrial set ups with plenty of natural light and cement accents. That and there was a beautiful coffee machine in the corner of the room accompanied with decent coffee beans. It kept you happy enough as you waited for the meeting to start. You were sitting here with your boss, the both of you were sipping from mugs, and the both of you sat in a lazy relaxed manner. In fact, you feet were up on the conference table and your boss gave zero fucks about your behavior.

After all, who was she to judge? She recently got an undercut and she had had this huge ass tattoo on her arm for as long as you could remember. You were both fairly chill individuals. That was probably why the both of you got along so well. While you respected her and observed proper etiquette, the two of you were more like coworkers than boss-employee. She told you about her crap and you told her about yours. In fact, you told her about your new relationship and she gave you a bottle of whiskey for free. After all, she had met Laura once or twice and approved greatly.

In fact, everyone seemed to approve of your dating Laura. Which was weird because you were the last person you wanted her to date. Rather, you would never want her to date someone like you. You wanted her to be with someone who showered her with affection and treated her like the little ray of sunshine she was. You on the other hand? You partied too much, drank a lot, and had one too many one night stands. You even smoked at one point but you had stopped before you got in too deep. Fine, you lied. You still had the occasional smoke but not often. Well, not much partying nowadays but the point was still there. She would always be too good for you.

But in all earnest, personal feelings and opinions aside, you were more than willing to room with Lawrence again for the illusion of the whole relationship. You did promise after all and you committed yourself to this. You couldn't do things in half measures so it didn't matter if Laura was undecided, you would do the hard choices for her.

You were thrust out of your thoughts when the glass door finally swung open.

Janis Cavanaugh was the first person through. Her hair was artistically messy today and while her
fashion was on point like always, you didn't miss the firm wrappings on her left wrist. You could easily sympathize. Not playing the guitar for a couple of more weeks would have been an absolute nightmare for you. It was one of those few hobbies you genuinely liked.

Then her bandmates entered after her one by one.

You quietly put the mug down and approached Janis for a quick casual hug, something she reciprocated with a smile.

"How's the wrist?" You asked.

"Itchy as hell... It sucks because I want to play my guitar like all the time." She replied before lowering her voice. "So how is Laura?" She asked.

You sighed. "It's working surprisingly well actually."

"I'm still really sorry about the whole—"

You put a hand to her face. "I'll stop you there sweetheart. It's not your fault.

Janis nodded slowly. "Okay fine. But enough about that, we have an album to discuss."

"Excellent." You said.

Everyone adjourned to the fancy seats surrounding the conference table. Naturally, you offered everyone refreshments and things were going in a very professional direction now. You were back in your chair, which was in the literal right hand side of your boss. Janis took the seat closest to you and everyone else simply clustered around your end. It was a rather large table after all.

"Right then, let's get down to business so we can get the hell out of here." You heard your boss say and you smiled. How typical.

"I second that motion." Janis replied.

"Yes, ignore the one who's actually working on the album. Unlike you slackers, I'm the one with the late hours." You joked.

Your boss laughed. "But I pay you to take my shit Karnstein. Why do you think I hired you?"

You groaned and ran a hand through your hair. Then you leaned forward and started flipping through some of the papers in front of you. "As the only adult in this room, I think we should move on. What we have here is just the usual paperwork. Legal stuff and whatnot. That is if Metro Vinyl wishes to continue with this label. We're small but we're dedicated. Plus we're not big enough to delegate our sessions to other recording studios as a sub contractual gig. Clearly we like working with who we're producing."

"If you weren't such a rebel Karnstein, you would make a decent lawyer." Your boss remarked.

You shook your head as Danny's face flashed in your mind. She was naturally the last one to leave Silas University, opting to go through law school there as well. You remembered how dead she was throughout her three years at law school. You would never wish that on yourself. That would have been cruel.

Danny's current lawyer status was also one of the few things you really respected about her. It was fairly ballsy.
"Just because I excel at bullshitting fancy talk does not make me a lawyer." You retorted to your boss before facing the band. But essentially, you can read through these later. I'll forward the copies to your agent and you can sign it another time, at your convenience of course. Hopefully we'll have your answer by—"

"You can expect it by next Monday. Don't worry Carmilla, we like you guys. We're planning on signing with your label permanently." Janis cut you off.

You grinned. "Perfect. That's pretty much the paperwork part. We can actually talk about music now." You stated as you took out the demo cd from one of the binders in front of you. You slid it towards Janis. "This, sweetheart, is your cd. Exciting right?"

You watched her face change into pure joy. It was always a great pleasure to hand out a band's first demo cd. It was the symbol of their fledgling career and it was also the promise of more to come. At this point, you had considered Janis a friend so seeing her face light up made you feel a little proud of yourself. "So? Wanna give it a spin?" You asked.

She looked up at you and nodded in a childlike fashion. "Hell yeah."

Before you could stand up, your boss was already doing the honors. She took another copy of the demo and walked on over to the stereo system set up in the corner of the room. It was a fancy set up full of high grade amplifiers connected to impressive speakers. She popped the cd and the first track had played immediately. Then you and your boss watched Metro Vinyl listen to their own music.

Yeah, you totally did good Karnstein.

"I swear to god. If you weren't dating someone already, I would kiss you Karnstein." Janis exclaimed.

"Uh huh." Was all you murmured.

"Seriously though, you're a genius. I would kiss you too. The tracks sounds amazing." The guitarist added.

Your boss suddenly slung her arm over your should and pulled you close, it was closer to a headlock than a friendly gesture. "Hiring you was a good thing, never leave me."

"Sure thing boss. About that pay raise though..."

She suddenly messed up your hair, not that your hair needed any more messing up. It was already bad enough on its own. "Too soon you little punk. Try again next week."

"I'm having a plaque made for you."

"Will it say: Best Boss Ever?"

You smirked. "I could do that too."

Then you felt your phone vibrate in your pocket. You politely excused yourself and briefly stepped aside to check out the text. There were only a number of individuals who would text you on your personal cell, it was not hard to guess who.

'I can get out of here right now. Literally. Can you meet up at the cafe now?'

You shook your head and sighed.
'You sound stressed. Don’t forget to remind yourself that you chose this Xena.'

Her next reply came two minutes later.

'Yeah yeah, whatever. Can we meet now or should I come by the apartment later?'

No, you couldn't really talk if Laura was there. That would defeat the purpose. You mentally examined your schedule and figured that you could probably get away with leaving now. Your boss was never strict on hours to begin with and your meeting with Metro Vinyl was today’s last agenda. Yeah, your job was flexible that way.

'I'll see you in fifteen.' You quickly texted back.

"Hey boss, do you mind if I clock out early today? There's something I have to do." You said out loud.

Your boss waved your request off casually without looking in your direction. "Sure, whatever."

"Oh, you're leaving already Carmilla?" Janis asked from the table.

You smiled apologetically. "Yeah, I have shit to do. Duty calls."

Janis grinned. "Well, I'll see you around then. Give my regards to Laura."

You saluted her on the way to the door.

The cafe in question was the one you and Lawrence frequented. Partly because of the excellent coffee but mostly because it was in between your studio and her law firm. Plus, it was also a place where only the two of you hung out. It was too far from the apartment complex you all lived in so it wasn't exactly ideal for a group hang. It was also in one of those tiny alleyways, desolate and quiet. The bunch who frequented the place were either regulars or coffee connoisseurs. You and Lawrence were now of the former after a few years of patronage.

After ambling through the various twists and turns of the building, you easily made your way to where you parked your car. It was a short drive to the cafe anyhow.

It wasn't long until you found yourself walking up to the cafe steps. You were so used to going here, it was almost routine for you. The whole drive was a literal blur. Without further ado, you pushed the door open and found the ginger giant sitting in the corner. Her back was facing you so you did what you always did.

That is to say, you snuck up on her.

Unfortunately, Xena was used to it.

Nothing spectacular happened. Her head simply turned to greet you with dead eyes and she sighed. "Just kill me now." She greeted.

You sat opposite her. "Gladly, but I need you to be my rock right now."

Danny raised an eyebrow. "Can't you just talk to Laura or something?"

You shook your head. "If only."

Danny simply stared at you with dark circles under her eyes. You might have to call her ginger panda from now if her sleep deprivation persisted. You knew her job was killing her and you also
knew she wanted this, but did she even enjoy her job? Danny leaned forward and finally pulled the hair tie from her ponytail, letting her gorgeous head of hair free. Even you had to admit that Danny Lawrence had great hair.

"Wait... Is this about Laura?" She asked perceptively.

You didn't say anything in response, not yet.

The one of the guys manning the coffee shop passed by your table. "Can I get you guys anything?"

"Just the usual, thanks Spencer." Danny said with a smile.

"You got it." He replied with a smile and got on with their coffee.

Finally, Danny started using her interrogation eyes on you. Not that they worked but you really did have something to say. She crossed her legs and leaned back. "Alright then, out with it. What's wrong?"

You looked away. "I'm not sure where to start."

"But it is about Laura."

You sighed. "Yes."

"What's the problem? Is it about the whole fake dating thing? Because it's been going great. Your mom and your sister are satisfied and everyone's taking it really well. If I didn't know you both, I'd say you were really dating." She stated.

If you were someone else, you might have had the gall to laugh nervously. But this was you and your silence spoke volumes. You leaned forward and finally spoke. "Listen, I'm not sure if I can keep doing this."

"It's only been a few weeks."

"Well Xena, I just can't."

"Why?"

You looked away nervously. "It's become... Complicated."

Danny's eyebrows scrunched together. "Define complicated."

Your coffee orders came and you began to casually mix in the milk and sugar in your cup. Danny did the same except she only added sugar, as if she needed any more milk in her life. "I can't be Laura's fake girlfriend without... without... certain things."

"Without what Carmilla?" Danny asked sternly.

You exhaled loudly. "Feelings. Dear god, I can't keep holding her hand or kissing her cheek without feeling something. I don't know if I'll even survive movie night anymore."

Danny's face was a complete blank.

Then she suddenly broke into a fit of laughter and you couldn't help but feel a teensy bit insulted. You gritted you teeth and angrily brought your coffee cup to your lips. "I'm here telling my problem and you're laughing? Gee, thanks Lawrence. I feel so much better now."
Danny shook her head and stifled her laughter. "I'm sorry. But this is just priceless you know. Are you telling me that you're feelings things for Laura? Because if you are then that's just brilliant. Your making my day Karnstein."

"No but can't you see how problematic this is?"

Danny sighed and ran a hand through her hair. "Honestly? I wouldn't be the least bit surprised. Remember when you told us that you felt nothing when Laura kissed you? It was such an obvious lie I could cry. I could probably believe Laura, but you? I know when you're lying. I didn't spend three years rooming with you without picking up a few things."

Cue the shame. "So what are you trying to say?"

"Let's talk about this. What's so bad about feeling things for Laura?"

You quickly put the cup down. "Are you kidding? She's my best friend. I can't go around feeling things for my best friend. I've known her since I was five."

"And? She's your bestest friend in the whole wide world. Then what?"

You frowned. "Why are you so okay with this?"

"How can I not be? You've spent all your life avoiding romantic attachments and the first person to make you feel warm fuzzy things is Laura. Just think about that."

"Well..."

"I mean. You do like holding her hand right?"

"Well yeah..."

"And when you kiss her cheek or her forehead, is it for the deceit or for you?"

You didn't have to think about that one. "I suppose it would be for me."

Danny leaned back with a grin on her face. "Well then there you go. Think about all of that."

You frowned even further. "Well you're no help."

"I can't give you answers. What would be the point?"

You actually looked disappointed. "I was hoping for a longer conversation."

Danny chuckled. "We could do that, but it would be a waste of time. But go ahead and talk about it if it makes you feel better. Tell me about Laura. Let's pretend I don't know her."

You considered it carefully and decided that there was no harm in it. Maybe deep down inside, you really did want to talk about your feelings as a change. As much as you liked to keep things bottled up inside, spilling your guts was sometimes a good thing. That and this was Danny you were talking to. If there was someone you trusted besides Laura, it would definitely be Danny.

"Come on, don't be shy Karnstein." Danny teased.

"Well..." You started because you had no idea where to begin.

"I don't have all day."
"Yes you do, bitch."

Danny laughed. "Stop stalling. At least tell me when this all started."

You took a large sip of coffee and inhaled deeply. Once you put the cup down, you began your story. You started talking about the lunch that started this whole mess. For the first time, you talked about the kiss. And dear god, it felt really good to finally get things off your chest. You hadn't realize how heavily your feelings were weighing on you until now. Naturally it was awkward for you to talk about it. While you may have ranted to Laura one too many times, those had always been fueled by some form of angst and anger. These kinds of talks were well... delicate. Pouring out your heartfelt feelings was hard and it wasn't something you did.

This was Laura's territory. She was always good at being sincere. You had admired her for that. For her genuineness. Especially with you because she never felt the need to hide anything from you. Unfortunately, you weren't as readily available as her. Sometimes you felt bad for that but she was always patient and understanding.

She was always too good for you.

In what universe would you deserve her anyway?

After you talked about the lunch, as well as the fight you had afterwards, Danny had this contemplative look on her face. But you continued anyway. You talked about how you and Laura decided that it was easier to make the fake relationship public and that the fastest way was to go to Elsie's. You talked about the dance and how you realized that everything had changed. And so simply too. One single kiss had managed to unravel you. Your whole friendship was suddenly turned on its head. It was akin to the Titanic hitting the iceberg. Whether you would sink or swim remained to be seen.

The other parts of the story, you skimmed through quickly. Once you finished, there was a silence. Danny was looking at you intensely and you waited.

"Okay." She finally said.

"Okay?"

She smiled. "It's so rare of you to wax poetic about your feelings like this. I'm truly, deeply honored and touched fangface."

You glowered at her. "Xena..."

"Yes well, I don't have much to say Carmilla. I can't magically tell you what it is you're feeling and if it's a good thing. If I were you, I would ride it out. Plus, this is Laura we're talking about. You've got nothing to worry about."

"I just don't want things to change."

Danny's amused face was immediately changed into one of concern. She leaned forward and lightly placed her hand on top of yours. "Oh honey... Just have faith. It'll all work out, I promise."

You finally relaxed and gave Danny a grateful smile. "Thank you for hearing me out Lawrence."

"You're welcome Karnstein."

What followed next was your usual talk. Danny was complaining about her work and you talked
about yours. You argued over debatable topics and gushed all over the new books you both had read. You were both on your second cup of coffee by the time you both had decided to go home. Hell, you even let Danny have full control over the radio. She wasn't Laura though, she had enough sense to pick a band like The Corrs over the Spice Girls. You both sang out loud in the car at some point until finally, you reached the apartment building.

"We've got throw pillows, popcorn, hot cocoa, and our movie. Movie night is good to go." You said in your comfy plaid pajamas.

Carmilla was already lazily sitting on your bed. The way she sat had always reminded you of the lithe movements of a jungle cat. If you had to pick one, she would definitely be a panther. You didn't know why but a panther would suit her well. She was busy minding her nails but she looked up at you when you called. A slow smile spread on her face and she patted your side of the bed.

"Well you took your sweet time." She said in her usual lazy drawl.

"Don't tell me you're bored already." You replied with a pout.

Carmilla grinned. "Whatever cupcake... I did promise after all."

You made a face in response and grabbed your laptop from your desk. Carmilla had been wearing these really soft wool pants and an incredibly comfy tank top. She was the kind of of person who valued her comfort over fashion but she seemed to have easily married the two concepts with ease. You joined her on the bed and plunked a pillow in between the two of you like you always did. Because eventually Carm would fall asleep anyway and you refused to shoulder the weight of her head for the next hour.

Carmilla grabbed the bowl of popcorn and settled it on the pillow in the middle. The two steaming mugs of hot cocoa would remain on their spots on the dressers next to Carmilla while the laptop was also on the dividing pillow. It was like old times. Back when you and Carm used to do this in high school. The two of you were always at each other's houses. Just hanging, talking, watching a movie, and all kinds of shenanigans. It was strange because theoretically, the two of you shouldn't get along. But you defied logic and were like two peas in a pod.

"Come on, let's get this show on the road."

You sighed at her impatience and pressed play.

For once, Carmilla was very awake and quiet too. While you loved Imagine Me and You to death, she pretty much hated it. She usually spent the whole movie complaining and making snarky commentary. While she never said that Rachel and Luce lacked chemistry, she would always criticize Rachel herself and the plot of the whole movie. You were ready to comment on her having turned a new leaf when she finally complained. It was unfortunate too. Only a fourth of the popcorn had been consumed thus far.

"For crying out loud. She just goes through and marries him? Just like that?"

You sighed because she had used those exact same words before. "Carm. They've been engaged long before Luce came. Can't you just appreciate a nice meet cute?"
"But it's so convenient. And then later the movie expects you to digest the whole 'I'm married to a nice guy' routine. It's ridiculous. They should have just taken out the whole marriage conflict and make a romance about them. That would be way nicer."

Your frowned after you shoved your face with copious amounts of popcorn. "You only say that because you've got the biggest crush on Lena Headey."

Carmilla chuckled. "Who wouldn't?"

You jokingly punched her arm. "You're so lame."

"I know. I'm too hot and lame to be real. Pinch me Laura."

You started to laugh uncontrollably. It was quite laughter, but relentless. "Stop it Carm, I can't watch."

Carmilla shoved a fistful of popcorn into her mouth. "You've watched this movie too many times."

She scoffed through the popcorn.

You glared at her. "Need I remind you that you promised me."

Carmilla smiled softly. "I know, I know. Don't get your panties in a bunch creampuff."

"Just shut up okay... It's that rooftops scene. I always love that part." You replied.

You expected her to laugh but she didn't. Instead, she began to absentmindedly play with your hair from her side of the bed. Whether she was deliberately doing this or not was uncertain. You met her eyes and she seemed to not have noticed the gesture. "I always thought you liked the 'You're a wanker number nine' the best."

"But the rooftop scene is where the frisson starts. It's when the audience feels how palpable their chemistry is. It's where the sparks start flying and we start thinking of all the possibilities. You know Carm, I am aware that this movie isn't perfect. But when it quiets down to just this moment, it's the absolute best."

Carmilla considered your answer before laughing through her nose and looking back towards the laptop screen. Her hand had dipped back into the bowl of popcorn but she remained where she was, leaning in your direction. "I won't tell you you're wrong because I feel the same way." She said in a low voice.

You didn't look at her but you acknowledged her words. "Yeah?"

"The kiss was nice sure. The whole pseudo date thing was pleasant but this scene? You're right. This is the one part where there are a multitude of possibilities thrust upon us and are left drifting up in the air. When it just boils down to just the two of them and their attraction. It's... romantic."

You smiled. "So you are a romantic after all."

"Every once in a while."

"How's Janis by the way."

She shrugged. "Her wrist is killing her. Every time I see her, she's itching to play the guitar. But she's doing okay. And she's still guilty about the whole fake dating thing."

"We should send her a fruit basket or something."
Carmilla laughed. "Only you Laura. Only you."

By the time you dunked your hand into the bowl, all that remained were the bits that didn't pop into popcorn. You frowned and Carmilla looked amused at you. "I could make some more if you're bothered." She offered.

"Nah, that's what the hot cocoa is for."

Carmilla grabbed a mug and passed it on to you. You immediately took a sip and nearly burned yourself. Still, just the full rich flavor of the chocolate was enough to soothe your pain. You took note that this one was more bitter than usual. "Is this Spanish or something?" You asked because Carm was the one who ran the last grocery run.

She shrugged. "It was either that or Swiss Miss and I refuse to drink that."

"Fair enough." You replied.

There was more silence between the two of you as the movie played on. It was nice because Carmilla refrained from making any more of her caustic commentary. Rather, she resigned herself to drinking hot cocoa quietly. You appreciated her consideration. Because if you thought about it, this was the first time Carmilla wasn't snarky or sleeping. The only light illuminating the room was the lamp on the dresser and the room was silent if you ignored the laptop. Both your legs were buried under the sheets.

If you wanted to, you could easily tangle your legs together.

What?

Woah, Laura. Slow down.

Why would you even think that?

You subtly observed Carmilla as she watched the movie. You couldn't help but admire her. She was always pretty as a child but puberty hit her hard and well. She had suddenly become such a sensual force that demanded to be reckoned with. Carm could pretty much wear anything and still look like a goddess. You always thought it unfair. From her well structured jawline down to her languid sensuality, she was just too unfair.

You easily recalled this one time back in high school. You were walking down the school halls when she cornered one of the cheerleaders for fun, whispered a few choice words, and had the cute cheerleader blushing like a tomato. The next day, you found them making out by the school steps. She always had a way with women even back then.

That and you always thought, that between the two of you, she would be the first time to get into a relationship. But she never did. Instead, you were the one with the whole dating gig and she was the serial sleeper.

Suddenly, Carmilla caught you staring at her and she smirked. You suddenly felt embarrassed and suddenly looked away. It was odd, you were never this conscious of Carm before.

"See something you like?"

Carmilla was always flirting with you but it was already friendly. After all, best friends were usually close. It was like dating without the romance. Flirting and sarcasm was just such a natural Carmilla thing. But for once in your life, you minded the flirting.
"Yes, your hot cocoa." You quickly retorted.

She shook her head but she was still smiling. "Tsk, a pity." She remarked.

You ignored her and tried to concentrate on the movie instead. Rachel had finally stormed into Luce's flower shop, demanding that whatever it was they were doing, it had to stop. This would lead to the infamous scene were the two would kiss and crush the flowers. You always squealed at this part while Carmilla would chastise you for falling for such a cliched trope. You were expecting her to laugh at you like she always did. Instead, she gave you her silence.

She was wide awake yet she didn't say another word.

"I know you expect me to make insult your movie... But I kind of sympathize with Luce."

You raised an eyebrow. "Why?"

Carmilla sighed. "She's attracted to someone she can't have. I think that's sad."

Okay, this was definitely coming from somewhere. Maybe this was why she was suddenly so moody lately? Was their fake relationship in the way? Was it giving her a hard time?

"Do you wanna talk about it?"

Carmilla suddenly took on this strange expression. You weren't sure what it was but it was melancholic somehow. What was this about?

"No... I don't actually."

Suddenly Carmilla got up from the bed. She softly placed her empty mug on the dresser and began to circle the bed barefooted. "I'm kind of tired actually. I think I'll go to bed."

You quickly closed the laptop and chased her to your door. She was so hot and cold, it was starting to piss you off to be quite frank. You usually had no problem with her attitude before but this was new. You managed to hold her by the door and she immediately gave you a look that you knew was a bad one. "Hey wait."

"What?" She grounded out in irritation.

"Seriously Carm, what the hell is your problem?" You nearly shouted.

Carmilla avoided you gaze. "I don't have problem. Stop looking for things that aren't there." She said calmly but there was a level of restraint in it. Like she was trying to hold something back.

"Cut the crap. I know you Carm... I don't know why you're still lying to me. It kinda hurts you know. I've known you all of my life and you can't trust me with something that's obviously bothering you. You don't think I don't know that this whole movie night thing is a peace offering? I'm not that dense so stop treating me like I don't know any better."

Carmilla gritted her teeth. "I don't have to tell you anything."

"Yes you do."

Now she looked pissed. "I don't owe you shit cupcake. I don't have to tell you every single thing that's happening in my life. You're not my family and you sure as hell ain't my girlfriend. I'm not the least bit obligated to tell you about my problems!"
You couldn't stop the sharp pang you felt in your chest. Sure the two of you fought, but this hurt. You were stronger than this but you could feel your throat clamming up.

"Maybe not. But I'm your best friend. Does that mean anything to you?"

Her face was full of fury a few seconds ago. Now, her anger had dissolved into regret. You could see it in her face, she was immediately sorry for her words. Suddenly her face melted into something softer and something far more sincere. Her arms reached out to you and before you knew any better, they were wrapped around you. She held you tight against the door as her hand stroked your hair as if to convey how sorry she was. She buried her face into your shoulder and you felt a sudden warmth spread throughout your whole body.

"Carm?"

"I'm sorry... I didn't meant to—"

You reciprocated her and held her fiercely. "I know. I wish you'd tell me what's wrong."

You heard her sigh. "I wish I could. I swear to god Laura, I wish I could."

"But you'll tell me when you're ready right?"

She slowly pulled back but she didn't break your embrace. Her face was calmer but her eyes were still in a state of panic. "Of course." She replied firmly.

You didn't understand why. But you suddenly felt this overwhelming urge to make her feel better. And, you were overcome with the need to kiss her metaphorical tears away. The feeling was oddly unsettling yet completely right. You wanted to reach out to her and kiss her.

It was only now that your realize how close your faces were. You only had to move a little until your noses touched. Your eyes found her lips and they suddenly looked so incredibly kissable at the moment. With only the lamp to illuminate her features, she suddenly looked so beautiful. The light was touching the tiny dips and grooves of her angular features and she just looked absolutely breathtaking.

You didn't act on it.

You couldn't.

Rather, acting on it could not be a possibility. Because this was Carmilla and this shouldn't happen.

"Laura? You okay?"

You sucked in a shaken breath but you couldn't seem to muster the strength to move. Suddenly, you were acutely aware of Carmilla's arms around you as well as every stroke she made with her hand.

"Yeah, I'm fine." You heard yourself say.

Carmilla dipped in towards you, her dark hair shifting with the minute movement. Her eyes were so piercing as they matched yours. "You sure?" She asked but she sounded breathless.

Somehow, you found yourself being increasingly drawn to her subtle but potent allure. You looked down at her impossibly soft lips before looking back up. "Positive."

None of spoke nor moved for precisely a minute. Then suddenly, Carmilla pulled back from you and you felt oddly disappointed. The idea that she was going to kiss you had settled into the back of your
mind like poison. Once it gripped you, it seeped deep into your veins until you were sure you were going to succumb to it. The funniest part was that you actually wanted her to.

You wanted to taste her lips again.

With a desperation you didn't expect.

Before you knew it, she was halfway out the door. "I'm sorry about tonight. I promise I'll make it up to you next time. Good night Laura."

You exhaled sharply. "Good night Carmilla."

Once she was gone, you leaned against the door and closed your eyes. You tried not to buy your mind lingered back to the kiss you shared weeks ago. The one that sent tingles all the way down to your toes. The one that somehow shook the foundations of which you stood upon. You allowed your fingers to touch your lips and you allowed yourself to remember the ghost of a kiss. It had lingered, you just hadn't realized it.

What was that about?

And where did it come from.

Was there always this insurmountable heat between the two of you?

Chapter End Notes

For reasons, I'm editing over mobile again. So if I missed some grammatical syntax stuff or mispelled some things, by all means tell me.

Also, I think "good night" is their "okay"

//casually runs away
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

You guys deserve a little break.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The thing about best friends was that despite cold empirical reasoning and the downright rejection of basic common sense, your periods were in sync. It was absolutely ridiculous. Yet here you were wrapped up in a blanket with your adorable best friend and current obsession. Usually being so close to Laura sent your senses on overdrive and made you feel all kinds of things, innocent or not. But today? You were too miserable and too cramp ridden to deal with that. So you huddled with Laura on your bed, watching movies and taking the day off.

As if sensing the mood, it was raining outside. It wasn't a threatening downpour but it was still rather heavy. In a way, it was a blessing. Your boss agreed to let you take the day off, probably because she planned on doing the same. True enough, you wouldn't have wanted to go to work anyway. You'd have to get some parts wet and spend the day shouting at people while experiencing abdominal cramps. Yes, that sounded like an excellent way to spend your day.

Laura did go to work this morning though, well she tried to. She called her co-anchor to tell her that she was going to be late but instead of that, you grabbed the phone and told Betty that Laura was in no condition to be walking in broad daylight. Thankfully, Betty agreed and handled the morning news by herself like a pro. Naturally, Laura protested this but she let it go eventually.

You currently both had mugs of hot cocoa in hand and heating pads to alleviate the pain in your lower back and abdomen. Today was day two, the second day was always the worst for both of you. To make matters worse, Laura seemed to have caught a cold. So she had her period and the blues. Every few minutes, you would hear her sniffing. More often than not, you would hear her blowing her nose. Right now, you both were nestled in your room. Partly because your bed was comfier than hers but mostly because Laura had come walking in wearing her pajamas and she just stayed in your room on a whim.

It was almost lunch and none of you had budged. Right now, your laptop was playing a movie and you both felt like shit.

Laura, with her head wrapped up in her end of the blanket, suddenly leaned on your shoulder and you did it right back. It was nice clinging to a warm body during days like these, the fact that it was Laura you were clinging to notwithstanding. Okay fine, even if you were pain riddled, the fact that it was Laura kind of made things a little better.

That and you were incredibly lucky your period this month just made you miserable rather than horny. Lord knows the pain you suffered the few times when you were sexually frustrated for a week because it was your period. You drew the long stick. Well, depending on whether your dying uterus was something to celebrate over being horny. That was up for debate.

Still, snuggling up to Laura had its own perks. Despite how you both hadn't bathed yet because doing so was an annoyance at the moment, Laura smelled pretty nice. She always did. With her head on your shoulder, you could easily inhale her scent, the one that always made you feel like you were
home. Then you could feel just how close your bodies were to each other. Your legs were casually entangled with hers and it made for a very comfortable position. You didn't know how else to describe it but the bottom line was that you enjoyed being this close to Laura. You also enjoyed her company in any form possible.

Of course, there were some things that you wanted to do but couldn't. You felt like this moment would have been perfect if you could simply slip your hand in hers or wrap an arm around her. Things an actual girlfriend would do. Right now, with the weather pouring hard outside and a blanketed over the two of you, it seemed like the perfect time for just making out. Oh, how you wanted to. And it would have been tremendously easy to do it too. It was so easy to just lean down and take her lips then and there. You wanted to kiss her in the slow lazy way, unhurried and utterly perfect. As the days went on, Laura was making the lines very blurry for you. At some point, you were bound to explode one way or another.

This whole fake dating situation was a time bomb.

It was either you diffuse it or you allow it to go off. Both ways were not without repercussions and besides, who were you kidding? Your friendship with Laura was something you could no longer salvage. These past few weeks had made it painfully clear to you that there was no going back to the way things were. Even if your feelings for her were to diminish, that fact that you had feelings at all would never go away. Somewhere in the corner of your mind, you would always think about how beautiful she was. You needed to be realistic now.

You needed to break up with Laura immediately after the wedding, literally and figuratively. And actually, you wouldn't mind rooming with Danny again. Plus, you knew that Danny would never judge you if you were the first one to up and leave. At this point, you couldn't handle being with Laura platonically or romantically. Not when she clearly felt nothing for you. Not even a tiny frisson of anything.

You needed to accept that your friendship with Laura was long gone now.

That thought alone would be enough to fill you with grief. It was always unpleasant, losing your best friend of all people.

"Carm?"

You were thrust out of your thoughts. "Hmm...?"

"I can hear you thinking." She stated.

Damn it, she knew you too well.

"It's just stuff, don't worry about it." You replied.

"The thing about you Carm is that it's never just stuff. Care to share your thoughts with the rest of the class?"

For one brief moment, you seriously considered pouring your heart out to Laura. You considered telling her how much she meant to you now and how you had non platonic feelings for her. You wanted to know if she felt the same. Of course, doing so would be tremendously stupid. So instead, you decided to tell her half the truth.

"To be honest, this whole thing is stressing me out."

"You mean our relationship?"
You sighed. "Yes."

"Well, if you look at it another way, the engagement party is this weekend. Soon after that, we'll be flying out to the countryside for the wedding. We'll be back to being single in no time." Laura said matter-of-factly.

"And you want that?"

"Want what?"

"To be single?"

Laura pondered over it for half a minute. "Well no, after this whole ordeal. It kinda makes me rethink things you know? So I figured I would make my online profile active again or start meeting more people."

"Huh...."

Laura tilted her head to look at you. "Why do you ask?"

"Curiosity."

"So, what part is stressing you out exactly."

How about the fact that all I want to do is kiss you? How's that for an answer?

Actually, you were sort of confused in that regard. Did you want to just make out with her or did you want a little something more scandalous. You had a few thoughts about that and it had nothing to do with the fact that her breasts were sort of pressed against your arm.

Okay, so apparently. You were in pain and horny. Fan-fucking-tastic.

It was that kind of period.

"I'm not exactly an actress." You stated.

She sighed. "You can wait out a couple of weeks can't you?"

"Hopefully."

"That doesn't inspire confidence."

"Don't worry about it sweetheart, I'll keep you on your toes. Just you wait."

Laura laughed. "Am I expecting you to jump me?" She teased.

You raised an eyebrow and met her eyes with a smile. "Why? Would you want that?"

Laura immediately flushed red and hid herself further into your blanket. As if she wasn't cute enough already. Oh honey, she had no idea. You covered her head as she hid into the blanket. "Is that a yes?" You asked.

"Stop flirting already." She blurted.

"But it's fun, you should try it sometime. But Laura? It's a serious offer."

"The flirting?"
You laughed. "No honey, the other thing."

You watch her make a tiny fit beneath the blanket and fought the strong urge to hug her tight. "Meanie."

You snorted. "If I wasn't so platonically in love with you, I would totally have dated you."

"Really?"

"Would I lie to you?"

"Well no."

You finally lowered you arm and wrapped it over her in a comforting best friend kind of way. Then you slowly rocked her back and forth. "Laura, believe me when I say you're a catch. You're beautiful and don't fight me on this. You are also very hot. I mean come on, you used to play football religiously and you go to the gym. You have a body I would kill for. Then, there's your personality."

"I'm too awkward."

"You're not awkward, you're adorable. If your dates can't see that then they're not worth your time. Any girl would be lucky to have you." You heard yourself say and hoped that your voice didn't betray you. Somewhere in those words were your true feelings and perhaps, some of those may have bled through the nonchalance.

"Why didn't you ever try to date me?"

What?

Laura no. That was too loaded of a question.

"Because you're my best friend. I just don't feel that way for you." You lied through your teeth. Thank god Laura couldn't see your face, she'd know you were lying.

"Oh."

Did you hear disappointment? Holy fuck.

No, but it was like platonic disappointment right?

If only Laura knew how much you wanted her. How all you could think of was to lean down and claim those lips of hers. To kiss her to oblivion and make everything else fade away. You wanted those slow sensual kisses in the afternoon and those crazy passionate ones in the evening. It was slow but suddenly, you wanted everything with Laura. You wanted to possessively wrap your arm around her, you wanted to affectionately hug her. You wanted to take her out on real dates. Hell, sometimes you couldn't help but imagine the idea of making love to her in the wee hours of the morning.

You wanted all of that. So badly it hurt.

It was clear to you that what you felt was miles away from platonic. She couldn't know about this if you wanted to keep whatever friendship you had left. Laura was too important to you to deserve anything less than your constant friendship and support.

Then there was that night you almost kissed her.
You fought that night and fighting with Laura always left a poor taste in your mouth. You always said the worst things in the heat of the moment but somewhere in your anger, you crossed a line. Then that face she made when you said those awful things, you wanted to stab yourself. How could you do that to her? She was trying to help and you tossed her aside because you were too mad at yourself for having feelings for her. But then you held her close and your faces were too near each other. You tried so hard not to kiss her then there.

If you didn't know any better. You'd say that Laura wanted you to kiss her. At least, that was what your gut told you. You felt it in the way she held you and in the way she looked at you. She was practically daring you to kiss her whether she did it consciously or not. You had to stop whatever tension had filled the room then. Laura didn't know what she was asking for. Maybe to her, she simply wanted to kiss you as a physical thing. But for you? You couldn't kiss her like it was nothing. It was sudden death for you.

It was all or nothing now.

If you ever kissed her again, it would be because she liked you as well. In that way. And well, the chances of her liking you back were slim.

"I think I will go take that shower now." Laura said quietly.

You immediately paused the movie. "Okay, I'll go order takeout. Want anything in particular?"

"Yeah, that Thai restaurant sounds pretty good right now."

"Alright."

Then you both yanked off the blanket and quickly dispersed. Laura headed off to her room immediately and you went to your little kitchen island to find Laura's stash of menus that had been stuffed into a drawer. You both were in no condition to be cooking right now. Not unless you both wanted burnt things for lunch. You found the phone hanging off the kitchen wall and immediately dialed the number. You ordered the food quickly and threw in some flirting to get them to do it faster. What? Don't judge.

Then you quietly deposited your own person onto the couch and waited.

You faintly heard the sound of running water starting up and suddenly, your ears were practically standing at attention. Your joint bathroom with Laura could only be reached through the all purpose living room. It was always easy to know if it was occupied. The running water was a pretty telling sound after all. Still, while you had intended to get some shut eye on the couch, you couldn't. Not when you knew Laura was in the shower.

You groaned.

Oh fuck. There went your hormones again.

It was just the hormones right?

But you could simply imagine it. It was so easy, so incredibly easy. You knew what Laura looked like naked, well... As best friends, you had seen each other naked at one point. But holy crap you knew that her body was incredible. You could imagine the hot water sliding down her sun kissed skin, going past the dips and grooves of her stomach. What the hell, you knew her torso was almost as tight as a drum. Almost. She kind of added a tiny layer of fat over it once she stopped playing football altogether but the gym helped maintain her figure.
Then her legs. Her legs were always amazing with toned calves that looked great in the rare occasion that she wore heels.

Then she had that stupid habit of singing in the shower. You always made fun of her for it but you knew she could sing. Her voice was of the sweet variety, very singsongy. It was a theatre voice. Plus, she would always sing some tacky pop song. Right now, you could hear her starting her own personal concert.

Of course.

It had to be Torn didn't it? As if she didn't play that song enough the year it came out. You both were probably in elementary... Or was that middle school? You couldn't recall.

Eventually, you were spared from having to imagine what Laura was doing in the shower. While you were ready to leave your little fantasy of her behind, she called you out. Upon hearing your name, you immediately sat up from the couch and walked on over to the bathroom door. "Yeah?"

"We're out of pads in the cabinet, can I get some from you?"

You sighed. "Sure, give me a sec."

You walked back to your room and opened the drawer full of a gentlewoman's unmentionables. Well, while some unmentionables were obvious like panties and tampons, the others were well... unmentionable. You weren't even sure if Laura knew the contents of your drawer, you doubted she would ever venture into your room with asking anyhow. If she ever did, you'd probably make her blush. You grabbed a long pad and skedaddled back to Laura.

You cracked the bathroom door open and shoved your hand in. "Laura? I'm sticking my hand in."

"I can't reach it, you'll have to come in."

You rolled your eyes and groaned. You have got to be kidding me, you thought.

"Are you decent?" You shouted.

"Does it matter? Do you want the remnants of my dead uterus on the floor?" She retorted.

It was a fair point.

You begrudgingly entered the bathroom. As soon as you came in, you felt the steam immediately hit your face. It was somewhat foggy and even though there was proper ventilation, the mirror above the sink fogged up anyway. Yeah, Laura liked really hot water. You quietly approached Laura who apparently was hiding behind the shower curtain.

"Sweetheart? I'll just put it by the sink."

"Yeah thanks. And can you hand me a towel."

You groaned inwardly. So yeah, your best friend was totally not naked behind that shower curtain. Not at all. Nope. Not in the slightest. You grabbed a towel from the rack and handed it to her. Laura opened the curtain a fraction too much and you managed to see a hint of her breasts. Oh god. Thankfully, Laura put the towel on quickly and you were spared the temptation. She stepped out of the shower and you stayed out of her way and prepared to make a quick getaway.

You may have been spared from seeing her stark naked, you weren't spared from seeing a wet Laura
in a bath towel. That in itself spurred some blush inducing images in your head accompanied with a sudden warmth pooling down south. And no, it wasn't the monthly death talking.

"Yeah, I'll go check if our food order's there." You said awkwardly.

Laura didn't seem to mind and nodded. "Uh huh, thanks Carm."

Then you exited as fast as you could. The farther away you were from Laura, the better.

As soon as Carmilla closed the door, you sighed in relief. You weren't sure how long you could hold your breath. With the way she was acting around you, you wouldn't have been surprised if she was burning holes into your towel. You really didn't want Carmilla anywhere near you in your state of undress but lack of foresight required her to deliver a pad to you. Speaking of which, you quickly stuck the pad to your underwear and put that on.

It was funny because you were never this self conscious of your body before. Not with Carmilla around.

Ever since you had that awful fight one night, you couldn't help but see Carmilla as anything but your best friend. How could you be platonic friends with her when all you wanted to do was stare at her face all day long if you could. You didn't know how it started but that fight was the catalyst. Ever since that fight, you had been exceptionally aware of everything Carmilla did. From the way she touched you all the way down to tiny habits she had, you noticed.

Even this morning you were being selfish. You wanted to put yourself in a situation where it might be an actual girlfriend thing. So you walked into her room and cuddled. Carmilla complied because you both were in actual pain. So you unabashedly leaned against her and clung to her like a girlfriend would. Hell, you even had the audacity to ask her why never tried to date you. Admittedly that was a stupid thing to do but when she started talking about what a catch you were and how any girl who dated you would be lucky to have you... well, it made you feel all kinds of warm and fuzzy.

Hell, any girl would be lucky to have Carmilla. She was loyal, kind, and incredibly considerate. She may act like she hated the world and true enough, she was a rebel in her own right but Carmilla had such a big heart. When her hard edges melted away, Carm was easily one of the best people you'd ever had the pleasure of meeting. It was you who was glad to have her as your best friend, not the other way around.

You found yourself wondering nowadays, what it would be like to be at the receiving end of her affection.

That thought alone caused your chest to tighten with this strange emotion. It was incredibly warm yet it stung. It spread all the way to your toes and finger tips in an odd tingly way and it took a while, but you figured out the core emotion that you felt right now. It was yearning.

You were yearning for Carmilla of all people.

You wanted her, plain and simple.

You closed your eyes and leaned against the nearby wall. You thought of all the reasons why this
was a bad idea. The first being that she was your best friend. If this went badly, you would lose her forever and you wouldn't be able to handle that. How could you go on living without the one person who always had your back no matter what. Carmilla was too important to you, you couldn't afford to lose her. That was impossible. You also couldn't face rejection because there was no way Carmilla would reciprocate whatever it was you felt for her.

Finally, you finished up. You brushed your teeth and dried your hair with a towel before putting on some clothes. You looked at yourself in the mirror once more and finally exited the bathroom.

When you walked into the living room, you noticed that the rain was still pouring outside like nobody's business. Carmilla already had the food laid out on the table and she was in the middle of grabbing a beer from the refrigerator. You watched her casually wipe the bottle before opening it with a bottle opener. The whole action was surprisingly attractive. Plus, she wasn't like those girl who poured their beer into glasses. She just drank it straight up from the bottle and it looked incredibly attractive. Then she ran a hand through her hair before she noticed you. A small smile spread across her face and you almost melted then and there.

"Thai food as requested. Come on, eat it while it's hot." She stated.

You walked on over to the dining table and sat down.

"Hey Carm, grab me one too."

She made this tiny salute and grabbed another beer from the fridge. She popped that one open for you and placed it on the empty spot before you. Then she sat down and handed you a spoon. "Well then, dig in."

It was apparent that you were both hungry because there was silence. Not the uncomfortable kind. Food was just the obvious priority. After stuffing our faces for a while, there was finally some conversation.

"So what are you wearing to the engagement party?" She asked.

You grinned. "That's a secret."

"No fair, you saw my dress. I should see yours."

You took a swig of your beer. "Think of it as a surprise."

"You sound pretty confident."

"Don't worry Carm, I won't steal your thunder. You'll still be the black sheep of the family." You replied.

"Good, I prefer it that way."

"So you feel like you're ready to see Will again? After all that radio silence I mean."

Carmilla shrugged. "Through hell or high water, he's still my little brother. We'll manage one way or another. We always do." She said with great confidence.

"If he's getting married, she sure must be something special huh..."

Carmilla smiled. "Getting him to tie the knot, she must be. I wonder what it would take to tie me down."
"You and marriage? That would be a challenge."

Carmilla leaned forward and rested her head on her propped up palm. "Do you think I'll ever settle down?"

"Whoever your future bride is would probably drag you to the altar kicking and screaming." You snickered.

"You know me too well." She laughed.

"Well, whoever she is. She's gonna have to go through me." You added.

Carmilla nodded. "Absolutely. If she doesn't even have the Laura Hollis seal of approval, then she's not worth it."

"Of course, all my future girlfriends have to go through you as well. If the Karnstein doesn't approve then I should probably kick her to the curb."

"Damn right." She replied as she brought up her beer.

You clunked your bottle with hers and grinned. "But with the way things are going, we really might as well date each other huh...?"

Carmilla's face seemed to crack a tiny fraction. Like she was caught unawares but she managed to salvage her poker face. "Tell you what creampuff. I'll make you a deal. If both of us are still single near the end of our thirties, let's just marry each other."

You laughed. "You can't be serious."

"Why not? It's already the two of us against the world. What difference does it make?"

You shook your head. "You're talking about getting married Carm."

"Yeah... I am. What do you say Hollis? You in?"

She had a point. You were probably gonna stay together until your deathbeds. It was sort of the pact you made with Carm when you both were five. It may have been a child's promise but you valued it and you were willing to keep it. But what the hell.

"Okay."

Carmilla's eyes widened. "Okay?"

You shrugged. "Okay. If we're single near the end of our thirties, let's get married. Why the hell not? I don't hate you."

Carmilla smiled. "I don't hate you too."

The two of you must've spent like a minute staring and smiling at each other without a single thought. When you both realized what you both had been doing, you looked away. Carmilla casually shrugged off the moment while you managed to flinch once or twice. Carm quickly finished her beer and started cleaning up her end of the table. You sort of followed suit. It was nothing short of awkward.

Despite the strange afternoon to follow, you felt unbearably giddy.
Married to Carm?
What a dumb notion.

Chapter End Notes

Short chapter today but a real long one next week. I promise!
By the by, any guesses on what's in Carm's drawer? //laughs forever
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

So three things to take note of:
1. I won't be updating next monday. I've been hella busy and I need some time off to finish the next few chapters
2. I'll be amending the summary... I'm not as funny as I thought I was
3. I'm aiming for 18 chapters or so. Around that much.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"What's taking so long." You muttered under your breath as your heels tapped against the floor in a constant rhythm.

It was the night of Will's engagement party and while you weren't running late, your mother had ridiculous standards and would chastise you for dallying so much. It was one of those fancy black tie affairs. Plus, it would be filled to the brim with nosy relatives and relatively weak champagne. But family aside, this would be the first time you would've seen dear old Will in months. Maybe even years. You weren't quite sure what to expect. The one person who would be your rock for the evening was also the very same person who would be your own undoing.

You were dressed in some sexy black number with a back that dipped dangerously low and the fabric clinging to your body like a glove. You deliberately chose it because while it was still formal and tame, it was also the right amount of risqué to induce a few heart attacks. Matched with your stilettos and impeccable makeup, you were dressed to kill. Still, you wouldn't last long in your gorgeous evening attire the more Laura kept you waiting.

Even after she promised you she'd be out in five minutes, you still didn't believe her. Your best friend was occasionally neurotic so whatever it was she was doing in her room, it was probably just her perfecting her makeup. Or something to that effect. Whatever, you quickly decided that you would wait for her downstairs.

"Laura, I'll wait for you downstairs. I'll go ahead and call for an Uber." You called out and hope she heard you through the door.

"I'll be right out, I promise." She replied.

You rolled your eyes, picked up your purse, and made your merry way down the stairs. Danny managed to catch you on the way up the stairs. Apparently she had gone to the nearest Chinese takeout for some all nighter food, you vaguely knew about her current time consuming case. It made you feel tired just hearing about it from Lawrence the other day. She was minding her steps but she saw you and grinned.

"Well you look hot." Danny approved.

You winked. "Don't I always."

Danny looked behind you. "So where's Laura?"
You sighed. "She's taking her sweet time getting ready."

Danny's grin grew wider. "So I take it you haven't seen her yet."

You shrugged and ignored what she was implying. "I know she coordinate her dress with mine. I just don't know what she got but she's Laura. Her fashion sense is adorable and at most times, impeccable."

She crossed her arms and leaned against the nearby wall. "Oh? So she's adorable now."

You sent an icy glare in Xena's direction. "Fuck off Lawrence."

"It's okay to be attracted your best friend."

You resisted the urge to throttle her despite the fact that in an actual fight, you were sure Danny could easily throw you out the window. She was such an athlete, and she was way taller than you. It was a no brainer. Before you could throw another scathing insult towards ginger giant's direction, you heard the telltale clicking of heels. You turned around too have a look.

You didn't expect to have your breath stolen away.

You immediately felt a familiar warmth pool in the pit of your stomach, well that and other places you didn't wish to name. But regardless of how painful your attraction to her was, there was something far more prevalent then that.

Laura Hollis was completely, and utterly beautiful. It almost hurt how exquisite she looked tonight. You knew she matched her dress with yours but you had no idea she even had it down to the color. She had on this simple little black dress but it fit her so snugly. It accentuated her curves and showed just the right amount of skin. With a dress as simple as that, you were forced to look at her gorgeous face. Dear god, she looked good. Damn good. Laura was an absolute vision.

Plus her legs looked fantastic in those heels.

You would physically groan if doing so wasn't rude. Or was it?

"So, are we all set to go?" You heard her ask.

You tried to articulate a response. Tried being the operative word because you couldn't. Your throat clammed up and you didn't know what to say. You were completely and utterly speechless. All you could do was stare. You were slowly becoming a slave to Laura's potent attractiveness. She was always cute and adorable. Then there were times like these when her sensuality reared its head and showed you Laura as a woman. The effect was utterly devastating. Finally, you managed to calm down and you extended your hand towards hers.

She took it with reluctance, clearly wondering what you were up to. But you had no special tricks up your sleeve tonight. You pulled her down to your level unhurriedly before you brought her hand to your lips. Then you kissed the back of her hand as slowly as humanely possible before you released her. While you did it to see if you could fluster her, the gesture was a selfish one. "You look beautiful, Laura."

You had the pleasure of watching the blood color her cheeks. It satisfied you to know that you had this much of an effect on her, at least. She smiled sheepishly. "You too Carm."

Danny tried to circle around the two of you in order to get to her apartment. "Yeah, you kids have fun. Use a condom."
Both of your heads snapped in Danny's direction and it was a wonder why your collective glowering wasn't melting the ginger giant. Naturally, the giant in question didn't seem the least bit affected. "Jesus, lighten up you two. It was a joke."

"Yes, one done in poor taste Xena." You snarled.

"Well you're no fun now." Danny scoffed.

"Xena I'm warning you—"

Before you could shell out another scathing insult towards Danny, you felt Laura's hand slip into yours. Her hand was soft and so incredibly warm, you could have easily melted on the spot. Then she tugged at you as she shot Danny a look. "Don't patronize her. She's been cranky all day." Laura warned.

Danny grinned and shook her head. "Of course. I'll see you guys tomorrow. Please do something I wouldn't do."

You felt Laura squeeze your hand and decided to let it go. Ginger giant was just trying to get a rise out of you in light of recent revelations. You let Laura lead you down the stairs and out into the chilly Styrian air. The Uber you called earlier was already waiting for the both of you by the pavement. It was one of those sketchy looking cars, being a black sedan and all, but the driver's face was on your phone. It was safe. Plus, you'd be arriving at the venue in style.

You glanced down at your entangled fingers and raised an eyebrow. "Red nail polish? How bold." You approved. How did you miss it the first time? Were you that distracted by Laura? Oh dear god, what had you been reduced to?

"It works for you all the time, I just wanted to try it out." She replied with a smile.

You quickly opened the door for her and gestured towards the leather seats. "After you Mademoiselle." You said jokingly.

You helped her step into the car knowing full well that Laura and heels were not a good combination. She was beauty but she was definitely not grace. Punching you in the face however, she could definitely do that. Her father didn't put her up with Krav Maga for nothing. Laura could probably beat you in a fight, effortlessly. Once she was in, you stepped in after her and greeted the driver as a courtesy. Then you were well on your way. The car was one of those annoying BMWs, so there was this giant lump in between the two of you. Even if you wanted to close the gap, you couldn't. There was this space in the middle and it served as some metaphorical wall between the two of you.

It was probably more symbolic to you than it was to her.

You arms were now crossed as you absentmindedly looked out the window. Laura was casually admiring her nails, which she should. Red was an unusually good color on her. You didn't expect it to work it but surprise, surprise. The driver was playing some easy listening tracks on the stereo while the two of you sat quietly. It wasn't the uncomfortable sort, at this stage of your friendship, you didn't need constant conversation. In a way, it sort of made you an old married couple without the actual romance.

The difference now being that you wanted to kiss the ever living daylights out of Laura Hollis.

It was very problematic.
All of a sudden, your cute best friend had become painfully attractive. You had begun to notice the small things about her. The way her hair curled as well as how it's beautiful color shimmered under different kinds of light. The way she fidgeted with her hands when she was excited about something. Even the way her resplendent eyes lit up at the things she found interesting. Hell, just the constant warmth she seemed to have was enough to bring you to your knees. Laura was an exceptionally warm human being, literally and figuratively.

It was slow at first but were noticing everything. As long as it was Laura, you paid attention. You weren't sure if you paid anyone that much attention before. Her habits, you were already familiar with, but everything else about her? You were learning about them with a frightening speed.

Even now as you tried to look occupied, you wanted to do nothing more than to hold her hand and kiss her like she kissed you that one time. You recalled her kiss being hesitant. It was obviously an impulsive one but the way she kissed you was so inherently her. So wholly inexperienced yet so eager. That powerful urge just kept getting stronger and stronger each day, and you were so powerless against it. You were at its mercy.

"So how was your day?"

You turned your head and couldn't help but be taken aback. "Oh? Umm... It was good I guess. Yours?"

Laura gave you a caustic smile. "Come on, you can do better than that."

"What is there to tell. I had a free day, all I did was play Cards Against Humanity with the boss and a few other coworkers. I'll admit, we had a few shots. What can I say, we were bored." You said with a grin.

"That can't be true."

You shrugged. "Well cupcake, my workplace is not a serious one. I really struck gold with the lottery. Why? What's up with yours?"

"My day you mean."

"Yeah, you brought up the topic. Surely you have something to say."

Laura sighed.

A crease formed in between your brows and you tried to bridge the gap in between the two of you. Well, you tried. The lump was being a nuisance. What was up with the make of BMWs? If you were to force at least one leg over the hump thing, your dress might have torn. "What's wrong?"

"Didn't you watch today's morning news. I screwed up."

You gave a long sigh and put your hand on her shoulder, to assure her. "Laura, of course I watched it. And no, you didn't screw up. It's not your fault the teleprompter was glitching out. Has this been bothering you all day? Why didn't you tell me?"

"I didn't want to bother you and Carm, I'm a journalist. I should be able to improvise. It would be unprofessional otherwise."

"Please. If I'm allowed to subject you to massive mood swings, you are allowed to bother me. Trust me. Plus, Betty helped you out didn't she? Don't beat yourself up so much. You've been at this job for half a year, you're allowed to make mistakes."
"Yeah but—"

"No more buts Laura. You are far too beautiful tonight to be stressing out over something that doesn't matter anymore."

Her look told you that she thought you were just flattering her. Unfortunately, you were being honest right now. Not that she was aware. Laura was remarkably astute at certain situations and incredibly dense in others. "Thanks Carm. You always know what to say."

You smiled softly. "Can you blame me? I know you too well."

"Twenty years would do that to you." Laura joked.

You laughed. "Remember that time you tried out for the football team back in middle school?"

"Yeah, I had this massive crush on the team captain and I had no idea. I thought I simply had a friendly admiration for her."

"Yes, it was very subtle. You were staring at her ass every practice. You would have been straight not to notice." You sarcastically.

"Like you would know." Laura scoffed.

"I always suspected that I preferred ladies. High school just clarified things for me."

Laura chuckled to herself and leaned back against the headrest. "I kinda figured. All your idols were female icons. Joan Jett, Hayley Williams, Tegan and Sara, and so on. The only time I recall you pining over a guy was for his poetry."

"I had a Shakespeare phase. I can't believe you had to deal with that, it must have been awfully annoying."

She shook her head. "You weren't difficult. Just pretentious."

"Oh god, I was a pretentious little shit wasn't I." You gasped for effect.

"Well, you were my pretentious little shit." Laura joked.

Having heard that, there was no way you were going to let that go. The edge of your mouth quirked up and you leaned a little closer to her. "Oh really now?" You asked in a lower tone that you rarely used on her, for obvious reasons.

"Well yeah... You're the closest thing I have to an actual relationship." She replied quietly.

"Without all the kissing, right?"

Laura's breathing grew shallow. "Yes. Without all the kissing."

A new tension grew between the two of you. You could hear the blood pumping faintly through your veins, the steady beat of your heart was all your could hear. The quiet rumble of the car faded away and all you noticed was her. Her scent had hit you hard in that moment, she had this musky perfume on, it was dulled your senses and made it so that you only responded to her. The earlier heat you felt had resurfaced and had surged down south. You could feel the hairs on your skin stand as goosebumps slowly crawled up all over you. Then your eyes immediately found her lips. You briefly followed her eyes and you realized that she had been doing the same.
Then she unconsciously bit her lip in this slow tantalizing way and you needed to keep the conversation going. Not if she wanted to be ravaged in the back of an Uber car.

"Do you ever wonder how we would both turn out if we never met at the playground. What if we had met in high school or in college. Would we still be friends?" You asked.

"I'd like to think we'd still be friends... But knowing you, it might be a little different."

"Different how?"

Laura shrugged. "Just different... But I wouldn't like that. I like us as we are."

"And if something were to change?" You asked.

Laura kept your gaze, her big brown eyes were looking straight at yours. "I wouldn't hate it." She stated firmly.

"Ladies, we've arrived." The driver's voice cut through and you both jumped at the sound of his voice.

It was like a splash of cold water. Quickly, you slid back as far away from her as possible and she did the same. You picked up your purse in haste and opened the car door. You had one foot out the door when you briefly thanked the driver and quickly stepped back onto the pavement. The restaurant steps were a short walk away from where you were. Laura followed after you shortly and you both started to walk.

"Well, it's showtime I guess."

"With an audience of a hundred.... Yeah. No pressure." She replied.

You grabbed a hold of her hand. "We'll be okay. Just do what we always do."

"But you're good at the touchy feely stuff. I'm awkward."

You smiled at her. "Trust me, you're doing fine. Just follow my lead."

Of course she was doing just fine. She was doing more than fine. After all, she didn't need to have the flirting prowess of a goddess. All she had to do was hold your hand, kiss you cheek, smile at you, and you were absolute putty. Laura had no idea how much power she had over you. If you were allowed to do whatever it was you wanted to do to her, you would still be at the apartment doing all sorts of unspeakable things. Even as you held her hand right now, you took great pleasure from it and reveled in the warmth you felt. Holding her hand made you feel all nice and safe. Like could take on anything. This engagement party was going to be a breeze.

You led her up the stairs with fingers intertwined, you both needed to be a united front. The whole restaurant was a five star establishment serving some kind of euro-asian fusion of sorts. Tonight, the whole restaurant was booked for Will and Sarah Jane. The maitre 'd was already waiting for you and had led you into the restaurant proper. From what you observed, the restaurant was like the perfect marriage of modern and classic. It had a regal feel to it but it didn't feel old.

It was a good choice. Obviously, Will had nothing to do with it. His bride-to-be was probably the responsible party. It was points in her favor.

There was a small table situated near the entrance of the dining area, that was probably the reception. There was still quite a few people loitering outside the dining area with wine glasses in hand. A few
waiters and waitresses zoomed back and forth with bottles of what seemed to be good wine and the room was fairly loud. You tightened your grip on Laura's hand and proceeded to the reception table.

The woman manning the booth seemed to be the friendly but reserved sort. The type to only ask concise questions and never dally. She gave you a polite smile. "Good evening, Ms. Karnstein and Ms. Hollis I presume?" She asked.

"How did you—" Laura started before being quickly cut off.

"Mr. Luce said it would be impossible to miss the both of you. That and Ms. Karnstein, your mother was very detailed in her instruction. But I digress, you've got table number five. Have a nice evening ladies." She said in a clear professional tone.

The woman was finished with the both of you before you could even register what has happening. It didn't really matter though, you got your table number which was all you really needed. As you walked away from the table, Laura nudged you with her elbow and grinned at you. "She was totally checking you out."

"Was she?" You replied and it was genuine. The woman was nothing but the epitome of brief and concise. There was no room for flirtation.

"Totally. She was looking at you the whole time and she never spared me a glance. Plus, she was actually batting her eyelashes."

"I didn't notice."

Laura looked at you at disbelief. "She's blonde and easily a ten and you didn't notice her? Damn."

You blinked once. She was blonde?

"Why? Are you trying to hook me up with her?" You teased.

"Just because we're stuck in this situation doesn't mean you can't have some fun." Laura reasoned.

You sighed before smiling. On impulse, you kissed her temple. "That's sweet Laura but no thanks. You don't have to do that just because you feel bad. I'm not having a hard time. Really."

"I just wanted to be sure."

You casually looked back at the woman at the reception table and raised an eyebrow. You caught her in the middle of staring at you and watched her look elsewhere. And yeah, she was a blonde and a ten. Laura wasn't imagining things. What astounded you was that you really didn't notice. She wasn't even a blip on your radar.

"Well I'm not interested." You stated as you dragged Laura along.

You walked into the dining area and steeled your nerves. You would be needing them after all. That and maybe copious amounts of alcohol.

Here came your relatives.

Oh joy.

"Carmilla! It's been too long!"

You braced yourself for all the nosy intrusive questions as well as all the unwelcome hugs. The first
wave to assault you were your mother's cohorts. Mostly women her age, your aunts in other words. After gushing about how great you looked and how much you've grown and yadah yadah yadah, they turned to Laura. Unlike you, she handled them with much charm and finesse. She talked them down like a pro and was able to make some polite banter. Afterwards, it was just a matter of repeating the same rehearsed lines about how you started dating and whatnot.

The two of you were getting good at this whole faking thing. You both didn't miss a beat and no one would suspect that anything was amiss. Everyone except for Will. It may have been a while but your little brother was a very perceptive person when it came to you. He could usually guess that something was up. He also had the added benefit of growing up with both you and Laura. You couldn't dismiss all those years.

Once you were through with your line of aunts and your line of cousins, you finally met Will.

Last time you saw Will, he was sporting a clean haircut. Now he allowed his hair to grow out and he even grew a beard. It wasn't a bad look actually. He was dressed up in one of those bespoke suits and the brunette on his arm must be Sarah Jane. Well, she was pretty you supposed. But looks were shallow, personalities spoke volumes however.

And this case, Laura was like your secret weapon. She had your back. You were going to be just fine.

The two of you quietly approached Will who was chatting to what appeared to be Sarah Jane's relatives, his potential in-laws rather. You caught his attention with ease and a wide grin slowly spread across his face. While you were prepared for an awkward greeting, it was anything but that. Will sort of ditched his bride-to-be and made a beeline for the both of you. He went in for a massive bear hug.

"Long time no see Kitty!"

You smiled and hugged him back. "Hey there Willy boy. It's been a while little brother."

He pulled a way, still grinning from ear to ear. "Too long Carmilla. I really missed you." He said before looking at Laura. "Hey! Hollis it's been forever. Still hanging out with Kitty I see. She's lucky, you're too much of a sweetheart for her." He said as he went for another hug.

Laura returned it and hugged him tightly. "What's up with the beard?" She asked.

He made a funny face. "My beard is not the question, SJ likes it. But what's this I'm hearing about the both of you and a relationship."

You couldn't help but grin. No doubt he had heard things but he still wanted to hear it from you and not anyone else. What a sap. Still, it proved how well he knew you. In the end, Will turned out to be one of those people no amount of distance would change. It could be a decade and you'd still treat each other the same. You and Laura looked at each other briefly before looking back at will.

"About that..." Laura started.

You smiled at her before selfishly and brazenly kissing her on the cheek. Laura seemed to have gotten flustered by the unexpected gesture. Then you quickly wrapped an arm around her to pull her close. "Laura and I are dating now."

"Ah, right out of the horse's mouth. The rumors were true. But to be completely honest, I am not the least bit surprised." Will replied before framing the two of you by making a rectangle with his fingers. "This looks like a perfect shot if you ask me."
Ah yes, you nearly forgot that Will was into photography now as a side hobby. While he was based in the UK and working for big time Fortune 500 companies, his passion was always for the camera. Now that he had some money to his name, he started making investments so he could turn his hobby into a side business.

"Flatterer." You shot back.

Will shook his head. "But seriously Kitty. You two are perfect for each other. I don't know who else is willing to take your shit. It's like your whole friendship makes perfect sense now. You have my blessing as your little brother."

"What does that even mean?" Laura asked.

"Which part?" Will replied good-naturedly.

"That part where our whole friendship makes sense now." You filled in.

"Well..." He started as he crossed his arms. "It's like you guys are soulmates you know. Completely different yet perfect for each other. It's only now that we know it was of the romantic variety. You two were always inseparable so we all just figured you'd wind up together eventually. Nevertheless, I'm happy for you guys."

Then Will looked back to call for his fiancée and she immediately made her way to where you all were. "So Laura, Carmilla, this is my fiancée Sarah Jane. SJ, meet my big sis Carmilla and her girlfriend Laura." He introduced.

Handshakes were briefly exchanged. "It's nice to meet you Sarah Jane." You said politely and Laura followed suit, saying something nicer.

"I've heard some interesting stories about the two of you from Will over here." Sarah Jane admitted.

Glares were shot at Will. "What did you tell her exactly." Carmilla snarled.

Will put up his hands up as if to defend himself. "Nothing inflammatory to your stellar reputation I assure you. Just the usual stories to paint a picture of your sparkling personality. The four of us hung out all the time after all, before Mattie grew up and stopped being fun."

"Cheers to that. Speaking of which, please tell me there's an open bar here somewhere. Not that I don't love you, I probably won't survive the rest of the family without some alcohol." You said.

Will grinned. "Of course I do. My best man's hanging onto a few bottles of whiskey for the boys. I could give you a bottle."

"So which one is he?" Laura asked.

Will pointed towards one of the tables on the opposite end. "There's a tall guy somewhere over there in a vest, has the hyperactivity of a puppy. His name's Wilson but you should probably just call him Kirsch. I think he went to Silas around the same time as you guys. He's been my buddy through and through."

"Thanks Willy Boy, I appreciate the support." You said as you patted him on the back.

"But you owe me this evening." He shot back.

You waved it off. "Whatever, see you later." You said before giving Sarah Jane a quick smile. "It
was nice meeting you, I hope we could talk more in the future."

"Of course." She replied.

You dragged Laura by the hand and she managed a few words of farewell to Will's fiancée. Mostly, she was apologizing for your behavior. It was something you really didn't care much for. You were halfway across the opposite end when you finally started walking side by side in a slower pace. "I think I had a Kirsch in my lit class before." Laura stated as she tried to recall where she had heard the name before.

"I remember punching a Zeta named Kirsch that one time I caused some trouble with Zeta Omega Mu." You replied.

The only reason why the name stuck was because when you landed nice left hook to the side of some Zeta bro's face, you heard someone call out his name in concern. Why you punched him was something you really couldn't remember but it had something to do with the Zeta president who was always hitting on you. The new president after that guy, Theo was his name, seemed to be of the decent variety and had apologized for harassing the women on campus. He even personally apologized to you in your sophomore year on behalf of Zeta Omega Mu and his douchebag predecessor.

It was an interesting time in your college life.

"I don't think remembering him will matter right now, he's coming this way." Laura stated matter-of-factly.

"How did you know it was him."

"He was my certified Zeta Omega Mu safety companion. Well, right before Danny hauled his ass out of the room and he never came back." She replied as if recalling who he was.

You squinted in the direction she was looking at. "Oh dear god, I did punch him didn't I?"

It was as Will described. The man was a hyperactive puppy in a tailored charcoal grey vest, black tie, and blue dress shirt. He easily towered over the two of you and had a nice amiable smile. He was clearly a typical frat boy but he was of the nonthreatening variety. Probably wouldn't hurt a fly. Rather, he didn't even try to hit you back when you gave him a black eye. He accepted the hit gracefully and even complimented your solid left hook.

"If it isn't football nerd and crazy rocker chick." He greeted.

You raised an eyebrow. "Kirsch right?"

He grinned and nodded. Yep, exactly like a puppy. "You remember me, that's awesome. Because like, who doesn't know you two. It's rare to be so well known in college, you know. Especially after what you did to our president back in first year? Whoo, I still get shivers just thinking about it."

"I'm sorry I punched you."

He shrugged. "No sweat. I would punch him too. It was stupid to get in your way."

"So yeah, I know she's infamous but how do you know me exactly?" Laura asked.

"Laura right? Aside from being assigned to your dorm, you absolutely killed it at your senior game against Bulwark. You pulled of a freaking hat trick, like how awesome is that. Best midfielder
Laura bashfully scratched her cheek, how adorable is that?

"I didn't know the bros watched women's football. You're all too busy freaking out about the other kind of football." Laura said.

"American football is all fun and stuff but your sport is pretty brutal. I respect that." He said with a mini salute.

You smiled at Laura. You liked sports as much as the next uninterested person but you always loved it whenever people praised Laura for her accomplishments. Watching her face light up was always worth it. It's a wonder why you didn't compliment her more often. Maybe you should start.

"I don't understand anything that involves kicking balls unless I'm the one doing it, for reasons." You joked.

Laura gave you a crooked smile and you returned the look. "So yeah, Kirsch. Can we ask for a favor." She asked.

"Sure, anything for you little hottie."

You immediately glared at him. "You call my girlfriend a hottie again and I'm kicking you right in the family jewels." You threatened.

You watched Kirsch shudder. "Of course... Er, Carmilla. What did you guys need."

Laura seemed amused by your threat. "Give us one of your bottles. Please and thank you." Laura asked politely.

Kirsch smiled. "Of course. Will got too much anyway."

Kirsch ran back to where he stashed the booze and Laura immediately turned to you. She smiled mischievously and leaned a little too close for comfort. "You're running this girlfriend routine pretty hard Carm."

"I would have done the same sans the whole fake dating thing." You replied.

"And the hand holding? Don't you get tired of it?"

You smirked. "Like all the time."

"So why do you keep doing it." It was more of a statement than a question.

You raised an eyebrow at her. "Do you want me to stop holding your hand? I could if it's making your uncomfortable. It's just that if I had an honest to goodness girlfriend, I'd hold her hand every second of every day if I could."

You swore you could have seen her blush but whatever it was disappeared as soon as it had started. "You're such a sap."

"It's gross just thinking about how gross I am. Me in a relationship, fancy that." You replied sarcastically.

"You'd be a pretty great girlfriend and I say this from experience. Whoever you date in the future is a lucky girl, Carm." She said quietly.
Then you looked right at her without an ounce of shame or subtlety. You looked her right in her beautiful hazel eyes that seemed to have been affecting you far more than they should and took on a serious face.

"Why yes she is." You said knowing full well the implications.

Her lips parted and her eyes widened for a fraction of a second before she broke eye contact. You felt her hand tremble ever so slightly as she looked elsewhere. Laura found Kirsch returning with one of the bottles and she focused on him instead. Kirsch proudly deposited the bottle in your possession. "So will that be all ladies?" He asked.

"Yeah, thanks Kirsch." Laura replied a little too quickly.

"If you guys need anything at all, I'm your man. See you guys later." Kirsch said before going back to whatever it was he was doing before.

"Now we have to say hi to mother."

Laura shrugged. "No sweat."

"I don't believe I've ever spent five hours with her before. Not in a very long time."

"We'll leave early. Right after the toast if you want."

"Please, by all means."

Laura smiles reassuringly. "Well then, after me then."

And she lead on with you following closely behind. Like always.

You never realized how much of a flirt Carmilla was until she redirected all of her attention towards you. Because all those things she was saying were clearly just flirting right? There was nothing to them. She was only saying those things to get a rise out of you. Even now, your mind kept drifting back to that moment on the car ride. You tried to ignore it and shove it in someplace you couldn't remember but you couldn't deny what had transpired. There was a certainty within you that told you that if the driver hadn't interrupted, she would have kissed you.

It was such a potent thought that you desperately tried to distract yourself.

But Carm herself was acting fairly strange. Flirt that she was, she would have absolutely flirted back when the blonde at the reception was checking her out. Even if she wasn't interested, it was just in her nature. But hell, Carmilla didn't notice a thing and she didn't seem to care. Rather, at some point, you had noticed that Carmilla just kept looking at you. You didn't know what that meant and you were scared to read into that.

Sure, you were dense sometimes. But she was being so blatantly obvious now without an ounce of shame. Was Carm even trying? What was she trying to accomplish from all of this?

And that thing she said earlier.

"Why yes she is"
Why did you cling to those words? Clearly Carm was just humoring you but the way she said it. She suddenly looked so serious and she was looking right at you, as if the words were meant for you. The way she looked you right in the eye actually made you feel like the only girl in the room, even for a few seconds. In that moment, you felt your chest tighten and little by little, it had become harder to breathe.

What was Carmilla playing at?

Because if this was just a game to her then you didn't know how long you'd last.

Not when she made you want to kiss her into oblivion and make you feel all kinds of warm fuzzy things.

These "feelings" weren't there before but it was becoming painfully apparent that they ran deeper than you thought. You had entertained the idea that maybe you were just confused. You were put into a situation where you were "dating" someone and had some of the intimacies involved. Maybe the feeling of being in an actual relationship was merely imprinting on you. But it was more than that.

They were coming from somewhere.

And Carmilla was causing them to surface.

The handholding and the kisses on anywhere but your lips were becoming increasingly difficult to do. You felt safe whenever your fingers were interlocked together. You felt a tiny burst of happiness whenever she pulled you close to kiss your cheek. And the way she would do innocent kisses, dear god. They were always so slow and so drawn out, it was torturous and cruel.

Then there was her mercurial hot-and-cold behavior. Sometimes she was the most affectionate human being in the world. Other times, she was this giant ball of pent up anger. You enjoyed the times when she was being silly old Carmilla. Back when you simply enjoyed each other's company because you were just two best friends hanging out.

What had changed? When had it changed?

Why couldn't she just be your best friend.

"William's fiancée is such a darling isn't she."

Your head turned towards Mrs. Karnstein direction. "Yes, Sarah Jane's pretty nice." You replied.

"Apparently she's a graduate of Cambridge. Good head on her shoulders if I do say so myself." She added.

You merely nodded in agreement.

"Carmilla, be a dear and get me a glass of wine." Her mother cooed.

Carmilla sighed with her eyes closed. "It's a champagne affair I'm afraid."

"What is Will even doing?" Mattie groaned.

You watched the whole family with growing amusement. They all looked so starved for something stronger like red wine. In a way, they reminded you of a family of vampires, all tired and pale. Like the utter lack of alcohol was killing them.
Carmilla swirled around her glass of whiskey and down a few sips. "Yeah, it's a pity you both don't drink this stuff." She stated.

"It's crass." Mattie shot back.

"You just don't appreciate a good single malt blend. It's finesse in a bottle." Carmilla retorted.

"Honey, you'll drink anything as long as it has alcohol." Her mother pointed out.

You watched her as she attempted to protest but then she stopped herself. "Fair point."

Then Carmilla turned to you. "Are you going to eat your salad sweetheart?" She asked in a lazy manner.

You shook your head. "You can have it... If you're that bored."

Carmilla began to start poking her fork in your plate. She stabbed one of the cute cherry tomatoes in your salad and ate that one. You watched the fruit enter her mouth in this strange tantalizing way and stopped yourself. You absolutely did not wish to think of Carmilla and her mouth in the same sentence.

Then she unconsciously licked the fork.

Oh fuck.

You were definitely not thinking about that. Not at all. Not her cute little pink tongue. Not the way it licked the fork clean. It wouldn't be a stretch to imagine it doing—

No, stop it Hollis.

Girl the hell up.

Carmilla's eyes found yours and she raised an eyebrow. She stabbed one of the leafy lettuce parts and pointed it in your direction. "Did you actually want to eat it? Why didn't you say so?" She asked with an unguarded expression.

She really had no clue.

"I'm fine, really." You lied. In fact, you felt really hot right now. Like, did the temperature just rise? It probably did.

"If you're sure." She replied as she proceeded to shove the lettuce into her mouth.

Okay, this was getting ridiculous.

Finally, the soup came after the salad. You were spared from watching Carm eat vegetables and it was such a relief. Anything involving her mouth was completely off limits from now on. Luckily for you, they were serving pumpkin soup with some croutons floating about. Pumpkin soup couldn't be sexy in any way, right?

Well, you were right on that regard. Carmilla unceremoniously consumed her soup as if she were at home. It was so typical of her. The problem was, watching her drink up her soup like a ten year old had suddenly become something painfully adorable. What was wrong with you tonight? And Carm was just unfair. You don't just jump from downright sexy to utterly cute. It was illogically, unfathomable, and completely incomprehensible. Then Carmilla just had to lick her lips and she reverted back to being annoyingly attractive.
It seemed that tonight was especially bad for you. Especially when Carmilla just had to wear a dress that dipped so low, her creamy back was exposed for all to see. She probably relished in the attention but you were distracted beyond measure.

It's probably why you had worked so hard to make sure that her back was never in view to you. It killed you to see all the dips and grooves of her back shift every time she moved.

A cold shower was definitely in order.

This wasn't the first time Carmilla had affected you so. Ever since the night you fought and she hugged you against the door, you kept noticing things. Constantly. You didn't want to but you found yourself staring when she wasn't looking. Whenever she did couple things, you always held your breathe in hopes that what you felt didn't show. Your relationship with Carm was alarmingly becoming something tangible. It was beginning to resemble an actual relationship and that terrified you.

You immediately downed the glass of champagne next to you and quietly finished your soup. Carm wasn't the only one who needed some liquid courage.

As you went through the rest of the full course meal, nothing exceptional happened. Your whole table had easy conversation, probably due to the fact that you all had history. You were comfortable talking to Mattie and you could easily talk to Carm's mother but thankfully, Carm was actually talking to you. There was a strange normalcy in the way you talked and made stupid jokes. It was surprisingly nostalgic. Maybe you both were making some kind of conscious effort to go back to being comfortable with each other, even for just a whole dinner. It was nice.

"So yeah, and then this idiot walked right into the pole and claimed that the pole ran into him. Smooth right?" Carmilla laughed.

"The girl he liked was standing right there?"

"Oh yeah."

You laughed just as hard. "I could die from second hand embarrassment."

"Here's the best part, so he stands up like nothing happens right. Then finally the last person they were waiting for shows up. She walks up to his crush and lands a wet one right on the lips."

You covered your mouth. "You're kidding. She was gay the whole time."

"Everyone knew and no one told the poor guy."

"You're horrible."

She snickered. "Am not. He was just a friend of a friend. I didn't need to tell him."

"You enjoyed it you sadist"

She raised an eyebrow. "Why? Would you have told him."

"I would have..."

"Oh really now. I call bullshit."

"Okay fine. No I wouldn't."
Carmilla grinned. "See Laura? You're just as imperfect as the rest of us."

You rolled your eyes. "Whatever, you're lame."

"Your weird tofurkey diet is stupid."

You frowned. "Oh my god, that was one time."

"You ruined thanksgiving."

"I did not. I was trying to be healthy."

"You're like a walking health contradiction. You go running early in the morning seven days a week and go to the gym on Sundays. Then you pig out on sweet stuff and hot chocolate. Are you even human?"

You laughed. "Don't be so bitter just because you diet."

She looked insulted. "I do not. I naturally look like this." She retorted.

"You wouldn't have to diet so much if you just went jogging with me."

"Oh hell no Ms. I-Enjoy-Triathlons."

"You're so lazy. Don't blame me for your poor stamina."

Carmilla seemed to take that as a challenge. "Oh I'll show you poor stamina." She practically growled.

Suddenly the air was charged with potent electricity and the two of you stopped in your tracks. The tension that surfaced was so thick you could probably slice right through it with a butter knife.

Suddenly, you felt like you were both dumped into the same situation as you were in the car. Carmilla was the first to back off. Her form retreated and she sat back in an odd stiffness. Her posture looked so fragile. Like a single touch would break her. Then you realized that you had done the same. What was going on?

"Are you two done being children? Will's doing his speech." Mattie chastised.

You both didn't answer and Mattie didn't seem to find anything amiss. Will was there standing by his table with a microphone in his hand. There was applause and the clinking of glasses filling the room until it was silent. Will smiled charmingly and began to start speaking. Apologies to Will and all, charismatic guy that he was, he had a fairly text book speech and you sort of didn't pay a lot of attention. He was merely thanking everyone for coming, talking a little about how this all came to be, then he would talk straight to his future wife. It was all fairly generic in your opinion.

He managed to crack a few jokes and everyone laughed until he started thanking certain people in his life. He talked about Kirsch, how they met, and how they would be bros for life. It was nice and it sort of had the big puppy at the verge of very manly tears. Apparently, he was a sensitive guy and it was nice that he wasn't ashamed to shed a few tears. Then finally he specifically started to thank Carmilla. That was when you paid attention. You knew she hated it when she drew this kind of attention, whenever people put her on a pedestal. She seemed to prefer notoriety to fame.

"To my big sis Carmilla, I'm sorry we sort of drifted apart. You've always been there for me ever since we were little. You are my oldest friend and I wouldn't be standing here today if it wasn't for you. Actually, I wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for everyone in that table over there."
Suddenly, the spotlight shown on table. Firstly, why was there a spotlight? And secondly, the attention was all focused on you.

"Mrs. Karnstein always took care of me like I was her own. Thank you for that. Especially when I was an awkward little kid. And Mattie, growing up with you is such a privilege. You've taught me a great deal. Laura Hollis, you're the only one who isn't family but you are. You are family anyway. Speaking of which, I'm sure you've all heard but my big sis and her best friend are now dating and I think that's just awesome. No two people are more perfect together than they are. Well... maybe me and SJ."

There was laughter at his last joke but you and Carm were growing increasingly uncomfortable at the sudden attention on your relationship. Will was literally about to end his speech when the room started to clink their glasses like they would at the wedding reception. Only, it wasn't for Will and SJ. They clearly hadn't done anything to merit that.

No, it was clearly for you and Carmilla.

Will's side of the family knew all about Carmilla's allergy to relationships and were thrilled at the prospect of the two of you. SJ's side was as equally enamored, clinking their glasses with much enthusiasm. Especially after meeting you two.

Will laughed into the microphone. "Okay, I think we all know who that's for. So Kitty, I did say you owe me. Just one kiss for the happy couple, I am getting married after all."

Carmilla froze and you were immediately worried. Of all the kinds of attention she hated, this was by far the worse. The bad part was that Will sort of knew that. Well, if you two were actually dating, this might not have been such a stretch. But come on. Then you read her body language and you just knew she was ready to rip someone a new one and just walk out. You couldn't let that happen, the evening was going so well after all. It was one of those things you could never take back and it might ruin her relationship with Will by a little.

It was the man's engagement party for pity's sake.

You decided that you would take it upon yourself to defuse the situation. Who else would?

You carefully put your hand on her shoulder and oh boy was she tense right now. She suddenly looked at you with these angry eyes but she slowly calmed down when you shook your head. You smiled at her and without warning, you kissed her.

It was only a brief kiss. A mere peck but it felt like so much more. It took every fiber of your being to pull back so quickly. You knew you couldn't handle kissing her a second time, it would just ruin you. For that infinitesimal contact, you felt everything from those lips. There were sharp pangs bursting through your chest and your hands trembled. Carmilla's eyes were closed for a few milliseconds longer than yours and when her eyelids fluttered open, her eyes were hazy. She looked so vulnerable right now, so raw.

Her expression was like a reflection of the weakness you felt deep within your chest.

And maybe that gave you hope.

That maybe you weren't the only one who felt this way. About everything.

The applause that burst throughout the room didn't register. It was no more than white noise in your ears put to a low volume. Carmilla was the first to break your gaze and you followed suit. To hold so much power within a chaste kiss, it meant something. All you knew was that your body was
positively bursting at the seams, and that whatever it was you were bottling inside was becoming too much.

All you wanted to do now was go home and sleep.

Because you were now fearful of what would happen from this point forward.

The two of you managed to hitch a ride with Kirsch and you were so thankful that you did. He was a very much welcome third wheel to your awkwardness. The rift started as soon as you said your goodbyes to everyone but the change was obvious. For instance, Carmilla immediately ceased her affectionate touches and hand holding. She stood approximately five inches away from you and kept it that way. It was only noticeable to you and only you.

Kirsch was talking at a mile an hour and bless him for that. He seemed oblivious the obvious tension in his car and you humored him. You kept the conversation going without fail. It was better than the searing silence. Carmilla was clearly ignoring you. She kept looking out the window and she never looked anywhere else. Her legs were crossed and she sat absolutely still.

It wasn't long before your apartment was in view. Kirsch dropped you off by the sidewalk and said a few parting words. He was a pretty nice guy and you were sure to hang out in the future. It was also nice of him not to leave until the two of you were safe within the building walls. As soon as you managed a final farewell to Kirsch, Carmilla had already made her way upstairs.

Usually, you'd run after her and talk things out. It's what you always did and it's how you always fixed things for years. But now? You weren't so sure. It would be so much easier to just not talk about it. So you decided to walk up to the apartment in a slower pace, not knowing what to expect.

You entered the apartment and found Carmilla sitting on the couch looking tired. You felt the same and headed right for your door.

"Why do you keep doing that?"

Your hand was only inches away from your doorknob when Carmilla spoke. You cleared your throat as your hand dropped. "Do what?"

"Kiss me like it's nothing for you."

You turned around and walked a few steps towards Carmilla, but you kept a good distance away. "What do you want me to say Carm? I don't know what you mean..."

"Bullshit." She spat with quiet fury.

"Carm..."

Suddenly she stood up, seething with every loud step. Before you knew it, she was standing right in front of you looking angrier than she'd ever been before. Her fury was a rare thing to witness and you had felt it more within the past few months than your whole life. You were accustomed to it and to be honest, Carmilla was scaring you. You couldn't really call her drunk either, she didn't have that much and you knew she could hold her own. This wasn't a wild Carmilla shouting because she couldn't hold herself back. She was choosing to let it out. It felt cold, controlled, and so unlike her.
Then again, maybe she had it in her all along.

She ran a hand through her hair in blatant frustration. "I can't do this. I fucking can't... I thought I could but no. I am just so done with everything."

"Wait... Are you done with us?"

"There is no us Laura. This is all fake remember? Who's bright idea was this again? It's certainly not mine." She scoffed.

Oh okay. So we're bringing up old arguments again?

"I thought you were okay with this. You said you were willing to commit. No one forced you to do that. You know what else? You keep complaining how your family never listens to you but they do. Do you know why they keep pestering you year after year about having a girlfriend? It's because year after year, they see that you're miserable and alone. They see how lonely you are even though your best friend's standing right here. And they're right in a way. I don't understand why you're still so lonely sometimes."

"I'm not lonely. Don't downplay my life like some outsider. Why are you trying to understand them when you could just back me up. Isn't that what best friends do?" She retorted.

"I do have your back. Always." You said quietly and sincerely.

Carmilla's face didn't seem to budge though. "It sure doesn't seem like it."

"What do you want me to do Carm? If there's something I can do to fix things, I'll do it. I can't stand fighting with you all the time anymore. This distance between us... it hurts like hell." You croaked.

"You know what else hurts?" She asked as she suddenly surged forward and closed the gap between you. She was frightening you. Then you found herself being backed to the wall. "Do you know how badly I want to kiss you? Yet here you are, kissing me like it's nothing for you. It's insulting because I'm having such a hard time—"

"Then why don't you?"

Carmilla finally looked like something other than mad. "What?"

"Kiss me." You replied breathlessly.

When she didn't make a move, you slowly grabbed her hands and pulled her towards you. "It's all you've been shouting ever since we got here but it's not true... I don't kiss you like it's nothing. I kiss you like it's everything because you're my best friend and there was no way you'd feel the same but I'm just really attracted to you. Like holy crap am I attracted to you."

Her kiss couldn't come fast enough.

She grabbed your head and kissed you hard. It was fast, ferocious, and all sorts of perfect. Her body was pressed against yours as she slammed you against the wall. Your lips slid insistently against hers in a furious rush as your hands started to roam. It was nothing short of glorious. Your senses were on overdrive and you were slowly losing your ability to think. Oh dear god, she really knew how to kiss.

Then she bit your lip and you really lost it.
Your hands immediately found their way to her supple ass and you grabbed it through the silky fabric. You pulled her as humanely close to you as possible and finally you ran your tongue across her lips, begging for entrance. She opened her mouth and oh god, she tasted so good. There was the hard bitterness of whiskey dancing on her tongue mixed in with the faint taste of strawberries, she was fatal. You moaned when Carmilla rolled her hips into yours as you both began this heated battle for dominance.

The kiss was anything but innocent.

If anything, it was hot and demanding.

Then suddenly, it all came to a crashing stop. Carmilla tore herself away from you and you felt her slip through your fingers. The first thing you saw were her eyes, all misty and hazy with what you know knew was need. Her cheeks were flushed and her breathing was harsh. Then you found her lips, all swollen from kissing you. She was such a sight. She may have stopped but she didn't release you, you were still caught up in her embrace.

"We can't do that." You heard her say.

"But—"

"No Laura... We can't do that. Ever."

"You can't deny that we fit. That you feel the same things I do when we kiss."

Carmilla looked away. "I know. But this won't end well. It's why I tried so hard not to make this happen. This changes everything Laura."

"We'll work it out." You reasoned.

"No we won't. There's nothing to work out."

You sighed as you tucked away stray locks of her hair. "Fine... At least tell me you're attracted to me too." You pouted.

Carmilla finally smiled and it just made her so beautiful. She did that thing with her hand where she touched the bridge of her nose, as if she didn't know what to do. It was a nervous tick of hers. "Are you kidding? Ever since you kissed me, you were all I could think about." She replied in a whisper.

Your heart warmed at the thought. "Thank you for your honesty."

"We'll talk about this in the morning. Right now... I don't trust myself with you."

You silently agreed with her because you were both in the same boat. You didn't trust yourself with her either. She also had a point, this was bound to end badly. Steering clear of whatever this thing you have was the best course of action. Things were complicated enough. You couldn't allow it to go beyond the point of no return. You were still behind the Rubicon after all.

Carmilla left you completely and you suddenly felt the cold air of the apartment. You watched her walk to her room and for once, you were so glad your rooms were separated by doors. It gave you some comfort.

"Good night Laura." She called out from her end.

"Good night Carmilla." You replied before she shut the door.
Chapter End Notes

(° ₅°)
Funny story actually. So I was writing this chapter right? And when I finished, I realized that I had written 18k words. Like wtf me. So I split it into two. Trust me, it's for your own good guys.

You didn't sleep a wink. Not one bit.

Just the mere thought of you losing control like that was bad enough. But finding out that you two sizzled like doomsday volcanoes strangely made you feel all kinds of fuzzy and all kinds of bad at the same time. You were pretty sure Laura managed some sleep, she looked remarkably more well rested than you. Plus, she was always extra cute in the morning. Laura was always this bundle of energy until she would stop in her tracks and yawn in this adorable way. It used to make you laugh in amusement, now it made you want to squeeze her tight.

Apparently, after last night's revelations, your brain was running on a no-filter. Rather, you didn't seem to deny yourself everything you thought and felt about Laura anymore. You accepted it and while the feeling was nice, there nestled a sense of ever living panic deep within the pit of your stomach. Now with a clearer head in the very least, you both had to deal with last night as responsible adults.

As the one who was up earlier, you already had the coffee machine running while you heated a glass of milk on the side for her hot chocolate. When Laura came to, it was incredibly awkward. You both were tense bundles of nerves and you both maintained this constant distance from each other. She started up breakfast and you worked on setting the table. All of this was done without a single word. It was only when you both had steaming mugs of something and a plateful of food, you began to talk. You didn't argue or have serious talks on an empty stomach after all. That would just make you grouchier if you did.

"So..." Laura started.

"So." You mimicked.

"Bottom line is that we really like each other. In that way." Laura laid it all out in one sentence, it was fairly accurate.

"Yes." You replied as your hand gripped the handle of your mug.

"So we're pretending to date now with the added bonus of actually being attracted to each other." She continued.

"I think we can all stop stating the obvious now." You scoffed.

Her eyes narrowed at your sarcasm, apparently it was too early for it. "Fine. So what now? You wanted to talk this out so talk."

"Well firstly, what happened last night can never happen again." You stated firmly.
Laura raised an eyebrow and sipped her hot cocoa. "Yeah, you've made that point painfully clear. I agree with you."

You blinked twice.

"Oh... I was expecting you to put up more of a fight."

Laura sighed tiredly. "Yeah well whatever it is you're feeling about last night is probably what I'm feeling too. I would rather we didn't. I wasn't thinking clearly last night, we both weren't so we don't get to point fingers."

"No more kisses on the cheek or on the forehead." You added.

Laura nodded. "Yes, please."

"Just the hand holding then."

"Are you sure about that?" She asked.

You cocked your head to the side. "Why?"

"If we're at all feeling the same things then you should know as well as I do that hand holding does all kinds of things to me." Laura admitted.

You couldn't help but feel happy for some strange reason. "Really?"

Laura shook her head and smiled. "Yes really."

"Me too." Was all you could say.

Laura laughed and god did you love her laugh. If only you could record it and play that on loop all day long. She leaned back and grinned. "We sound like idiots."

"Oh dear god, I know... So um, what kind of things exactly."

You had the pleasure of seeing the blood flood her cheeks, giving them a rosy hue. "I'm not answering that. It's self sabotage."

There was another moment of awkward silence. You both shifted uncomfortably in your seats and neither of you touched the food or the mugs. After what seemed to be forever, you made eye contact. Before you both knew it, you both had burst into unbridled laughter. It had been a while since you've laughed this much. Once you both settled down, you felt lighter. You didn't feel so weighed down.

"What have we been reduced to?" Laura asked, hints of laughter were in her smile.

"I don't know. But you know what? We're Carmilla and Laura. I'm sure we'll be fine."

"Feeling optimistic are we?"

You shrugged. "I have a good role model."

"But you're right. We can get past this as long as we've got each other's backs. I'm sure we'll be over it."

You sure hoped so. But Laura was being too ambitious. Whatever it was you felt for her was anything but simple. Your feelings for her swallowed you whole like a whirling black hole
threatening to collapse reality. Poetic, but the point was there. How could that ever go away? Fine, Laura liked you too. You never thought you'd ever hear that sentence in your lifetime. But there was also the distinct possibility that your feelings for her ran deeper than hers ever will for you. How could you possibly begin to deal with that?

"Of course, I hope so too." You said but those words were empty.

Laura suddenly stood up and grabbed her plate with her. "I think I'll eat in my room. You look like you didn't sleep at all, you should probably get some shut eye."

Bullseye indeed.

"I figure you'd notice."

"I say this all the time but unfortunately Carm, that's the disadvantage of knowing someone your whole life." Laura replied and started walking towards her room. Then she suddenly turned on her heels. "By the way, LaF passed by earlier and said they had an interesting idea. Wouldn't tell me though so whatever. Go see what they want or something."

Then you watched her disappear into her room to do god knows what.

You yawned unceremoniously as you stretched your arms upwards. You didn't rub your eyes though, you still had some makeup. After last night's little incident, you were too scared to go to the bathroom out of fear of bumping into Laura. With that fueled exchange so fresh in your mind you would have kissed her again, undoubtedly. All you did was change into your sleepwear in the very least and relieved yourself of your stilettos. That and you tried your absolute best not to cross to Laura's room.

Today's first order of business was to wash away last night's makeup. So you trudged on towards the bathroom like a woman on a mission. As soon as you saw your face in the mirror, you frowned. Your eyeliner was all smudged and your mascara was scattered making you look like a veritable panda. You stole Laura's cleansing thingy she got for free from the news station. It was nice because you could mix it in with water, apply it to your face, then wash it off along with all the grime. Hell, it even made your skin softer in the process. God bless freebies.

Once your face was makeup free, you tied your hair into a ponytail and decided to pass by LaF and Perry's flat. They were literally your neighbors as you were all on the same floor. Danny's apartment was the one above you.

You made your way out the door and grabbed your house keys from the nearby bowl as you went by. After a few short paces, you were face to face with their door and then you gave them a solid knock.

LaFontaine's neutral face greeted you and they looked tired for some strange reason. It probably had something to do with their dissertation. Dressed in a Silas University shirt that said "I'm a Bio Major" and a pair of comfortable sweatpants, LaFontaine was definitely not ready for the morning. They gave you a once over with dead eyes and leaned against the doorjamb.

"Oh, it's you. What do you want?"

You crossed your arms and raised an eyebrow. "You had something to say?"

"Oh."

You sighed long and hard. "Out with it."
LaFontaine wracked their brain for solid information. Clearly they were still waking up which begged the question as to how they were able to swing by earlier to tell Laura something. "Right, don't tell Laura. You know how she is when she gets excited."

You nodded slowly. "Okay. So what is it?"

"Umm yeah, we realize that you guys are leaving us for two weeks. I know it's not a recreational trip for you guys but we will miss you. Also, two weeks is a surprisingly long time so Danny proposed going on a road trip before you guys leave."

Oh?

"A road trip? Sounds fun, where are we off to?"

LaFontaine crossed their arms and inhaled deeply as if to absorb as much oxygen into their brain as humanely possible. "Uh yeah. Perr proposed that we go camping in Lake Plansee, it's good this time of year. It's still fairly warm and I would hate for the cold to kick in. Then again, I use the term 'fairly warm' loosely but we're Styrians. What's a little cold right? We could all share a cabin or something. Think of it as one last hurrah for us."

"You make it sound like we're going far away." You pointed out.

"Yeah well, just go with it."

You grinned. "Let me guess, Perry asked you to?"

LaFontaine frowned. "Have you tried saying no to Perr? Besides, she rarely asks for things and she's been feeling a little under the weather about work recently. I think it's a good thing. Also, I think you and Laura could use a break. This whole fake dating thing has you guys on edge 24/7, you could use this opportunity to chill or something."

You thought about it. "Well, it would be nice to be out of public scrutiny, in public… for once."

"It'll be fun Carmilla..." LaF said in a tired voice. It was not at all convincing. Nevertheless, you already had an answer.

"Well as long as Laura doesn't touch the stereo, I'm down for it. And yes, we should keep this from her. She'd never shut up about it. When is this supposed trip anyway?"

LaFontaine tried to grasp for information deep within their brain. They were kind of slow this morning. "You know what, talk to Perry. Come on in."

You followed in after LaF and entered their humble abode.

Generally speaking, your apartment with Laura was slightly larger due to the fact that it was the corner apartment. It was mostly due to an error in the floor plans when the complex was first made so all corner rooms were larger. But aside from size and a row of windows on one side, the layouts were fairly similar. Two rooms, one room with a toilet, a bathroom, a kitchen island, and one big living space. While you and Laura had more of that concrete, brick, bohemian thing going on, LaF and Perry had a more typical setup. Rather, one could call it modern with white walls and steel beams. Then there was the occasional splash of color.

It was a very clean apartment. Not just in the design but it was literally spick and span.

Despite that, there was still a huge pile of papers shoved into one corner. There were also boxes full
of beakers, flasks, and all kinds of small things that belonged in a lab. On the coat's rack, LaFontaine's lab coat was hanging there in its immaculate whiteness. It almost screamed "scientist".

It was funny how one's apartment easily showed one's character.

"Have a seat." LaF said nonchalantly as she went to the kitchen. It was apparent that Perry was there because you could smell breakfast foods wafting in the air.

Perry peeked out from the kitchen. "Hey Carmilla, do you want something to eat? Some coffee?"

You shook your head with a smile as you sat on the couch. "I'll pass on breakfast but I'll take that coffee, thanks."

LaFontaine poured you a cup fresh from the pot. They already put in one and a half teaspoons of sugar before handing the mug over to you. You inhaled the scent of the coffee deeply before taking a sip.

"You two are a godsend." You almost moaned.

"Didn't you have a cup earlier?" LaF inquired.

"I wasn't able to enjoy it. Let's just say Laura and I had another fight again."

It was easier to downplay this morning as a fight. It was far more acceptable to tell them that as opposed to telling them the actual subject matter of your earlier conversation with Laura.

"The two of you have been fighting a lot lately." Perry remarked.

"It happens." You replied.

"Yeah, but you've never fought this much before." She stated matter-of-factly.

You sighed. "With the way we're wired, it was bound to happen. This whole fake dating thing has just been surprisingly stressful. But don't worry... we're okay."

"If you say so." LaF stated slowly.

Before further conversation could be had, Danny Lawrence came walking in with a large bang. Apparently, she had pushed the door too hard and was abusing her house key rights as per usual. Dressed in a ratty t-shirt and snug boxers, it would appear that she just walked out of bed. It took her a few paces in to notice you.

"Oh? Hey Karnstein. What brings you over to this side of town." She greeted.

"I heard we were planning a road trip." You replied.

"Ahh right, don't tell Laura."

You frowned. "Why does everyone keep telling me that. It's not like I'd spill..."

Everyone in the room stared at you all at once.

"Are you kidding Carmilla? All Laura has to do is give you puppy dog eyes and you'd cave." Danny scoffed.

"She has a point, you'd never been able to say no to her before." LaFontaine added.
"It's imperative that you don't tell her. Remember the last time we had a road trip in college?" Perr stated from the kitchen.

You, LaFontaine, and Danny made a collective groan.

You eventually threw your hands up. "Okay! Fine. I'll do my best not to tell her."

Danny dumped herself into the spot right next to you. Her overall weight and ungraceful way of depositing her person onto the couch caused the cushions to shift, displacing you slightly. It was like a mini earthquake of sorts and you frowned. She then subsequently slung an arm over your shoulder and grinned. "So."

You raised an eyebrow and stared her down. "What?"

"How was last night?"

"It turned out pretty well. My relatives are thrilled and Will seems to approve. He also looks like he's doing well and Sarah Jane seems nice." You replied.

"Nothing interesting?"

You gave her a look. "We were also reacquainted with the best man whom we've met before at least once. Ever heard of a Wilson Kirsch of Zeta Omega Mu? A bit a typical frat boy but he's got a good heart. Nice guy."

Danny's face made a complete one-eighty and she grimaced. Her grip on your shoulder was becoming alarmingly painful. "Oh god."

"What? Why?"

"Kirsch was that guy who kept following me around for a whole year. He wouldn't take a hint."

You shrugged. "Well, he seems to be a functioning member of society now."

"Whatever." Danny groaned.

You put your feet up and drank more coffee. "I'd like to return to my apartment as soon as possible so please give me the stupid details of this trip so I can go. Pretty please." You sighed.

"It's a no brainer fangface. The Friday before your trip is the designated day. So you guys have at least a day or two of rest before journeying away to the wedding. It's a five hour drive from Graz to Lake Plansee. We can split the driving if you want and no. Laura won't go anywhere near the stereo." Danny stated in one breath.

"Sounds copacetic."

Danny snickered. "No one uses that word anymore."

"I do." You retorted.

"Anyhow, I know it's a tight schedule but that day is the least crowded. I already booked a cabin near the lake. It's two bunk beds and I'll be sleeping on the floor. Because it's less crowded, we could easily rent one of those yacht things for a couple of hours and do the fun stuff." Danny added.

You casually removed her arm from your shoulder and stood up with the mug in hand. You slipped your feet back into your slippers and started making your way to your place. "Sounds perfect Xena. 
If you'll excuse me, I think I'll go back to sleep. LaF, I'll return the mug later."

"Sure." LaF briefly replied before returning to their own devices.

Danny managed a little wave and stayed on. It was apparent that she had free breakfast from LaF and Perry. It would also appear that this happened on a daily basis. Once you were out of the door, you decided to make a quick detour. At this time of the morning, no one would be at the roof deck and the temperature was relatively cool. Plus, Laura would be pacing around in the apartment and you didn't want to deal with her. At least, not right now.

Unfortunately, the world was a cruel place.

As soon as you climbed the stairwell leading to the roof deck, there she was. She was still wearing her pajamas as she was sat by the ledge, her back was against the brick construct barring her from falling, her whole form leaning forward. Her dirty blonde hair was drifting in the wind and bits of sunlight were on her face. She seemed peaceful, as if she were simply enjoying the good weather and the morning breeze. She had an empty cup of cocoa, and a kindle on her lap. You didn't mean to stare but you did.

Was it possible for someone to become even more beautiful?

You stepped onto the rooftop pavement, making small noises with each step. Laura eventually lifted her head and the smile she made stole your breath away.

"Hey."

You sat next to her near the ledge. "Hey."

"So what brings you up here?" She asked.

"I just wanted to clear my head." You replied.

Laura placed her kindle on the floor next to her and gave you her undivided attention. She casually ran a hand through her hair and shifted her hairline. It was one of her annoyingly attractive gestures she made daily. "Me too... So ah, what did they want?"

"I was told to keep this in confidence but you would find out anyway."

"Okay, I'm listening."

"So the Friday before we leave for Will's wedding, we're gonna go camping at Lake Plansee."

You watched her face light up.

"Camping?" She exclaimed, quite like a child on Christmas Day.

You grinned. "Don't get overly excited okay. We don't want a repeat of college." You warned.

She crossed her arms indignantly. "Hey, that was an isolated incident. It was by no means wholly my fault."

"Of course sweetheart, whatever you say." You replied.

You stood up from your spot and grabbed the mug as you went by. After briefly telling Laura that you were gonna go back down to the apartment to take a bath, she stopped you. She grabbed her hand and stopped you in your tracks. You looked back at her and she had this odd look on her face.
You wasn't sure if it was worry, dread, or the combination of both.

"What is it?"

"We're okay right? You and I..."

Your mouth parted open every so slightly and you felt your chest tighten. "We're okay Laura. I'll make sure of that." You replied softly.

She smiled but it seemed sad. "Okay."

Then she released you and you kept walking.

Camping right? No sweat.

It's not like you'll be alone with Laura.

Right?

You watched your adorable best friend pace back and forth like a mad woman. You knew she would do this, it was so like her. There she was, flinging more strange essentials into the tiny suitcase you were both sharing. Here you were, standing in a university hoodie along with comfy ripped jeans and a pair of beat up old Doc Martens, grinning like your life depended on it. She was so cute. Laura was running around for her last minute essentials in nothing but a simple dress, soft vintage boots, and a faded denim jacket. Her hair was braided today and it made her look like she was in high school.

Your guitar was in its hard case by the wall, ready to be taken at any time while you had a duffle bag slung over your shoulder for your towels and extra things. After all, the only thing you rented was the cabin. All the other amenities had to be provided by you guys. Lawrence was bringing a frisbee, Perry had the extra food that wasn't available at the campsite, LaF was going to bring in some playing cards and a few tabletop games. It was a full camping trip.

Well... You sort of snuck in some booze into the duffle bag. You could get beers at the campsite kiosk but here? You had a nice bottle of Jose Cuervo and Perry promised she would bring the lemons.

Today's camping trip was going to be a blast.

Once you got over your overt sleepiness.

It was around half past six in the morning and you all had to leave by seven if you wanted to arrive by lunch time. There was an empty mug of coffee on the nearest flat surface to your left. Despite your apparent state of lethargy, Laura's early morning antics brought a smile to your face. Finally, she stopped pacing back and forth. She eventually closed up the small suitcase and allowed a sigh of relief to escape her lips.

"Are we missing anything?" She asked as she turned to face you.

"Calm down cupcake, everything's here." You replied.
"You sure?"

You picked up your guitar case and adjusted the duffel bag strap on your shoulder. You walked towards her with a lazy smile. "I've been watching you since five in the morning. I'm pretty sure, hon."

Laura tucked in some stray locks of hair behind her ear and stood up straight. She had been bending down earlier. "Well then, let's get this show on the road." She replied.

"Also..."

Laura gave you her full attention. "What is it?"

You couldn't help yourself. Maybe it was the early morning messing with your internal filter but you did it anyhow. "You look beautiful today."

Laura blushed and immediately looked to the floor. A small smile spread across her face. "You promised you wouldn't do this."

"I promised not to kiss you. That doesn't mean I'm blind. Come on, let's check out the car downstairs." You said as you walked ahead of her.

You quickly exited the apartment, pocketing your house keys as you went by. Laura would probably lock up the place anyway. You walked down the stairs in a steady rhythm and when you got out to the street, Danny was busy loading things into the back of the old beat up SUV. It belonged to the landlord of the complex. An old German by the name of Vordenburg. You and the gang had begun to affectionately call him Vordie and while he hated your guts, due to your clothes and attitude, he absolutely loved Laura.

But Vordie was a nice old man. He had a tendency to ramble and lie but he was kind enough. The SUV was his though but it wasn't hard getting him to lend it to you for the trip. A little Hollis charm and some persuasion by Xena made it all happen.

You walked by Danny in the back and started to load your things. Ginger giant noticed and grinned. "Hey Karnstein."

"Lawrence" you greeted in return.

You stuffed your guitar in the corner where it would be undisturbed. Then you caught a whiff of the vehicle and it smiled like lemons, someone had been using an air freshener. It was nice of dear old Vordenburg to be so thoughtful.

"So yeah, you drive and I'll ride shotgun." Danny stated.

"Wouldn't have it any other way." You replied as you finally dumped the duffle bag in.

"Before the others get here, can I ask you something?"

You looked up towards Danny and leaned against the car. You also shoved your hands into the pockets of your hoodie. "What's up?"

Danny crossed her arms. "How are you two anyway? You both have been acting weird ever since the engagement party. I wouldn't have minded if it was just a day or two but it's been like this for days now. What's going on Carmilla?"
"I'm handling it." You grounded out.

"Are you? It sure doesn't seem like it."

"Just don't Xena. If you want, I'll tell you later. But when we're alone, I don't want Perry or LaFontaine to find out."

"But are you okay?"

You were taken aback. "What?"

Danny exhaled loud and clear. "I know that you only care about Laura but you should think about yourself a little more often. Laura will be fine but you? You've always been a bit too emotionally invested for your own good, it's why you try so hard to look like you don't care. Whatever you guys have right now, she'd probably survive this. But you? I don't know. So you have to tell me if it's something you can't handle. The least I can do is have your back."

You smiled and leaned against Danny. "Thanks Xena, how generous of you."

"Anything for the roommate from hell. But tell me something though..."

"What is it?"

"These feelings you have. Do you think they'll go away?"

You sighed. "I wish... I mean, I hope they do but they feel... oh what's the word. Inevitable, they feel inevitable I guess. I can't imagine them going away without a fight. She makes it sound so easy..." You started out strong before mumbling the rest.

"Oh honey..."

You made a face. "What?"

Danny shook her head and looked away. "It's nothing. I've got it covered here, go start the car." She said as she handed you the keys.

You quietly swung the keys around with your finger through the keyring as you walked towards the driver's side of the car. The face Danny made just now was odd. If you were more perceptive, you would probably say that she was pitying you. Then again, maybe you were reading too much into it. Being sensitive was definitely not your forte. Well, you were sensitive to Laura and that was it. You climbed into the driver's seat and adjusted the mirrors before you started the engine.

You looked at the stereo and smiled.

Ah yes, old school cassette tape. You had something for that. Why wouldn't you?

You ran to the back to get something from your duffel bag. Danny was off the the side now, talking to LaF and Perry who were both coming down the stairs. You brought out this cassette tape with a wire sticking out. You could easily plug that into any audio device and play songs freely. You ran back to the driver's side and shoved the tape in. After glancing at the rearview mirror, you saw that LaF and Perr were loading their stuff in the back.

Then Laura came down with your joint suitcase in hand.

You sighed and bumped your forehead against the steering wheel. Oh dear god. Was it going to be like this all the time? One look at Laura in her little dress and you wanted to die. She was so cute,
what the hell. This world was too cruel.

Eventually, at seven o'clock on the dot, everyone started to climb into the car. LaF, Laura, and Perry sat in the back while Danny sat right next to you. It was the unsaid law that whomever sat shotgun was the one in charge of the music. You briefly looked back to see if everything was all set before you cracked your neck.

"Alright then, buckle up creampuff... Err, I meant that in the plural sense."

You heard Laura laugh. "Just drive you dork."

You smiled. "Yes ma'am."

As soon as you shifted to the first gear and got the car moving, you heard Danny snicker in her seat. "Whipped." She coughed. Quietly enough so only you heard it. Well, she should know better than to antagonize the driver.

"Don't test me Xena." You warned.

Danny laughed as she hooked her iPod to the cassette tape contraption. "You could use some chill." She replied.

"I'll be chill when I'm thoroughly inebriated." You snarled.

"Behave you two, it's too early." Perry chastised.

"Maybe we should go out on a coffee run first." Laura suggested.

"I second that." LaFontaine immediately chimed in.

You sighed and turned left. There was Starbucks drive thru in that direction and while there were better coffee options, none of you were particularly picky right now. The good coffee was in the opposite direction and it was too early to open. Caffeine was the top priority at the moment.

"Anyone up for a toilet break? There's a gas station up ahead." You said aloud.

There was some small clamor in the back but there was an agreement there. The vote to stop by the gas station was unanimous and the question itself was unnecessary. You could feel your leg getting sore. It had been a while since you've driven this long. It had been two hours since you left the city limits and for the most part, LaF and Laura were asleep. Danny was casually looking out the window and Perry seemed to getting by just fine. You managed a sneak in a peek or two through the rearview mirror and Danny caught you looking both times.

She teased you for looking at Laura and naturally, you denied it vehemently. Of course you were, she looked too adorable today. She looked exactly like that back in high school. Those were incredibly simpler times. Back when all you felt for her was platonic love. Now that you felt more, you understood why everyone always asked you if you were okay with Laura dating or seeing other people. The two of you were always together and you were extremely close, one had to question if there was more to your relationship.

Now that you thought about it, your attraction to Laura was not completely unfounded.
You did look back in high school. You're best friend was exceedingly attractive, after all. That and you disliked everyone she ever dated. To be honest, they weren't very good people anyway. You were right about every single one of them so far. They all had something wrong with them, whether it were just bad habits or strange personality quirks. None of them were a perfect fit for Laura. Not that you wanted you to be with her though, oh god no. Laura deserved more than you, it's just that you had yet to find someone worthy enough of her.

She needed someone who would always keep her out of trouble. Someone who would make her cocoa without asking, especially on bad days. Days when Laura was feeling down and out of sorts. Someone who would shoulder her frustrations and occasional selfishness. Especially when Laura's self esteem would hit a new low, she needed someone to bring her back up. Plus with her neurotic habits, she needed someone who could tolerate that. Plus she had unhealthy eating habits that balanced out in strange ways. It wasn't easy to adjust to her eating habits.

Eventually, you pulled over from the highway and into the gas station. There was quite a few parking slots in front of the convenience store. Once you eased in Vordenburg's SUV into one of those aforementioned spots, you set the gear to neutral, pulled the handbrake, and unlocked the door. Then you leaned back with a tired sigh. "Off you go then." You stated.

"Don't you want to do a little stretching first?" Laura asked knowing full well that you were starting to ache.

"Maybe later, I just want to lean back and sit quietly right now." You replied.

"Alright then, can I get you anything from the convenience store?"

"Get me anything."

She nodded as she jumped out of the car. "Roger that."

You shut your eyes and heard the quick scuffling of feet on cement. Then when the doors were shut, you locked the car. That is, apparently you were still too lethargic to have noticed that Danny stayed behind. When you opened your eyes and found her sitting next to you, you raised an eyebrow. "Still here Xena? Go pee before you kill your bladder."

"I'll go when you go. But for now, we need to talk. Rather, there are some things I'd like to know."

She replied.

You sighed long and hard as you put your foot up on the driver's seat. "Okay, fire away."

"So what happened on the night of the engagement party? I dunno about LaF and Perr, but even I noticed there was something odd with the both of you. For starters, you keep putting each other at arm's length. You don't sit next to each other as much. It's like that familiarity is gone. So—"

"I kissed Laura." You blurted out.

"At the party?"

You shook your head as a crease formed in between your brows. "No, after the party. When we got back to our place."

"Oh shit."

You snorted at her reaction. "My sentiments exactly."
"How did that happen anyway."

"Well, my side of the family was especially thrilled that I was dating someone. More so because I was dating Laura. Yeah, they absolutely love her. So Will had this speech and he mentioned that he was happy for us. The suddenly everyone was clinking their glasses even though it's not even the reception."

"And clearly it was for you." Danny continued.

You swallowed thickly. "Exactly... I didn't know what to do so I froze. Then suddenly, Laura was there. She was smiling and reassuring me and I felt like I could breathe again. And then... She kissed me."

You closed your eyes briefly, as if to remember the feel of her lips against yours. "I was scared afterwards. I really wanted to kiss her but I couldn't because I thought, at the time, that she felt nothing. That kissing me wasn't a big deal for her. So that made me angry because how dare she. How could she play with how I feel and not know what she was doing to me?"

Danny remained silent.

"So when we got back, I confronted her. I was just so angry at her and at myself that I was just shouting whatever came to mind. Then suddenly she told me that it wasn't nothing to her. I felt like I was being pulled out of the fog and the only thing I knew was that I wanted to kiss her again. So I did. And here we are now."

"Damn." Was all Danny had to say. She raked through her hair and sighed. "Just damn, Karnstein."

Your head connected with the steering wheel again. "Tell me about it. Being near her makes me want to explode. Like today, she just looks so fucking cute."

You felt Danny pat you on the back sympathetically. "You do realize that you're running on a no-filter right now?"

"I do."

"And you're telling me this willingly."

"It kind of makes me feel better so suck it up Xena."

"I don't mind it Carmilla but what are you going to do about this whole situation. Laura has feelings for you too right?"

You lifted your head up. "Absolutely nothing. There's nothing we should do other than to make these feelings go away."

"I didn't realize how serious this was... I'm sorry for teasing you so much." She admitted."

"It's fine."

Danny glanced out the window and leaned back. "Well heads up, they're coming back."

You reached out to unlock the car then you opened the door. You stuck a foot out. "Come on Xena, our turn."

As soon as you got out of the car, the first person your ran into was Laura. She had a bottle of Stella Artois and it was ice cold. It looked pretty good to you at the moment. You smiled. "Cupcake, you
know me too well."

"It's the perfect weather for it. Just make Danny drive, or something." She replied.

"Hold onto it sweetheart, I'll be back real quick." You replied as you walked towards Danny who had been waiting for you.

As soon as you caught up with her, she had an eyebrow raised and a grin on her face. "Cupcake? Sweetheart? There isn't even an audience. You are so gross."

You shrugged. "What can I say? I'm a masochist. It's become a hard habit to break."

Then you took your bathroom break with Danny shaking her head at you for the most part. When you got back to the car, LaFontaine took the opportunity to sit shotgun and you had to sit next to Laura. The beer helped. God bless her adorable soul. At some point, you spent the remaining three hours of the trip playing I Spy with Laura.

Danny pulled into the driveway and started going around for parking, which wasn't very hard. There was a whole lot of space after all. Carmilla did say that today was an off day so there weren't much campers around. In fact, you could already see the lake from the car and the view was absolutely stunning. The surrounding areas were full of green mountains and tall pine trees. The lake itself was a vivid cerulean, all sparkling and clear, plus the weather was just perfect. It was the right mix of sunny and cloudy with a zero chance of rain.

You quickly rolled down your window as the lake view approached your side of the car. Then you immediately tugged Carmilla's hoodie and grinned. "Hey Carm, look at the view!"

You heard her laugh and lean towards you. Her scent pervaded your senses as her dark hair brushed against your shoulder. It was always her familiar musky scent that made you feel safe. Like nothing bad could ever happen to you. "It does look pretty awesome." She replied.

"Can you imagine just sailing around the lake in this weather?" You added.

"We could do that actually." Danny pointed out.

"Look at the campsite though. The one with the cabins I mean, a bonfire would be fun." Carmilla stated with subdued excitement.

"Yeah, I've brought marshmallows and hotdogs for that." Perry said matter-of-factly.

"Nice! We could have s'mores." LaFontaine exclaimed.

You quietly acknowledged LaFontaine's remark about s'mores but Carmilla was really starting to bother you. As she leaned over you towards the window, she had one hand on the door and the other next to yours. Frankly, it was so easy to brush your hands against each hers or to hold it like you had already been doing for weeks before that party. You had missed the hand holding. You missed the feel of her hand in yours and how she would squeeze your hand when she was feeling nervous. Even the way her protective streak would start to show whenever some stranger would hit on you. Even the way she would immediately pull you behind her like she had always done ever since you were kids. The image of Carm's strong back was always burned into your mind.
You looked up at to see her profile, all angular and strong. She was smiling at the lake view and somehow, that made your chest swell with this strange bittersweet ache. You would kill just to see her smile like that all the time. Most of the time, she was either frowning or smirking were neither were quite pleasant. Then you decided to be brazen.

You put your hand atop of hers and you noticed the slight change in her form. She twitched ever so slightly before you saw the change in her eyes. Then her smile grew soft and she let you. Even though you both promised not to do anything couples would do, you couldn't help yourself. The overwhelming desire just to be close to her was enough to override all slivers of common sense. Your fingers sank through the gaps of hers and then Carmilla turned her hand upright within your grasp.

She leaned towards you, keeping your hands hidden from view like a closely guarded secret. It somehow felt exciting.

"Up to no good are we?" She whispered, you doubted anyone else could hear her.

"Can we just not talk about it. Let's just do things without thinking about the consequences. Just for today. We can allow ourselves that much can't we?"

You stared into her eyes and she did the same. Suddenly, her eyes had gone cold and her look was steely. She immediately withdrew her hand and a crease formed in between her brows. You could have felt her mood change from a mile away, it was that potent. It was as if she remembered something and had snapped out of her daze. "No, we can't Laura. You don't know what you're asking." She replied in hush tones but she was loud enough to draw Perry's attention.

Thankfully, Perry chose to overlook the two of you.

You wanted to protest. You wanted to tell Carm that you did know what you were asking and that she should stop treating you like you didn't know any better. Naturally, you couldn't. Not when all of your friends were so close by so you held your tongue.

Carmilla started being all broody and standoffish again. It was times like these that you positively hated her. It wasn't her place to make decisions for you. You were a grown woman, not a child. As if she was in any position to be the mature one. It was her own indecision that started this mess in the first place.

And now there was a new issue they couldn't simply ignore.

Of course she wanted to pretend it's not there. Carm was never the confrontational type anyway.

"Look, we'll talk about this but later." She finally stated. Not caring if everyone else heard her.

You sighed. "All we ever do is talk nowadays."

She raised an eyebrow at you. "Isn't that what you wanted? Aren't you glad we're talking at all?"

"Whatever Carm." You rolled your eyes.

"Don't you dare Laura..."

Your head snapped in her direction. "Don't I dare what?"

"Start something and make it my fault. How is that fair?"
"It's your problem, not mine."

"Laura, I swear to god—"

"Quiet in the peanut gallery. If you're gonna fight, don't do it in the car. God, it's like you're children." Danny shouted.

The two of you quickly shut up and stayed quiet.

Finally, Danny parked the car and you all started to unload your things. The parking lot was somewhat elevated and you would have to traverse down some stairs to get to the cabins. You were the first to get out of the car and you were also the one who opened the back. As soon as you even tried to unload your things, Carmilla shoved past you and took the luggage from you.

"What? You're not even gonna let me carry things."

She didn't look at you. "You're going to fall down the stairs." She grunted.

"I will not."

She glared at you. "Just don't argue with me on this. If you want, take my guitar."

You stomped around indignantly and grabbed Carmilla's guitar from the corner. The way you handled it was heavy but you were never gonna drop it. After all, this one guitar of hers was the one you bought for her birthday in high school. No matter how mad you were, this guitar was too special to bear the brunt of your anger. It didn't deserve to be in the crosshairs of your fight with Carmilla.

With Danny and Carm being the main luggage porters and with Perry carrying the food, you and LaF were left to check out the cabin first. You both ran down the stairs and immediately looked for the one you rented for the day. LaFontaine quickly found the right one and used the key the administration mailed to you guys the other day. With a quick flick of their wrist, you both entered the cabin.

It was a small cabin with enough space for the five of you. There were two bunk beds shoved in one section of the room and there was big space in between them for Danny to sleep on a futon or a mattress. Then there was a tiny kitchen area with a refrigerator and the basic amenities. You were told that the bath was communal and the water closet was a short walk away from the cabin. At least with today being an off season day, you were sure to have the communal bath to yourselves.

As you stared out the window above the kitchen sink, you couldn't help but smile. The view was stunning from here. The lake looked too good to be true and there were a few boats strung by the lakeshore just waiting to be freed onto the crystalline waters.

"Hey L, there's a grill in the shed in the back." LaF announced.

Carmilla peeked in from outside after finally catching up to you and LaF. Then she walked in with the bags. "Did you just say grill?" She asked upon entry.

"Yeah, that would be totally awesome for dinner." LaF replied with a cheeky grin.

You nodded. "Perry can handle that no problem."

As if on cue, Perry showed up by the door. "I brought some meat for barbecuing."

"Well duh, you're a veritable girl scout." LaFontaine scoffed.
"Don't antagonize the one touching the food." Perry replied smugly, it was rare of her to display such smarminess.

Carmilla dropped the bags into one of the corners. "I second that, I'd like to live thank you very much." She stated with enough snark to fuel a power plant.

"I doubt you'd live much longer with that tiny gay one over there glaring at you with the strength of a thousand hamsters." Danny scoffed as she too entered the cabin and thus, had also entered the fray. She quickly dropped the rest of the bags next to Carmilla's pile.

"Xena." Carmilla growled in a low rumble.

Danny smirked. "Fangface."

"Stop calling me that. Do I look sparkly to you?"

"You ate nothing but Count Chocula for breakfast the whole time we were roommates." Danny retorted.

"Plus your sleeping habits are the worst." You added.

Carmilla shot you a glare. "You have no right to talk about my sleeping habits Ms. My-Bedtime-Is-At-Ten."

"You still sleep at ten? Like a kid? I thought you changed." LaFontaine snickered.

"I can sleep later than ten." You defended.

"Sure. But only for a bit. You get ridiculously sleepy at around eleven or so, it's almost hilarious buttercup." Carmilla teased.

"You say that now but don't think I don't know you still sleep with the lamp on at night."

Carmilla frowned. "I have a tendency to trip over things when the room's pitch black."

You stomped over to Carmilla with your hands on your hips. "Oh really now Ms. I-Actually-Don't-Like-The-Dark. Back when we had sleepovers as kids, you always asked to keep some kind of light on."

"That was when we were kids." She snarled.

"It was like that until high school you dork." Your retorted.

"Maybe I stopped. You wouldn't know, it's not like we share rooms or anything like that."

"Wanna wager on that Karnstein?"

"Hell yeah. When we're out in the countryside, I'll show you who needs a freaking nightlight."

"Children, please stop fighting." Danny groaned out loud as she grabbed you both by your collars and pulled the two of you apart.

"I'd tell you both to kiss and make up but whatever. We're here to have fun, not fight on a vacation. Stop being such a married couple." Danny further chastised.

You gave Danny a strange look. It was the appropriate phrase to use but you had this inkling in the
back of your mind. Did she know about everything? Did Carm tell her? Well, she probably did.

"We are not a married couple. Let go of me Xena." Carmilla practically growled.

"Doesn't matter. Go hug it out or something and then let's get ready for some lunch." Danny immediately shut Carm down before releasing her hoodie.

Danny did the same for you.

Carmilla slowly approached you with the scary look on her face, like she was incredibly displeased that she was being treated as a child. She always hated that sort of thing. Her hands were in the pocket of her hoodie before she brought them out and outstretched her arms. She had this defeated expression written all over her face and she didn't even look at you in the eye. If you didn't know any better, you would say that she was pouting. "You heard Xena, hug it out."

You laughed at her.

Naturally, this displeased her.

"You look way too serious Carm." You pointed it.

"You know how it is. Come on, I don't like fighting any more than you do." She stated quietly.

You wrapped your arms around Carmilla's waste and you felt her arms embrace you. She did that thing where she stroked your hair in this slow lazy manner. It was always her way of telling you how apologetic she was and you had to admit, it felt pretty nice. Carmilla's potent scent hit you hard again and this time, you allowed yourself to breathe it in. Your head was directly attuned to her chest and you could hear her heartbeat, all steady and strong. It felt like a long time but it really wasn't. The hug was as short as possible and it was brief enough to not garner much strange looks from your friends.

"See Xena, we hugged it out. Can we please have lunch now?" Carmilla whined.

You chuckled to yourself.

"Good for you two. Come on, Perr needs help setting things up." Danny responded in a tired voice.

Carmilla saluted before running a hand through her thick dark hair. You were always a sucker for women who played with their hair. It was always one of those gestures that never failed to get all your gears turning. You used to think that Carmilla had that gesture down to perfection as an observer. Now, you were a slave it. The sheer difference was disconcerting because unlike before, you stared even if you didn't want to.

Carm however, had three kinds of reactions to pretty much everything.

The first was to show some form of disdain. She would probably glare at you, snarl, be extremely sarcastic, and probably add some kind of insult to the mix.

The second was to flirt. Sensual creature that she was, flirting was second nature to her. On good days, she would flirt with your platonically. Except for the past few weeks, she had been flirting with you as some kind of defense mechanism. You'd like to think she was letting of some steam by flirting with you instead of bottling everything up.

The third and rare reaction was when she'd smile at you and look at you as if you were the only person in the room. Just that simple gesture alone would be enough to melt you into putty and make
your knees weak. Carm had that kind of devastating effect on you. It was a miracle you were still standing to be honest.

Today was another rare day. Maybe her earlier behavior had softened her up but what the hell right?

Carmilla smiled at you and you could have sworn you felt your heart skip a beat. You had heard of the phrase before but you'd always been skeptical of it. Hearts don't really skip beats, that was dangerous. Yet here you were, with palpitations and skipping beats.

"Come on Laura, let's go."

You swallowed thickly before nodding and following closely behind her.

"Yeah." Was all you could manage.
Satan was particularly mean today.

It was bad enough that you wanted to kiss your best friend in a way that would make most people feel scandalized. It was worse because aside from wanting to ravish her in the Victorian sense, you also wanted to hold her hand and hug her forever like most kids did back in kindergarten. Laura was just too damn cute and too damn idiotic at the same time. Her attraction to you was blatant at best, it was a miracle that LaF and Perr hadn't caught on yet. She may have been dense for the most part but you sure as hell weren't.

It was impossible to miss all those longing stares and lingering touches. You had to applaud her for her subtlety and stubborn determination. Here you were trying to salvage your dying friendship with her on this camping trip from hell and all she wanted to do was ram a wrecking ball right through your efforts. Plus, you were well aware of the fact that Laura knew how dangerous a game she was playing and yet she decided to play it anyway. It was a big gamble and it was something she clearly didn't think through.

Even with your big talk about boundaries, rules, and why this shouldn't happen. She just couldn't help herself and frankly, you were starting to wear down. From allowing her to be all touchy-freely with you to being the first one to apologize today, Laura was winning. It was unfair because she actually agreed with you and now she was going against her own words. You thought she understood and maybe you were a bit hurt by her behavior.

Was your twenty year friendship with her worth a short passionate dalliance? Was it that trivial to her? All those years of loyalty and for what? A kiss? A one night stand? Such carnal passions were always at the pinnacle of ruin. Such affairs of the heart had brought kingdoms to their downfall and had torn nations asunder.

Were you being overdramatic?

Yes.

But were your fears unfounded?

Hell no.

You weren't trying to be stubborn. You just wanted to keep the best thing that had ever happened to you. Was that so selfish? To want to have Laura by your side forever? She couldn't do that if she
was picking up the pieces of her broken heart, something you were bound to be the cause of. You could never have a relationship with Laura without breaking her heart. That was who you were. You weren't one for romance and flowers. You were there for hook ups and casual sex.

No one went to you for their heartfelt confessions of love.

Laura of all people she know that you didn't have the capacity for such love. Not in the way she wanted. A good fuck perhaps, but never love.

And god, she deserved someone who would love her and worship the ground she walked on.

That person was definitely not you.

Did you love her? Of course you did, she was your best friend. How could you not after she was practically your family for so long. Would you worship the ground she walked on? To be honest, yes. After your feelings for her had hit you hard like a bullet train, it's all you had been doing. But she didn't need that from you. You couldn't love her in that way. These feelings you have didn't turn into the kind of love that Aphrodite could only dream about. Laura deserved that kind of unconditional love. Not your inept half-assed affection.

Before you realized it, Laura was in your face.

You practically jumped in your seat and leaned back. You forgot that you had been sitting on the edge of the boat and Laura caught you. Her arms were immediately around you and when you came to terms with that fact, you immediately pushed her away.

"Woah. Rude much. I did save you from falling into the lake."

You rolled your eyes. "You surprised me. If I fell, it would have been your fault."

She pouted. "Whatever. You had that weird look on your face."

"What look?"

"The one where your eyebrows are all scrunchy and you frown really deeply. It's like your shouldering some great burden."

"Just thinking."

"Lighten up Carm."

"I can't lighten up. You're not taking this issue seriously enough."

"Do I have to separate you two?" Danny shouted from the other end of the boat. She looked mighty annoyed by your antics.

"Butt out Xena." You snarled right back.

Laura cleared her throat and put her hand on your thigh to grab your attention. It was mostly an innocent gesture but her mere touch was enough to send almost every nerve ending on high alert. You head snapped back in her direction and you noticed the change in her demeanor and how her hazel eyes softened. "Listen Carm..." She started out in a lower voice.

You were listening.

"It's not that I don't take this issue seriously... god knows I do. And it's not that I don't know the
consequences but it doesn't matter what we do at this point. Somewhere along the way, ever since I kissed you that Wednesday noon, something had changed. You have to accept that. I know you Carm and I know you're trying to protect me by saving our friendship. Don't tell me I'm wrong because that's just so like you."

You were thankful that the sailing boat you rented was nice and spacious. Because you could have a serious conversation and not have your friends notice that anything was amiss.

"I'm not trying to do something stupid. I just can't understand why you're preventing a great thing from happening. I can feel it in my bones and from the way you kiss me that we have something. Something... oh I dunno, miraculous? I can't ignore that and try to save our platonic friendship just like that. We can't Carm... we're too far gone."

You chest swelled and your heart quickened from her words. There were strange tingles traversing your whole body and you felt sharp pangs of emotion burst throughout your chest. You closed you eyes briefly and made a sharp intake of breath before meeting Laura's gaze once more. "Laura, I can't talk about this right now. Not when they're there. If you don't stop, I'm afraid I'm going to kiss you right here, right now."

You watched her mouth part and her eyes widen. She quickly withdrew her hand and retreated. "Excellent point."

Her face was all flushed now and you wanted nothing more than to stroke her cheek and claim her lips as slowly as possible. Instead, you reached out for another beer before sitting right next to Danny. The look on Laura's face told you she understood what you were doing.

"Is everything okay?" Danny asked you.

"We're okay Lawrence." You replied.

Laura joined the rest of the gang around the table and sat next to LaFontaine.

LaF leaned forward looking very much like someone just gave them a present. They had this huge grin on their face as they laid out one of the many nerdy tabletop games they brought to this trip. "Now that we're all here, let's get started."

"What are we playing?" Laura asked excitedly.

"Tell me it's Cards Against Humanity." You said in a playful tone.

"Oh hell no, I hate that game." Danny cringed.

You laughed. "Only because you don't have a sense of humor. You lose all the time. Even cupcake here does better than you."

"I completely agree." Laura stated.

"That's too amateur you guys. We're playing The Resistance." LaFontaine announced in a grand gesture.

"Now that is geeky. But I love it. How do we play LaF?" You said with a grin.

LaFontaine spread out the game on the table and began their long explanation.

From what you understood, the game was set in a dystopian future. The government was predictably
oppressive and corrupt so a Resistance was made to fight it. The Resistance had to undergo various missions in order to revolt against the government however, there were Loyalists within the Resistance itself. Those Spies would try their very best to sabotage Resistance missions so the objective of the game was to have successful missions. There were five rounds and for the Resistance win, it had to win three out of five rounds. The same is true for the Spies.

The rest of the details were kind of blurry and you got lost at some point. All you knew was that it was a bluffing game and there would be lots of shouting and lots of wild accusations. It was definitely right up your alley.

LaF distributed the cards and you looked at yours. Your character card was blue and the person on it was the hot one, how apt. Blue meant you were a part of the Resistance. Then you put your card face down on the table. There were suppose to be two spies in a game of five people so there were only so much possibilities.

"Everyone have their cards? Did you all have a look? Good. Now then, everyone close your eyes." LaF stated.

You followed suit.

"Spies, open your eyes and make eye contact."

Only a few seconds had passed before LaF told everyone to open their eyes. Then they took the leadership token first and started passing out guns. Each turn, the player with the leader token had to propose a mission. They would then pass out guns to people they would bring on the mission. The number varied per round but that was the general mission flow. After a mission was proposed, the players would then put it to a vote and decide whether or not the mission goes through.

"So two people will go on this mission. I choose myself because I'm a loyal member of the Resistance. Then I think I'll choose Perr." LaF proclaimed.

"Okay hold up there Bobbsey Twins. How can I trust that you're not spies." You interrupted them.

"So if this mission goes through, they get success or fail cards right? There's only two of them and if the Resistance can't make missions fail, and if it does fail this round, then that means one of them must be a spy." Danny stated.

"If they're smart, neither of them would purposefully fail the mission." You added.

"Carmilla has a point, we can't trust this round." Danny agreed.

"What if Carmilla's a spy and she's just saying those things to cast suspicion. What then?" Perry argued.

"Wait, I'm confused. How do missions succeed or fail?" Laura asked.

You grinned at her. "Well cupcake. It's simple, each person going on a mission is given a success or fail card. Members of the Resistance can only give success cards while Spies can choose to give either the success or fail cards. If even one card in the pile is a fail, the mission fails as well."

"Ah, that makes sense." She replied.

"As I was saying, this round can't be trusted. Only an idiot would fail a two-man mission from the get go." You insisted.
LaFontaine sighed. "All votes in?"

You all flipped your vote tokens and everyone had agreed to the mission.

After following a whole bunch of procedures and whatnot, the mission succeeded. Predictably so. You point two fingers at the ginger duo and glared. "This doesn't mean you're in the clear."

LaFontaine passed the leadership token to Laura. She grabbed the guns and started distributing them. "I'll give LaF the benefit of the doubt and bring them along. I choose myself... And um... I'll choose Danny."

"Sounds fair." You stated.

"You're only nice this round because it's Laura." Danny scoffed.

"Hey, unless you've got a best friend of twenty years, you don't get to judge." You snarled.

"Cut it out you two. Votes?" Perry interrupted.

Everyone had agreed to the mission. Unfortunately, the results were quite interesting. In Laura's round as mission leader, there was at least one fail card in the pile. That meant the whole mission failed. You immediately looked to LaF. "Not a Spy eh LaF?"

"Carm, you're really competitive right now." Laura sighed.

"I'm a resistance member. Don't forget that Laura and Danny were in that round too. For all we know, one of them could be a Spy." They argued.

"You know what they say, it could be the mission leader herself." Danny pointed out.

You glanced at Laura. She wasn't the deceitful type and while she was pretty good at games, could she pull that off? Her expression was just as unguarded as ever though.

"If I were really a Spy, do you think I'd pick LaF on purpose?" Laura defended.

"You both could be Spies." Perry insisted.

Laura sighed in frustration and passed the leadership token to you. "Don't you guys think Carm's the suspicious one? She's been throwing accusations left and right."

"Don't you think I'd be more clever and quiet if I was a Spy?" You retorted.

"If you were a Spy Carm, you'd be even more argumentative." Laura pointed out matter-of-factly.

"Laura has a point. I think the reason why you're so loud is because you're jealous. You got a blue card didn't you?" Danny teased.

Perry shook her head. "You're too obvious honey."

You pouted and crossed your arms. "Oh, shut up."

"I think we've established that Carmilla can't be a spy." LaFontaine stated in order to move the game along.

You grabbed the gun tokens and started passing those around. "I'm obviously picking myself. I'll also pick Laura and Perry."
Danny immediately protested and LaFontaine did the same. They started at the same time but the implications were clear. "Are you sure you want to trust Laura?" LaFontaine asked rather assertively.

"I'm honestly hurt Karnstein." Danny said sarcastically.

"Well I don't trust you LaF." You seethed.

"But you trust Perry?" They replied.

You put your hand up and Perry gave you a high five. "Our friendship is super strong." You teased.

"I honestly think I'm the most nonthreatening one here. Why didn't I get picked." Danny complained.

You raised an eyebrow at the ginger giant, a smile was tugging on the corners of your mouth. "All's fair in love and war Xena."

"Votes?" Laura's voice cut through.

"I don't trust Laura, this mission doesn't have my vote." LaFontaine grounded out bitterly.

"Me neither, you're too trusting of Laura honey." Perry said in a disappointed tone.

You looked down at the vote tokens. The overall vote was three to two so the mission was still a go. After distributing the success-fail cards and putting them into a neat pile in the center, you flipped them over.

"Okay then. It's success, success and... oh shit."

"Still think you can trust Laura?" Danny joked.

"Are you kidding, don't forget that it was LaFontaine and Perry in the first round. They both could have been Spies just pretending to be Resistance members." Laura argued vehemently.

"No one would ever fail a two man mission." You stated. "That's just bad strategy."

"Not necessarily. Unless one of them would be used as a decoy. You would focus all the attention on them while the other Spy would be free to sabotage. That's one strategy but it's not in play right now." Danny said nonchalantly after glancing at the instruction manual.

"This game sure is complicated." Laura groaned defeatedly.

"But it's fun." LaF enthused.

You laughed to yourself before running a hand through your dark tresses. "Yeah, it's fun."

The game went on and luckily for you, the Resistance managed to win three out of the five rounds. Naturally, imagine the betrayal you felt when the Spies were revealed to be Laura and Danny. Literally, the two people sitting next to you as well as your most trusted people. For shame.

There was this one part though when Laura wrapped her arm around you for a tight hug sometime after the game. She was trying to console you about being completely fooled by her and Danny but you really weren't listening to her. You mind was completely focused on her arm and the proximity of her body to yours. She probably didn't notice you stiffen up. Honestly, how did she expect you to survive this camping trip?

At some point, LaFontaine brought the boat back to shore. How LaF knew how to sail a boat was
beyond your comprehension but it was LaFontaine. They knew all kinds of crazy shit. You weren’t surprised.

With your belongings and leftovers packed into where it had been crammed into earlier and neat little garbage bags, respectively, you all disembarked from the sail boat. LaFontaine offered to talk to the boat rental kiosk while Danny was singlehandedly grabbing the bags when you tossed them out to her. Once you were through with the bags, Perry walked onto the walkway first and had decided to dispose of the trash. You alighted ahead of Laura and quickly extended your hand towards her.

"Come on cupcake, let's go."

Laura held onto your hand as she stepped off the boat. It shifted in the water as she alighted from it but on the last part of the plank bridging the boat to the walkway, Laura tripped. It didn't matter though, because you caught her without missing a beat. You pulled her close on reflex with her hands pressed against your chest, just narrowly avoiding the swell of your breasts. Her face was awfully close to yours and you could see everything.

The way her soft pink lips parted in surprise, down to the way her eyes widened. In broad daylight, you could see the shimmering gold flecks hidden within her beautiful hazel eyes. You even noticed the way her cheeks flushed from the sudden rush of adrenaline. Your eyes found her svelte neck and you could see her pulse quickening. Your breathing grew shallow and apparently, you weren't alone.

One hand was was still holding hers, pulling her close, while the other was placed firmly on the small of her back. You held her there, afraid that she would fall if you let up. Even against all logic, you held her with that small fear in the back of your mind.

"CARM?" Her voice was nothing but a whisper.

"HMM?"

"I'M FINE NOW."

You nodded slowly.

Right now you were absolutely transfixed by her. The sun was highlighting all the perfect things about her. She was stunning in this light, more so than the usual. She bit her lip while waiting for your next move and you tried your very best not to think about kissing the ever living daylights out of her.

"REMEMBER WHY THIS SHOULDN'T HAPPEN?" You heard her say.

"YOU JUST SPENT ALL OF FIVE MINUTES TELLING ME TO GIVE IT A GO. NOW YOU'RE TELLING ME NOT TO? WHAT IS IT REALLY HOLLIS?"

"I DID... BUT NOW I'M SCARED."

"WHY?"

"I WANT THIS SO MUCH IT SCARES ME... EVERY CELL IN MY BODY IS TELLING ME TO RUN BUT I DON'T WANT TO."

You cocked your head to the side. That was a feeling you were well acquainted with. "THEN DON'T. SEE HOLLIS? EVEN NOW WE'RE STILL A PERFECT FIT."

"WHAT?"
"Right now, your body fits perfectly against mine. Tell me that's no coincidence."

Laura laughed quietly. "You're such a poetic sap."

You grinned helplessly against her. "It's a trend that I'm always a sap when you're around. But I don't know what to do Laura. So you have to tell me what you want. If you really can't do this then I'll back away from your forever. Having these feelings for you of all people was a mistake."

"No, don't tell me it's a mistake because then what does that make me? A stupid girl who has these feelings for her best friend?" Laura replied adamantly.

"Then what do I do?" You shot back exasperatedly.

"I—"

"Hey you guys, we're gonna start prepping for the bonfire and the barbecue. We can go play around afterwards."

Laura was the one who pushed you away this time, not you. Somehow, you found your self-restraint weakening by the minute. It had diminished to the point that Laura was actually the one telling you no instead of the other way around. What a conundrum indeed. You watched her run towards Danny who was the one yelling at the two of you. She looked concerned, you could tell that much from far away. Danny was the sort of person who wore their emotions on their sleeve.

Laura then ran past Danny towards the cabin but you slowed down to greet the tall ginger.

"You said you had things under control."

You glared at her. "I did."

"Then what happened?" She asked but she wasn't chastising you. Xena had concern written all over her face.

You sighed long and hard as you watched Laura's form run across the path. "Laura happened."

Then you followed after Laura leaving Danny to shake her head at you.

"Your aim is really shitty Carm." You yelled as you picked up the frisbee from the ground.

Carmilla frowned heavily and one of those trademark creases formed in between her brows again. She had removed her Silas hoodie moments earlier only to reveal that she had been wearing one of her punk rock existentialist tank tops all along. The sight of her creamy white shoulders was enough to distract you for days on end. Not to mention that Carmilla ended up tying her hair and it made her look sporty for once. It was not a bad look. On days like these, it was nice seeing her all carefree instead of angry or stressed. It was a refreshing change and the view was stellar.

"Do I strike you as the type of person who plays Ultimate Frisbee like Xena over there?" She growled in that low rumble of hers that never failed to grab your attention. Her voice was enough to launch a thousand ships.

You watched Danny glare at Carmilla from a distance. "I heard that." She yelled.
Carmilla sent her the middle finger.

You couldn't help but grin like an idiot. Your best friend was being an absolute child right now and you loved it. You adored seeing her without her rough edges, it was rare.

And if there was anything this camping trip has shown you, it's that you and Carm couldn't settle for platonic anymore. You told yourself that you were still well behind the rubicon. But the truth was that you had crossed it from the moment you kissed her that Wednesday noon. You just didn't realize how far you were from the line. Plus, it was highly unfair that Carmilla was holding up better than you.

It was already around quarter to five in the afternoon and all you've thought about since five in the morning was Carmilla.

Your exceedingly attractive and exceedingly mercurial best friend, Carmilla.

Your best friend was basket case alright. First she compliments you by telling you you're beautiful. Then she goes back to semi-flirting with you using her little affectionate pet names, something you ended up liking eventually. Then she acts like your best friend, like she used to before things got complicated. You tried to hold her hand oh so very selfishly and got rejected brutally. Then she has to say things like: "I might have to kiss you" and that gave you fragile hope. Then she's the one asking you why the hell this shouldn't happen.

And now you had no fucking clue about what was going to happen now.

Playing frisbee with Carm like this was safe. But what about the future. You couldn't simply traipse around the topic and hope it'll go away. Life didn't work that way. You were scared earlier because being so close to her caught you off guard. What surprised you was the strong inexplicable urge to give in to what you wanted then and there without any consideration for what Carm felt. It felt like the most natural thing in the world, being in her arms. There was some truth to Carmilla's poetic musings. You did fit.

You didn't know how to explain it but you clicked with her. Like a key in a lock.

Being with her felt so right.

You often found yourself daydreaming about all the maybes and somedays. What would it be like to just let go of everything and just be with her? To kiss her whenever you wanted to? To wake up next to her? To whisper sweet nothings into her ear? You simply had never experienced such yearning. You wanted to run your hands through her beautiful hair, you wanted to revel in the warmth of her hand, and you wanted to cuddle with her on lazy Sundays.

You wanted it all more than you had ever wanted anything in your life. It was frightening.

With a sigh, you threw the frisbee right back at Carm and she caught it without effort.

"Are you okay cupcake?" Carm asked from across the field you were playing in.

You were caught off guard. "What?"

Carmilla approached you with the frisbee in hand. "I asked if you're okay. You look like you've seen ghost. If something's bothering you then—"

"I'm just thinking about stuff."
Carmilla smiled. "Stuff like me?" She joked.

You glowered at her. "That's not funny Carm."

You watched her face melt into something far more apologetic. "Sorry. It's my defense mechanism."

"I know. You always fall back to sarcasm and flirting when things go sour."

"True, but seriously Laura. Tell me what you're thinking in that little head of yours." She said as she gestured to that rock behind you. It was uneven but you could sit on it.

Carmilla sat on it first and you after her. There was enough space for the both of you but it was a tight squeeze so Carm had her arm wrapped around your waist to keep you from falling off. She probably did it out of habit you supposed. You glanced at the cabin in the distance and saw that your friends were still hard at work. LaFontaine was busy dumping dry wood at the bonfire pit while Perry was running back and forth between the grill and the kitchen inside. Danny was busy carrying things from the kiosk back down to the cabin.

You finally had some time to yourselves.

"So what's up Hollis?"

You breathed in deeply. There it was again, it was Carmilla's musky scent that reminded you of rain splashing against the pavement. "So I was thinking about us and how we've been contradicting ourselves all day long."

"And in what context are you using 'us' Laura?"

"You know what I mean." You replied.

"I just wanted to be sure."

You leaned against her and put your head on her shoulder. "I don't want things to change."

"But it has."

"I want to try this Carm. Whatever 'this' is. Because if the opposite means losing you, I can't risk that." You finally say with all the sincerity you could muster. It took a great deal out of you to actually say that to her. This could easily change the greatest fixture in your life.

You felt her stiffen against you. "So you're only going to try this to keep me?"

You sighed. "No Carm. That's just one thing but I want to try this because no matter how hard I try, I can't stop thinking about you."

"Uh, pardon?"

You chuckled. "You heard me you giant sap. What do you think I've been doing the whole day?"

"Not thinking about me?" She suggested.

You hit her leg. "Genius."

You felt her thumb rub against your side. "I just needed to lighten things up."

"Why?"
Carm laughed nervously. "I don't know if you can tell but my heart is beating like crazy right now." She admitted in a weak voice.

You suddenly felt lightheaded as your fingers tingled with something you couldn't name. "You can't just say things like that Carm."

"I thought this was honesty hour?" She blurted out.

When you glanced up at Carm, she looked uncharacteristically nervous and not at all like her confident self. This was new. Sincerity was definitely something Carm did not do. Not normally. Her other hand was resting limply on her lap so you reached out to intertwine your fingers with hers. Carmilla let you as she watched the gesture, it seemed to calm her down.

"This is kinda nice." She admitted.

"Take a leap Carm. It doesn't have to be anything more than this... Just please."

You felt her hand squeeze yours. "Laura, if you were any other girl I would have jumped on the chance immediately. But it's you, and you're my best friend. I've known you my whole life and you're not someone I can afford to live without. I don't care if you end up hating me... I just need you to always be there. It's selfish and— "

"And you're terrified, I get it. I'm terrified too."

She hung her head low and allowed her dark tresses to cover her eyes. "Yeah. I'm scared shitless."

You were suddenly overcome by this strong urge to kiss her then and there. Not because she was beautiful, not because you liked kissing her, but because it was the only way to stop her from making such a defeated face. You didn't quite understand it yourself but the urge had never been this strong before. However, you couldn't indulge yourself, not here. You simply wanted to see her smile again. Such was your earnest wish.

Instead, you brushed her hair away and kissed her cheek. You felt her still beneath your kiss and you weren't aware that she had closed her eyes, as if she were savoring the sensation of your lips against her cold skin. Then you pulled away and Carmilla's grip on you tightened.

"It's funny..." She started.

"What is?"

"A simple kiss on the cheek and for some reason, I can't seem to breathe." She laughed before bumping her head against yours. "Only you Hollis... only you."

"You were such a badass before."

"And I'm not now?" Carm protested.

You leaned in playfully. "Every once in a while, you're a badass. And I assure you that you're still very cool."

Carmilla laughed. It was the most natural thing you had seen her do in a while. She hadn't laughed that genuinely since before the whole mess started. Then she stopped laughing and she turned to face you with this warm grin that seemed to melt your insides. "Hey. We're back."

"We're what?"
She nudged your shoulder with hers. "I got my best friend back. I have to say, I really missed her."

"I never left you know? I don't know what you're talking about."

Carmilla's eyebrows slanted upward and her smile turned a little sad. "It felt like you were gone this whole time."

You sighed. "True."

"So what happens now?" She asked.

"I haven't decided yet. But I'll keep you on your toes, just you wait." You replied.

"I'll hold you to that."

Carmilla finally withdrew from you and you sorely missed her presence. Everything grew colder the moment she left your side. The sun was starting to go down and while it was far from sunset, the sunlight streaming through the trees highlighted the best in Carmilla. It made her look like a young teenager again and it brought out the brown in her dark eyes. They were just so mesmerizing and you could easily stare into those eyes of hers for days on end.

You hand was still connected to hers and she tugged at you as soon as she was on both feet.

"I like you in a tank top by the way." You grinned.

She returned the smile sheepishly. Shyness was unbecoming of her but you liked it. It made her look adorable and that was one word not often associated with Carmilla Karnstein. "I'll make it a point to wear them more often." She replied.

Then your fingers slipped through hers as she tied her hoodie around her waist, tucked the frisbee under her arm, and trudged towards Danny's direction. Danny had already been sitting down, her hair was braided now, and she was sweating like crazy. Carmilla disappeared into the cabin only to come out with two cold open beers in hand. She handed one to Danny and clinked their bottles together.

As she drank from her bottle, she joked with Danny before sitting down next to her. Then she looked right at you and grinned.

Oh god, she was a woman after your heart.

Right, of course she was.

______________________________________________________________

"But I'm a creep! I'm a weirdoooooo...."

You had never laughed this hard in your life. There were tears forming in the edges of your eyes and your sides were staring to hurt. Carmilla herself was trying her best to stop herself from outright laughing at drunk LaFontaine. She was strumming on her old acoustic guitar and making it sound like it was worth more than it actually was. She was that good of a player. Carmilla always had this affinity for music, after all. When she was learning how to play the guitar, it just came naturally to her.

There was a strong fire going in the middle of the pit and a few more pieces of firewood nearby to
keep it going. A bottle of Tequila was sitting on the nearest flat surface to you, it was down to its last quarter. Danny had this strange flush to her cheeks while Perry was still remarkably sober. Carm herself wasn't a lightweight so a few shots hadn't brought her down yet. You? Maybe you weren't doing so hot. If the laughing was any indication then yeah. You were definitely some kind of drunk.

Earlier, after that extremely revelatory talk you had with Carm post-frisbee, Perry all called you in for the barbecue. The sun was starting to set at the time and with Perr at your side, the food was just fantastic. There was this spread of grilled steaks and skewered meat and veggies. Accompanied with beer, it really hit the spot. But that wasn't the most important part. Carmilla was right. The two of you had resumed this easy familiar rhythm with each other with just the added bonus of shy touches here and there.

You laughed with her and you were practically attached to her hip. You hadn't realize how wide and vast the rift between the two of you was until now. It was monumental. Especially when the two of you would dance around the apartment, tiptoeing as you went. It had been quiet and it didn't seem like you were friends since five. It felt like you were just two roommates who met on Craigslist. The awkward breakfasts were one thing but it sucked when you both would go straight to your rooms. At some point, you stopped pushing for movie night or any other best friend activity. What you couldn't believe was how you managed to convince yourself that everything was okay.

What hit you the hardest was that Carmilla could see it plain as day and that she must have been hurting all this time. How could you have been so blind?

At some point, LaF stopped screaming to Carm's accompaniment, which was still on point by the way. She always made the guitar sing. You always loved it when she played guitar. Especially when you heard her playing in the wee hours of the morning on those inspired days. Your favorite memories of Carm and her guitar were usually on the roof deck. That and one other old memory you held close to your heart.

Carmilla started to start plucking on her guitar again. This time, you easily recognized it as the opening riff to The Cranberries' Linger. It struck you as odd because she would rather be dead than be caught playing that one song that had been played in one too many high school proms. LaFontaine was busy approaching this new level of drunken deep thought with Perry rubbing their back. Danny was quiet and contemplative as she stared into the fire. But more or less, she looked like she was trying to get a grip of herself. You also watched Danny roast a marshmallow to burnt perfection and then throw it away.

Then it struck you.

Linger played in your senior prom. The one Carmilla took you to when your date bailed on you. It was a night you remembered fondly. You easily remembered the heartbreak of having the girl you had been crushing on for weeks on end ditch you for some homecoming king who bailed on her anyway. You had been so excited too. The moment the news hit you, you were too distraught for words. Then Carmilla came and anchored you back to the ground. Like she always did.

No matter what you did, she always had your back. She always knew what to say.

So she took you to senior prom and you had one of the best nights of your life.

It was almost midnight and students were going home. A huge chunk of the population stayed to finish the slow dances. You and Carm had been sitting in the side, just watching people. She'd been wearing that suit she had tailored and she looked damn good in it. Her hair was a gorgeous mess and her makeup just accentuated her already perfect features. Then suddenly, Carm stood up and extended her hand towards you.
"Come on Hollis, let's dance." She said.

The song that had started to play then was Linger. Then she pulled you into her arms and you danced in this excruciatingly slow rhythm which could only have been described as romantic. At the time you thought nothing of it, but looking back now, it was different. Carmilla's embrace back then as you danced, it was like a blanket of safety wrapped around you. Now that you thought about it, you did think about kissing Carmilla then.

You seriously did.

And you'd forgotten.

You closed your eyes as your ears picked up the strumming of the guitar and the cackle of the fire. You recalled breathing in the scent of her then. She had smelled exactly the same. Your head had been resting on her shoulder and you had this thought.

What if Carm was really your date. What if she was that girl you crushed on in high school. Imagine her asking you to prom.

Which then led to, what would it feel like to kiss Carm?

You recall crushing that thought immediately. Then you had buried it down so deep you had forgotten about it. But it was funny because even then, the attraction was already there. You were just too blind to see it.

"But I'm in so deep. You know I'm such a fool for you." Carmilla sang in that low timbre of hers that had this gritty gravelly quality you had always liked.

Your eyes were immediately drawn to her figure, illuminated by the fire. The moon above her form. She wasn't singing it earlier but now she was. Then she looked directly at you and you felt the heavy heat of her gaze.

"You've got me wrapped around your finger. Do you have to let it linger. Do you have to, do you have to, do you have to let it linger."

You swallowed thickly. You felt warm and the fire had nothing to do with it.

"LaFontaine's started doing the Fibonacci sequence. I'm gonna put them to bed now." Perry announced.

"But it's still early..." Danny whined.

"Its two in the morning." Perry replied firmly.

Danny blinked once. "Oh."

You stood up and realized that sometime during the song, you had started to sober up. Even if it was a little. You walked over to Danny and pulled her to her feet. "Come on, I'll bring you back. You drank too much this time."

"And you didn't?" She retorted.

You heard Carmilla snort but her fingers were relentless.

You shook your head at Carm and started to drag Danny back to the Cabin. Danny's arm was around you and you tried your very best to hold up her taller frame. She was moaning and walking
in swerves, rather she was making it very hard for you keep supporting her. Finally, you managed to haul her tall ginger ass into the cabin and you found Perry tucking LaFontaine in the top bunk.

"Aren't they going to fall off or something? Drunken person and all." You asked.

Perry shrugged. "LaF was very adamant about being on the top bunk. They won't die if they fall."

You laughed at Perry's blasé attitude and tried to get Danny into one of the lower bunks. As soon as you tried helping her settle down, she began to make a giant tantrum. "LaF got top bunk, I want top bunk too!"

You winced. "Danny, you'll fall from trying to climb up."

"Try me." She insisted as she pushed you aside and climbed to the top bunk.

It was a good attempt and her height helped her. Albeit she did hit her head against the ceiling and the wall next to her. Plus when she was trying to leverage herself over to the top, the swinging of her legs managed to hit you right in the head. It was amazing how childish drunken Danny was.

"Are you alright Laura?" Perry asked as she surged towards you to check your head.

You laughed. "I'm fine Perr. Don't worry."

"If you're sure. I'm going to hit the sack then. Make you get Carmilla to rest up too." She replied.

You saluted her. "Yes ma'am."

Perry nodded at you as she went to her bag and started digging for her sleepwear. You on the other hand had decided to go back out to the bonfire pit.

You walked back out into the cool air and shivered. You hadn't realized how cold it had become, it was probably the alcohol that shielded you from the temperature. You started to rub your arms for warmth as you approached Carmilla. She was still plucking away on that beat up guitar of hers and she had been humming along. You took your time walking to her and you watched her stop playing altogether. She dug into her pocket and you recognized the box in her hand.

It was a box of cigarettes, something you hadn't seen her hold in a very long time. With practiced efficacy, you watched her put one in her mouth and the light it up with that old lighter of hers, the one with her initials carved onto the steel encasing. White smoke rose from where she was as the bonfire grew duller by the second.

You frowned and made your presence known to her by sitting down right next to her. Carmilla inhaled again before letting out another cloud of smoke. Then she took the cigarette in between her fingers and brought her hand down.

"I thought you quit."

"I thought you went to sleep." She replied.

"Carm."

She sighed as she stared into the dying fire. "I know... Once in a blue moon, I still do it. But not often because if I did then you would have known a long time ago."

"But you stopped, why did you go back to it?"
"I didn't go back to it per se. I just didn't quit completely. Sometimes I still itch... Like tonight. It's too cold."

"Then why don't we call it a night.‖ You replied.

Carmilla set her guitar on the soft ground beside her. She brought the cigarette back to her mouth and inhaled once more before pointing upward. "It's too beautiful a night to go back in now. Look at the stars." She said as more smoke puffed out.

You did as she asked and looked up. Without the bonfire illuminating the area so brightly, you could finally see the stars. The dark sky was clear and the stars were strewn about like a painting. A literal star ocean painted the sky.

"Great view huh?"

"If you like the stars so much, you should teach me about them." You replied.

Carmilla laughed and huddled closer to you. She put her arm around you and pulled you close. She then threw the cigarette on the ground and crushed it with her boot. She bid you to follow her finger as she started to point around.

"The easiest constellation to see is Orion's Belt. It's those three stars in a row up there."

"It's the only one I'm sure of actually."

Carmilla smiled. "Then lucky for you I'm here to enlighten you."

You put your head in the crook of her neck as you arm snaked around her waist. Carm was so incredibly warm right now. She even rubbed your arm for extra heat.

"If that's Orion's Belt then follow those stars on top and below it. See that pattern? It looks like a guy holding a bow. That's Orion." She said in low voice. She was practically talking in your ear now.

"Then over there above Orion to the left, that's Gemini. To the right of Gemini, that's Taurus."

"Oh yeah, it kind of looks like a bull."

"Mmhmm. Then way over there to the right. A literal straight line away, that's Pegasus. See his wings? Below him is Aquarius then there's Pisces and Aries in a row."

"Okay, I lost you there." You laughed.

"Pay extra attention to this one now. You still remember where Orion is right? Now to his left. Keep going..."

"Oh, that's Virgo. The maiden."

"Kudos for you Hollis."

"Don't be snarky." You pouted.

Carmilla laughed at you. "I'm not. Above the maiden is Leo, see him?"

"It looks like he's rearing his head or something."

"Yes, that's Leo. Now this one is really hard so you have to stick with me okay? Look in between
Virgo and Leo then look slowly to the left. There's a tiny cluster of stars that are closer than the others. It's like someone spray painted them there that's why they're so near each other."

"I see it."

Carmilla leaned so close to you that her cheek was now pressed against yours. She was trying to see if you were seeing the same thing. "Good. That's Coma Berenices. Otherwise known as Berenice's hair. It's the only constellation with story that doesn't end in tragedy."

"Tell me." You whispered.

Carmilla stopped looking at the stars and leaned over your ear. The gesture felt incredibly intimate and suddenly your senses were all too aware of her.

"Berenice was the queen of Egypt at the time. Her husband, Ptolemy, was off in a far away land on a dangerous mission against the people who killed his beloved sister. The queen was so distraught over her husband's absence that she cried out and swore to Aphrodite that if the goddess returned her husband safely from the voyage, then she would cut off her long beautiful golden hair. She would offer that to the goddess as sacrifice. The thing about the queen was that her hair was a matter of pride yet still, she loved her husband too much."

"What happened next?"

"Well... Aphrodite returned Ptolemy to her. So Berenice did as she promised and laid her golden locks on an altar. The next day, it disappeared and Ptolemy was furious. He had thought his wife's hair to be stolen. But the court astronomer told him that Aphrodite had love Berenice's hair so much, she had put them on the night sky to shine eternally."

"I suppose it is nice to have the symbol of your love permanently displayed for all to see." You stated.

"Unfortunately. Even the stars aren't wholly exempted from the lack of romance." She replied. You could feel her breath on your ear.

"And you're an expert at it? At romance I mean."

You heard her chuckled. "Romance? No. At seduction perhaps." She replied in this husky tone that goosebumps crawl all over your skin.

"Carm?"

"Mm?"

"When I asked you about that thing earlier. You never gave me an answer."

Carmilla brushed aside your hair. "Wasn't it obvious?"

"No?"

"Well then."

Carmilla smirked wickedly before she cupped your face with her hands. Then she leaned closer and closer until her lips brushed against yours. Your heart raced and you could feel yourself falling deep into something you couldn't put a finger on. "I'll make it perfectly clear." She whispered against your lips.
Then she kissed you under the stars.

Carmilla's kiss was slow and unhurried. As if she were trying to savor the sensations of you and commit them to memory. As if she were trying to memorize the feel of your lips against hers. Her hand slid down to the nape of your neck while yours immediately flew to her hair, entangling your fingers with those dark tresses. Carmilla made you feel everything. It was unlike anything you've ever experienced before. No one had ever kissed you like this and it wasn't a matter of how good of a kisser she was. Oh no, Carmilla was talented in that department but it definitely wasn't that.

It was simply her.

Kissing her was pure magic.

Then you felt something warm brush against your lower lip. You instinctively opened your mouth and your tongue met hers. Oh god, she tasted so good. You heard a softened moan escape her throat as you started massaging her scalp without thinking about it. You couldn't help but laugh against her lips. For such a badass, she was such a bottom.

"Are you laughing at me?" She growled before seeking out your lips again.

"I am."

You felt her smile as she continued to kiss you into oblivion.

"I hate you."

You grinned as you broke her kiss and simply buried your head in the crook of her neck again. You swept in for a swift peck right there on that creamy neck of hers and heard another glorious moan from her. This time, you snickered.

"Stop that." She warned.

"Stop what? Kissing you?"

Carmilla made this strangled noise. "No I mean—"

You laughed again. "I know. It's okay, I really like kissing you too."

Then you brought up your face to hers once more and gazed upon the beauty that was Carmilla. Just god, she was so beautiful. And her eyes. You never realized the deep mesmerizing quality of them until now. "Again." She said breathlessly.

And you did. You kissed her with all you had.

Finally, Carmilla put a stop to it and stood up. She pulled you to her and you met her, chest to chest. She pressed a searing wet kiss on your forehead before grabbing her guitar, her other hand in yours. She tugged at you and started pulling you towards the cabin. "We should sleep. It's late." She stated.

"And what about when we get back home?"

Carmilla put some thought into it before smiling. "Netflix and chill?"

You hit her arm, hard.

"You have a lot of strength for a tiny person." Carmilla teased.
"Don't patronize me."

Then midway to the cabin door, Carmilla stopped walking. She looked at you with such earnest eyes and you felt her tense up. "So what is this? Best friends pretending to date each other with kissing and stuff?"

You pulled her in for another kiss and it felt excruciatingly good. "I don't know. But I do want to find out... Let's just explore this. Why label anything right now?"

Carmilla gave you this strange look, like she was uncertain of something. Then it went away and she continued walking. "If that's what you want."

As soon as you both entered the cabin, all the lights were already off. You could hear the steady breathing of your friends and you knew they were all asleep. LaFontaine in particular was snoring and there was a thin mattress laid out on the floor in between the two bunk beds.

"Danny was supposed to sleep on the floor."

Carmilla raised an eyebrow. "Why am I not surprised. You know what? Don't worry about it, I'll take the floor."

You shot her a look. "Don't be silly, take the bed."

She smiled at you coyly. "Or we could share it."

"With all our friends here?"

Carmilla put the guitar in one corner of the room. "Why not? We're platonic to them."

You kissed her on the cheek. "Okay then, I'll take you up on that challenge."

You kicked off your shoes and got into the lower bunk without bumping your head. Carmilla followed after you after she did the same with her Doc Martens. She took off her hoodie and joined you on the bed. Then you tucked yourselves under the blanket, your backs were facing each other.

"If this were Victorian England, this would be beyond scandalous." Carmilla stated in a low voice.

"Two unmarried ladies sleeping in such a state of undress. For shame." You replied.

Then you rolled over and surprised Carmilla by putting your arm over her waist. She practically yelped when you did, you were going to have to tease her about that. Then you tugged her closer to you until your legs were all mixed up. Then you went to her ear and whispered. "Told you you were the little spoon."

You heard her laugh. "Fuck off."

You smiled and held her tighter. Your friends be damned. Right now, all you wanted was Carmilla.

Before you knew it, you both had fallen asleep. But somehow, falling asleep with her in your arms was the greatest feeling in the world.
Holy fuck.

It felt like someone was stabbing your head with a knife continuously. You could feel your head throbbing like crazy and you groaned. As soon as you tried to sit up, you made a collision with the ceiling. Wait what?

Why were you on the top bunk?

You glanced over the room amidst the searing pain and noted that LaFontaine was on the top bunk opposite yours. Perry was below LaF. You peered down and also took note that nobody was sleeping on the mattress. The sun was starting to shine in from the windows and all you could hear was the sound of your friends sleeping.

Where the hell was Laura and Carmilla though? Were they already up and about?

You decided to first check the bunk below you and lo and behold.

"Oh."

You quickly looked at LaF.

"Hey, LaFontaine." You called out in a loud whisper.

Thank god for their sleeping habits, it was relatively easy to wake them. They seemed groggy at first as they wiped their eyes. Then they looked at you with this offended expression. "What the hell do you want Danny?" They groaned.

"Look down." You replied in the same hush tones from earlier.

LaF did so and you watched their eyes widen. Then a grin showed up on their face.

"Oh."

"What are you two going on about this early." You heard Perry say from down below. She too had just woken up.

Perry's eyes made contact with the bunk bed opposite hers and her eyes widened to the size of dinner plates. "Oh."

Carmilla and Laura were still fast asleep but part of the blanket had fallen off them. Laura was basically spooning Carmilla and the brooding one herself seemed absolutely content being in Laura's arms. Not that she would ever admit that.

"There's something very right about this view." Perry admitted.

"Whatever it is, it's been a long time coming. These two are impossible." LaFontaine whined.

"They are. But it's our job to keep supporting them through hell or high water." You replied.

LaFontaine smiled in agreement before bringing out their phone. Then they pointed it at Laura and Carmilla. "Still need to take a photo though."

You shook your head.

Still, you hoped that Carmilla knew what she was doing.
And more importantly, there was Laura to consider.

You were close to Laura sure, but you were closer to Carmilla. You really couldn't stomach the idea of Carmilla getting her heart broken because her best friend was too dense to see what she was doing.

You hoped to god Laura knew what she was doing.

For everyone's sakes.

Chapter End Notes

You're welcome...?
Chapter Notes

AHA, it's still technically a monday. I am not late.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

"Carm, please get up. For the love of god, be lazy all you want but just not today."

You flipped over and laid on your stomach, clinging to the pillow, the blanket, and the part of the bed you could actually cling to. You hated mornings. Oh, the godawful mornings. Who’s bright idea was it to get an early flight to Will’s little soirée of marital happiness? Oh wait, it was yours. Because you said you wanted more time relax and do nothing so you opted for an earlier flight. Naturally, Laura was against it because she knew you would throw an early morning tantrum. Well damn it, she was right. She knew you too well. That was unfortunate.

"No." You protested as you clung fiercely to your pillow.

"Carm." Laura said sternly.

"You can't make me." You growled.

Yes, this was an incredible display of adult maturity. You truly acted your age and embodied a successful working woman in the middle of her twenties.

"You wanna bet?" Laura challenged.

You hadn’t realized what Laura was up to until you felt your bed shift and squeak under the new weight. Then she flipped you over. You tried to resist but you were weak compared to her gym monkey strength. The first thing you saw were her hazel eyes before you noticed her gorgeous hair spilling all over her face. Then you realized what position you both were in and you raised an eyebrow.

"Are you straddling me?" You blurted out.

She grinned. "I am."

"And your plan to get me out of bed is...?"

Laura simply smirked and leaned down. Her hands were gripping the sides of your face as her impossibly soft lips made contact with yours. You groaned as you felt her tongue tease your bottom lip. It was too early to think, all you could do was feel. Your nether regions started to throb and you wanted nothing more than to do all kinds of unspeakable things to her. Then she bit and tugged at your lower lip, the move was incredibly sexy and completely out of character for Laura.

You decided that you liked brazen Laura.

The suddenly, Laura stopped and got off of you. You immediately sat up to follow her before you realized that your best friend had achieved her goal. You watched her face become all smug and entitled as she stood by the window of your bedroom.
"Looks like you're up." She stated triumphantly.

"I hate you." You snarled.

"Tell that to your boobs." She replied in this matter-of-factly tone as she circled the bed to get to the door. She disappeared into the living room in the same breath.

You did look down and yes, your girls were standing at attention through the thin fabric of your shirt. You groaned hard and dropped your body back onto the bed dramatically. "Fuck!"

You consequently buried your face into the pillow and sighed. Thank god for your biology. If you were a man, you'd have to deal with the very blatant indication of your arousal.

It was very interesting though, finding out how much you were holding back. Letting some degree of your self restraint go was like letting water out of a dam. The first you thing you did upon coming back home to the apartment was kiss Laura against the door. It was quite the happy surprise on Laura's part but she let you and didn't put up a fight. That is, before she dragged you away from the door. After deciding that you would ride out whatever this was, the rules were thrown out the nearest window. Rather, you had no idea what you were getting yourself into. Without a plan, you decided to go with your gut and your gut said you wanted to make out with Laura like a hormonal teenager.

Then you spent the rest of the day, snuggling next to Laura and watching more movies together. It was your thing. Your tradition of sorts. You'd been having movie marathons with Laura ever since you were kids. Movies marathons were now just more... interesting. You liked the added intimacy. You liked being able to put an arm over her. You also liked putting her hand in your and bringing it up to kiss her knuckles. You found it very difficult not to touch her.

Sometime during the third movie, you ended up making out on Laura's bed. Naturally, she protested a good ten minutes into the kiss and you had to settle for more cuddling as you continued watching more movies. At some point, you gave up trying to seduce Laura and had gone back to your room to sleep.

So Laura's idea of getting you out of bed at this ungodly hour of the morning was unexpected to say the least. No, unexpected was quite the understatement. Doing something this scandalous so early in the morning was more your thing than hers. It was strange finding out that there were still some things you didn't know about your best friend. Frankly, you liked the mystery of it. You also wanted to discover the bottom of the mystery that was Laura Hollis. The sensation your felt was new. For the whole of yesterday, you felt like you were walking on air. You didn't feel like eating and sleep was hard to come by. You also couldn't go one second without thinking about Laura's brown eyes and that smile of hers that could cure cancer.

Even now, it felt like your feet weren't firmly on the ground. Like every step you took and every move you made felt unsteady. Like you weren't in your own skin. The only way you could feel more like yourself again was Laura herself. It was strange.

You smiled as you stretched your arms.

It felt like start of an honest to goodness relationship. And if you were being honest, that excited you. You had never done anything like this before and you knew you should be more scared, but you weren't. Because you were going to walk this tightrope with Laura.

You finally got up from bed and decided that the first order of business was payback. You could only take a shower once your revenge was exacted. So you snuck out of your room and made your way towards her. You could already hear her singing through the door. So you quietly turned the
doorknob and pushed the door slowly. Sure enough, her back was facing you and you were glad that her floor wasn’t loud and creaky. Once she was within your range, you grabbed her by the waist and kissed the nape of her neck. You had the pleasure of hearing her gasp at the contact before you let her go.

"Carm!"

"Payback’s a bitch sweetheart. Have a nice day." You said as you exited her room, flipping her the bird in the process.

When you closed the door, Laura shouted.

"I swear to god, I hate you so much!"

"Quid pro quo!"

"That’s not how it works Carm!"

You laughed. God, this felt normal. Not the intimacy, but the easy back-and-forth you now had with her. This used to be a daily occurrence until that awkward lunch happened. You missed this. Rather, you didn't realize just how much you missed this.

Feeling quite satisfied with the fluid execution of your revenge plan, you finally headed to the shower.

Today was probably going to be a long day.

With your luggage trailing right behind you and with Laura's hand tucked carefully into your own, you made you way towards the check-in counter of the airport. The days were getting colder if that camping trip was any indication enough. Now that you were actually out of the house in this ungodly hour of the morning, you felt the full force of Austria approaching fall. Laura didn't seem to mind though and kept walking alongside you without a care in the world. Her own luggage was being pulled by her other hand.

In other words, you had become that annoying airport couple.

Oh dear god.

You also might have glared at a few conservatives who had been eyeing your blatant display of homosexuality with disdain. You also might have kissed Laura’s temple in an effort to piss them off. Your best friend may have laughed at you and may have kissed you on the lips instead. Clearly, someone was amused at your pettiness. Naturally, the aforementioned conservatives ended up making disgusted noises and walking away. They were probably cursing your kind with every spiteful step.

"Picking fights already? The sun just started coming up." Laura teased.

You pouted. "Someone has to spread our super top secret gay agenda plan."

Laura threw her head up and laughed. "What the hell does that even mean?"
You smiled. "Nothing. Don't mind me sweetheart."

She gave you a suspicious glance. "Uh-huh."

You felt your phone vibrate in your pocket so you stopped momentarily to check that out. Laura stopped to accommodate you as you pulled out your phone from your not so deep pocket. A text was flashing on the screen.

"So big sis Mattie and mother have arrived." You announced.

"Oh, where?"

You quickly texted Mattie. The reply was equally as fast. You raised an eyebrow at the text and immediately looked behind you. "Somewhere here. Mattie says she can see us."

"Well I most certainly can't."

"Maybe if you try hard enough short stuff, you might be able to see beyond the crowd."

She glared at you. How adorable.

"You are only a few inches away from me hypocrite."

You laughed. "How hard is it to spot two glamazons in high heels?"

"Not very hard darling."

You and Laura both spun around to find your mother and Mattie looking at you in amusement. Of course they had to come from behind you. As per usual, mother had to be in some kind power suit. The women would never choose comfort over a power suit. Luckily, Mattie wasn't quite like that yet.

You sister quickly sized you both up. "Something's different about the two of you..."

You swallowed thickly and you felt Laura tense up beside you. "Pardon?"

"It's almost like you're... glowing. If that's the appropriate word to use."

Laura laughed nervously. "Just the usual. Nothing to sing home about."

"Yes, Netflix and chill is definitely nothing to sing home about." You teased her in a low voice, it was unclear if Mattie heard you.

Laura hit you on your thigh and you winced. You best friend really had superhuman strength. "Carm." She warned.

You grinned. "What?"

Mattie groaned and stepped away. "Whatever odd couple crazy this is, leave me out of it."

Your mother sighed in the background as she rubbed her temples. "Carmilla darling. As your mother, I feel like I have to say this. But honey, you are being tremendously gross right now and it's unbecoming. Please show the appropriate amount of proper decorum, thank you."

You frowned. "Laura, I'm not gross am I?"
She smiled sweetly. "Do you want the honest answer or the girlfriend answer?"

Somehow your ears perked up at the sound of Laura indirectly calling you her girlfriend. Your dating status was definitely fake. But this thing you had going on was a very real thing. Just hearing it from her own voice made you feel giddy and skittish at the same time. "The girlfriend one?" You replied.

You watched her roll her eyes at you and the gesture was incredibly cute. "Carm, you're gross."

"I thought this was the girlfriend answer?"

Laura beamed at you. "It is. You're gross, but I like it."

Somehow you could feel your ears burning up. You also felt like you were turning red? Was that a thing? Holy shit, you could actually feel your heart start to beat like crazy. "See Mattie, she likes it." You salvaged yourself.

Mattie rolled her eyes dramatically. "It's too early for this bubble of rainbows and sunshine."

Your mother and Mattie decided to walked ahead of you in an attempted to avoid you and Laura altogether. But deep down inside, you actually enjoyed this repartee between the four of you. It was pleasant and somehow very new. But then again, this thing was already happening before you and Laura started fake dating. Was it always meant to be like this?

"You really like running this girlfriend routine hard." Laura remarked.

"So am I good girlfriend?" You teased.

"Technically, you aren't my girlfriend."

"No, I just make out with you is all." You said in a light manner but it came out the wrong way. Then again, it was a Freudian slip so there.

Laura frowned. "Hey, if you don't like this set-up then just say so."

And there went your mood.

"I don't dislike it. But it wouldn't hurt to know what we're doing. We can't do this forever Hollis." You stated.

She sighed. "I know."

You both stared at each other for what seemed to be forever. There was uncertainty hanging in the air. The only certain thing right now was that Laura Hollis was going to be the death of you and there was a chance you couldn't keep your best friend. Rather, keeping her wasn't as easy as you thought. Then Laura took her hand off the handle of her luggage and she cupped your face. She lightly played with your hair before sliding her hand through the dark ebony mess. Then her hand found the nape of your neck and she pulled you down. Your lips met hers in a quiet clash. In a way, it had become some form of heartfelt communication. A way to tell you things she couldn't convey with words. There was a desperation in this kiss and you felt it all the way down to your bones.

Laura knew what the problem was. She knew the gravity of it all. You weren't the only one with worries.

Then she pulled away and your forehead rested against hers. Her hand was back on your cheek and
"Okay..."

"If you two lovebirds are done, we have a plane to catch." You heard Mattie shout from a distance away.

You chuckled as you wrapped an arm around her. "You heard the woman. Let's go cupcake."

"But Carm... I don't want us to go back to the way we were before the camping trip. I don't want us to hide things. So if something's wrong, we should talk."

You sighed as you started walking towards Mattie and your mother. "I will. Trust me, I'm not hiding anything this time."

"Really? My spider senses are tingling."

"What spider sense. Trust me, I have a lot of thoughts right now and maybe some of them might be about you."

"Me?"

"Amongst other things."

"Things like what?" She insisted.

You smirked. "Something about clothing and the lack thereof. I haven't really decided yet."

You didn't have to look at her to know that she was probably blushing again. Oh sweet summer child. It wasn't that your best friend was inexperienced, she just wasn't comfortable throwing it around so casually. In a way, it was probably the romantic in her. You heard her mutter a tiny curse under her breathe and you wanted to laugh. You may have had your reservations about this thing. It had recipe for disaster written all over it. Nevertheless, it would be a pity to let the disaster happen without a good fight.

You were going to enjoy this.

"You don't think I'll survive a zombie apocalypse Carm?"

You were currently on this small private plane which was supposedly going to drop you off in small town in the countryside. It was the kind of plane that wheezed out loud with its large engines that shook the body of the plane. The trip itself was only a thirty minute affair. However, the plane ride was preferable as opposed to riding in a car for hours on a downtrodden track.

She laughed at you in this oddly wonderful way and while you liked watching her be so unguarded, you had to remain a little indignant. It was a matter of pride. So you balled your fists and tried to frown. Carmilla looked even more amused at your show of force and wrapped her arm around you.

"Cupcake. You're too nice. In a zombie apocalypse, you would try to save everyone. While that's all well and good on paper, it's just not pragmatic." She replied.
"But everyone deserves a fighting chance to live." You argued.

Carmilla sighed. "They do, but it's not realistic to try and save everyone. But the act of trying in itself is very noble."

You pouted and she raised an eyebrow at you. Then she squeezed you in a comforting hug with her arm as her cheek rubbed against yours. The gesture reminded that of a cat. You once read that cats would rub their cheeks against their humans as a sign of affection and if there was anything you knew about your best friend, she was very much like a cat. Yes, you could easily wrap your head around the idea of your best friend being a cat in human form.

"What would you do in a zombie apocalypse Carm?"

She considered it for a brief moment. "Save you of course."

You laughed. "Be serious."

"I am. In a zombie apocalypse, I would do everything in my power to keep you alive. Even if that means stopping you from making stupid decisions."

"Like saving everyone?" You supplied.

"Like saving everyone." She affirmed with a nod.

"Practicality sure does have its sacrifices." You sighed.

"Correction: love has its sacrifices."

You looked up at her in disbelief. "What kind of cheesy ass line is that?"

She shrugged. "But it's true. People do all kinds of crazy things to keep the people they love close to them. Sometimes it makes their loved ones unhappy."

"Isn't that the opposite of people do for their loved ones?" You asked.

Carm looked rather pensive. "Sometimes keeping them safe is the lesser of evils."

"Even if they wind up perpetually unhappy for instance?"

"That sounds so dire. Perpetual unhappiness that is..."

"Yeah but what if?" You insisted.

You noticed that Carm started to rub her thumb against your shoulder, a nervous tick no doubt. You watched her eyes flutter in deep thoughts, she had such annoyingly long eyelashes. "Well, I'm a selfish person. Better that my loved ones stay close where I can keep them safe and alive with me, rather than risk living without them. I'm surprisingly fragile creampuff, I may not survive such a situation. Knowing myself, my loved ones would probably grow to hate me because of my selfishness."

"Well I would never hate you Carm."

She laughed in that beautifully low timbre of hers. Carmilla closed her eyes and pulled all of her weight against you, leaning in close with obvious affection. "Quite right."

You sighed against her as you closed your eyes as well. Intuitively, you knew that it had only been
fifteen minutes or so but a little shut eye couldn't hurt. "All hell would freeze over before I would ever hate you."

"According to Dante, hell is actually pretty cold."

"Don't be snarky."

"I'm sorry."

Only a minute of silence had lapsed before Carmilla spoke once more. "Hey Laura?"

"Hmm?"

"Are you free later?"

"That's a stupid question." You stated.

"Oh. Right. Sorry. Ah, yes well might I borrow you for the evening?"

"Why?"

"Nothing special. I just wanted to hang out with you... away from the family. Just the two of us. We haven't done that in forever."

You quickly moved up from your seat and have Carm a wide grin as the realization slowly dawned on you. "Wait. You mean an honest to goodness girl's night out?"

"Uh-huh. You in Hollis?"

You nodded enthusiastically. "Am I ever!"

"Glad to hear it." She replied.

Then you heard the telltale ding of the airplane, you didn't really have to put you seat belts back on though. The flight was too short to warrant taking it off in the first place. Carmilla drew away from you and leaned back into her own chair, pulling her arm away as she slinked back into the hard leather seat. Her hand however, was still lightly touching yours on the arm rest. It looked like an unconscious gesture and you smiled.

The plane was in for a shaky descent, such was the nature of all small planes with propellers far too large for the body of the plane. You dad was one of those small town guys so you were used to shaky road trips and tiny planes. Ever since your mother passed away, your dad took great lengths to keep family close. Thus, you had numerous trips to see your grandparents and quite possibly to see every relative you ever had. Carm on the other hand was not doing so hot.

She was already pale. She just turned paler if that was even possible. When you looked back at the aisle behind you, you noticed that Mrs. Karnstein and Mattie had similar reactions. You didn't blame them. The plane was too rickety to stay even remotely calm.

You quickly slipped your fingers through Carmilla's to reassure her.

She looked at you in surprise before her face melted into this beautiful warm smile. Then she continued to stare out the window with her hand squeezing yours. You couldn't help but sigh. Sometimes your best friend melted your insides and turned you into mush. You began to wonder how you ever managed to survive twenty years of friendship with her when she was this incredibly attractive. Seriously. It was so unfair.
Inevitably, the plane landed at the tiny privately owned runway. The impact of the wheels touching the ground caused Carmilla to grip your hand painfully and you winced. Good god, she had a death grip. Once the seat belt sign was switched off, the four of you started to disembark. As this was a private plane courtesy of SJ's family, everything was already taken care off. All you had to do was follow people around until you finally arrived at your private accommodations.

Carm knew more about the manor you were supposedly staying in. But from what you could recall, the manor would also be where the wedding was taking place. Only close family members and friends stayed at the manor. Everyone else had to seek refuge at the nearest hotel or the local bed and breakfast. In fact, most of the guests wouldn't be coming in until next week. While the manor itself was in a remote location away from the local rabble, there was a small town fifteen minutes away by car.

Still, what were you going to do for two weeks? It was currently Sunday and the wedding was already happening next Friday. It wasn't a literal fourteen days but still, two weeks. Quite a long time to be doing nothing. There was only so much entertainment to be had.

"Bored already?" Carmilla teased.

You gave her a sideways glance. "How did you—"

"Please Hollis. You're like a restless puppy. Give me some credit for putting up with you for so long."

You raised an eyebrow. "Shouldn't it be me saying that? It takes a lot to put up with you and your habits. You make Danny look like a saint."

Carm frowned. "Please. No one could ever live with your neurotic habits and wild ideas. The moment some stupid idea catches on, you start following it with the determination of that squirrel thing in Ice Age."

"My neurotic habits? Why don't we talk about the havoc you leave with every step you make. I leave you on the couch for two minutes and you've already made a mess. You room is basically a hurricane zone. Plus, your hair clogs the shower drain."

Carmilla sighed. "Well then. I guess we're perfect for each other if that's what we deal with everyday."

Your eyes widened before you ended up grinning. "I mean. Why else would we be friends?"

Carmilla laughed affectionately and ruffled your hair. You groaned in obvious protest. "Well said Hollis." She teased.

You knocked her hands away angrily. "Hey, cut it out."

She laughed even harder. "You are surprisingly cute when you're mad Hollis."


Suddenly you found Carmilla's arms around, pulling you close to her, as close as humanely possible. She was using her tiny height advantage over you as she hugged you from behind, her head was resting over your shoulder and her cheek was pressed against yours. You couldn't stop the sudden spread of heat throughout your whole body. Your reaction to her was fast and electric like lightning and even now, your senses were on high alert. Then you heard Carmilla sigh contentedly against you. "Trust me Laura. You are beyond cute and I am so incredibly lucky right now."
You swallowed thickly when you realized that her breasts were pressed against your back. "I would never have pegged you as the hugging type." Was all you could say, albeit you couldn't control the tremble in your voice.

She chuckled in this low rumble that shook you to the core. "I know. But for you, I might make an exception."

"Carm, they're waiting for us. The van's just there." You pointed out.

True enough, your ride was just waiting for the both of you. You could easily imagine Mattie rolling her eyes in disdain while Mrs. Karnstein was probably fuming in her spot. After all, Carm's behavior was increasingly becoming more and more inappropriate.

"I know. Now that I have you, all I want to do is to keep you close. Just like this..." She said and there was something in her voice that just struck you. Perhaps it was the rare sincerity in it or perhaps it was the sudden sense of yearning you perceived from it. You couldn't tell. But Carm was behaving strangely. Not in a bad way but it was strange nonetheless.

You thought back to her words on the plane ride, back when you were talking about zombie apocalypses and other kinds of nonsense.

Then you realized that Carm was being more truthful than she may be letting on.

You broke her embrace and took her by the hand, dragging to her to the van.

"Come on Karnstein."

"And to your left is the manor garden. There have been a great many tea parties here in the past. In these two weeks, SJ plans on throwing one so keep your eyes peeled." Will said casually.

You couldn't help but yawn. Sure you liked Will. After all, you used to hang out with him all the time before he left during middle school. But right now? He was kind of a bore. Rather, was he always this boring? It seemed like everyone related to Carmilla was bound to suddenly turn into an adult, and not the fun kind. Mattie for instance had turned into her mother with only bits of her old fun personality bleeding through every once in a while. Now, Will was no longer a troublemaker. The only one keeping up with the rebel attitude was Carmilla and you hoped to god she would never change.

"I would love to get out of here." You heard Carm say.

"Yes well. When the family tour is only just us, it's fairly obvious if two people were to slip out." You replied.

She groaned. "Why do you have to be the voice of reason?"

"It's in the job description."

Carmilla grinned mischievously. "Oh? Which job pray tell."

You rolled your eyes at her. "Best friend."
She looked vaguely disappointed. "Of course it is."

You smiled at her teasingly. "What did you want me to say?"

Carmilla looked away, very much like a child whose candy was taken from them. "Absolutely nothing, cupcake."

You couldn't help but laugh at her pouting face. Cute was usually a word associated with Carmilla Karnstein but sometimes it was just so apt. "Are you going to sulk now?"

"No." she replied indignantly.

You only shook her head at her as you looked back at Will. He really did change. Not only was the massive unshaven look an oddity for him, he even grew his hair long enough to tie it. You explicitly recalled him saying that bearded men were lazy. Then again, maybe the lumberjack trend was finally getting to him. It was a thing in London wasn't it? Plus, the U.K. was finally getting to him. His accent was now affected by a hint of British and even his clothes were full on Briton.

He was wearing one of those clean pressed Oxford shirts along with those sleek dapper shoes and a bespoke jacket.

Upon meeting up with Will at the manor, he was extremely polite. It was like stepping into an episode of the twilight zone. You tried to look for traces of bad boy Will and failed. Still, it had to be a good thing. At this stage, Will was definitely husband material at this juncture. Sarah Jane was a lucky girl.

"How long is this your gonna be?"

You shrugged at Carmilla. "We're finally at the garden. That means we're almost through. I mean, we did take up a lot of time at the foyer and the parlor rooms."

"Too many rooms. What is this? The eighteenth century? Nobody has parlor rooms or drawing rooms anymore." She whined.

"Don't be rude. This is SJ's family estate. It's been in her family for years. I think Will might've mentioned that her bloodline could easily be traced back to some sixteenth century duchy albeit, her blood has thinned out considerably."

"Nothing's better than old money." She scoffed with great sarcasm.

"Don't say that. You're old money too. Karnstein is a pretty old name." You pointed out.

After all, you could easily recall that one time you and Carm spent hours pouring over old books about family trees and lineage. You were both twelve years old and extremely curious when your history teacher mentioned a minor Karnstein in passing. Naturally it made Carm feel very self-important.

"Don't remind me. I don't like it." She retorted.

"Carm..." You said sternly.

She sighed. "Fine. I suppose I should be grateful I was born into privilege."

"As you should be." You stated with finality.

"Anyhow! Up ahead is the library and another empty drawing room so there! That's basically the
family manor. As I've said earlier, there's a private golf course and the family keeps horses in case you're up for some riding in the countryside. The nearest town is fifteen minutes away, you could probably borrow a car. There's also a lake past the garden, it's a long walk but if you feel like checking that out then there you go. What else am I missing...?” Will said rather loudly.

From the stairs behind Will, near the library, Sarah Jane came down in a very casual blouse and a chic looking skirt. She quickly looped her arm around his and smiled. "I don't know why I let you do the house tour but whatever. Okay guys, there's a greenhouse next to the garden. You should just follow the signs. It's small but I'm quite proud of it. As for the wi-fi password, it's blackjack. My dad picked it out."

You nudged Carm in the arm and grinned. "There we go. Not so boring after all."

"Horseback riding? Really? That's your idea of fun."

"Well no, but if there's anything I know about small towns, they usually have the nice rowdy bars."

She frowned. "Like in that movie Sweet Home Alabama?"

You gasped for dramatic effect. "You do pay attention to my chick flicks."

"Yes well when you repeat a singular movie over and over again, something's bound to stick. However, I do like small town bars. They're loud and rowdy but more importantly, they don't give a rat's ass about strangers."

"I take it that we now have plans for this evening?" You asked.

Carmilla returned your smile and moved closer only to press a kiss against your hair. "Quite right, Hollis."

Then your both your eyes went back to Will. "Okay then, I guess that concludes the house tour. If you will follow Maxwell over there, he will show you to your rooms."

You and Carmilla looked at each other before snickering. Upon entering the manor, it felt like you had returned to a time where butlers and maids were still commonplace among the nobility. It felt very pretentious. You watched Will and SJ make their timely exit through another door while Mattie and Mrs. Karnstein was making quiet chatter. Most likely, they were complimenting the house.

You looped your arm around Carmilla's and the four of you followed this 'Maxwell' to your rooms.

Maxwell, the house butler, was the stately sort. The way he moved around spoke volumes about his efficiently while his salt and pepper hair easily put you at ease. He gave of this aura of competence albeit, his eyes looked very grave and sunken. Like he had been resting in an old wooden coffin for a decade and had decided to get up and well... be a butler.

He guided you back to the central staircase and you all ascended it's carpeted steps. You hadn't explored the upper floors yet but Will promised that it wasn't very hard to find your way around and that it wasn't very spectacular. The second floor merely comprised of guest rooms. Upon reaching the east wing, the first two rooms opposite each other were given to Mattie and Mrs. Karnstein. Once they disappeared into their rooms, Maxwell led you both to the room at the very end of the hallway.

You raised an eyebrow at each other.

"Isn't Will a little too thoughtful now." Carmilla remarked aloud.
"Who can blame the guy. We're technically dating." You said with matching air quotations.

"I can think of a few things we can do with our current arrangement." She whispered into your ear.

You swallowed thickly and bit your lip before answering her. "Oh yeah...?"

Okay, that came off a little too coy.

Or was it?

Then Carmilla used this look on you. It was something you had seen her use on other women, but never on you. She could easily melt you with that one look. Then she smiled in this slow seductive way and you could feel your pulse staring to race. It reminded you of a cat closing in on its prey.

"Wanna bet?"

"M'ladies, your room is right here. Your bags have already been carried into the room" you heard Maxwell say.

Carm suddenly backed off as if she had touched something extremely hot. You did the same and quickly followed after Maxwell while Carmilla seemed to stand there in a daze before following as well. You entered the room and noted that it was far better to stay here than at the local bed and breakfast.

There was a nice queen sized bed in the center of the room with a mattress that looked softer than anything you've ever seen in your life. Plus the sheets looked exceedingly comfortable. Then there was a singular flatscreen television fixed on the wall opposite the bed and there was a large window opening up to a small but spacious balcony. You walked further into the room to push aside the curtains to open the way to the balcony. Upon opening it, there was a light breeze that had suddenly rushed into the room.

You felt Carm approach you. "Cozy. Admittedly, this view ain't half bad." She said.

"Yeah, and we have our own bathroom."

"And one bed. Oh, what ever shall we do with that?" She asked mischievously.

"If you ladies need any further assistance, feel free to ring the help. The phone is just there and it comes with a list of numbers. Have a nice day." Maxwell announced in a gravely tone.

You quickly turned around and flashed him a smile. "Thank you Maxwell, we're all good here."

He nodded and quickly disappeared back into the hallway, the door closed behind him in a small resounding thump. Suddenly, you felt Carm's hands on your waist. The mere contact even through the fabric of your clothes was enough to make you feel lightheaded. You were silent and so was she. Before you knew it, you were absolutely sure that she was standing right behind you. You could feel the heat exuding from her body and you knew that she didn't have to do much to be pressed against you.

Then you felt her brush aside your long thick hair, revealing your neck to her. You felt her hot breathe lightly tickle the exposed skin.

"Carm...?"

"Hmm?"
"What are you doing?"

She didn't reply. Instead, she pressed a searing kiss against your neck and you inhaled sharply. Something about her touch just made your skin feel like it was on fire, you didn't understand why. Then her lips moved up from your neck all the way up to your cheek, leaving a wet trail. Her lips reached your ears and you could feel your breath shortening.

"I never realized how much I've been wanting to do this until we were both alone, just like this." She whispered in this low husky voice.

Then one of her hands circled around your waist and went to your torso. She began to draw strange patterns over your clothed abdomen. You heard her purr against you. "Mmm... I've always wanted to touch you like this. Ever since that stupid kiss, this is all I've been wanting to do. Do you have any idea what you do to me Laura?"

Then Carmilla bit the shell of your ear and you had to bite back a moan. "I love the taste of you, did I ever mention that? Oh the things I could do to you."

"Tell me..." You heard yourself say.

Then she chuckled. "I could kiss you senseless. I could also make you scream. Whichever pleases you... or I could do both. I could do both and so much more. It all depends how much you're willing to let me do."

You finally regained your senses and immediately turned around in her arms. Clearly she was caught off guard. Then you wrapped your arms around her waist and pulled her close, your pelvis against hers. "Or I could just kiss you and we'll see what happens then."

"Spontaneous. I like it." She replied with a grin before she licked her lips.

You didn't know who made the first move. Probably, you both met halfway but the collision was magnificent. Somehow, you really couldn't get enough. You had to keep kissing her. It felt like the most natural thing in the world. Kissing Carmilla was a whole different experience and you never wanted to stop. You didn't know when it happened but somehow, the two of you had collapsed onto the bed. It was very erratic.

Her kiss was making you lose your mind. The two of you were a hot mess comprised of unrelenting hands and heated kisses. Your hands were in her hair as she hovered above you. Your head was trapped between her arms and basically, you lost control of your senses. You didn't think anymore and you just focused on feeling. Everything felt too good. Then again, maybe it was just Carmilla.

Then she tore off her lips and started to leave a trail of wet open mouthed kisses down your neck. You craned your neck, giving her better access to you. Then she started to unbutton the first few buttons of your top to expose your collarbone. Carmilla casually flipped her hair to the other side to keep it out of the way as she assaulted the part of your skin that was now open to her. Your hands weren't idle though. They were sliding down to her firm supple ass. God did she have a nice ass.

You groped her there unabashedly as she started grinding her hips into yours. It was ridiculously hot. The fact that you made Carmilla like this only served to make you even hotter for her. Before you knew it, your shirt was now open and you felt the cool air of the room touch your heated skin.

Carmilla sat up all of sudden, her legs straddling your thighs. She ran her hand through her hair in this incredibly sexy move as she just stared at you with intense eyes. As if she were admiring her own handiwork. It made you feel a little embarrassed. After all, you mouth was slightly open and
you were panting as if you had just run a marathon. Your cheeks were flushed and you could feel your nether regions throb. There was a chance that when Carm finally got to your underwear, she would find them to be rather damp.

"Like what you see?" You asked breathlessly.

Her fingers started to trace the dips and grooves of your abdomen. Something years of football and going to the gym had helped tone. She licked her lips and somehow, you knew what she was going to do next.

"I tried not to think about it Hollis but I could never help myself. Every time you took your top off, I had to look. Even back in high school, I looked. You may think otherwise, but you are incredibly hot. You just don't know it."

"I'm always a sucker for flattery." You replied.

Carmilla laughed as she leaned over your stomach, her fingers tracing even more strange symbols over it. "Seriously, you have the body of a cover model and you're this modest? You have got to be kidding me. You know, I've always liked this mole of yours. Right here." She stated before kissing that exact spot. You muscles tensed up at the contact.

"I could spend hours just worshipping your abs. Dammit Hollis, you are too unfair."

You couldn't help but laugh.

"But I won't do that. Not yet." She stated before moving over your covered breasts. "These however deserve my full undivided attention."

Oh yeah, your body was so ready.

"On second thought. I'll make you wait. After all, I have you all to myself for two weeks. Why rush into it?" She added.

You groaned out loud and banged your hand against the soft mattress. "Damn it Carm."

She laughed and leaned over to press a kiss against your forehead. Then she rolled off of you and laid down next to you. Her hand was still lightly playing with your open shirt. "Honestly Laura. The camping trip was only the day before yesterday. Things are happening too fast."

"You're one too talk. You sleep with everything that moves."

She rolled onto her side and began to play with your hair. "That may be true... But this is different. What we have is too important to me to ruin with mindless sex. Much as I want to have mindless sex with you."

"What if I don't want you to be patient."

"No is no Laura."

"Can I do anything to change your mind?"

Carmilla was silent for a brief moment.

"Tempting cupcake but no dice."

Then you started trail your fingers up the length of her arm. "You sure about that Carm…?"
She paused for too long.

"No… stop that Laura. I mean it. I am better than my libido."

You laughed hard as you sat up from the bed. You pressed one last kiss against her lips and this one lingered. Her hand was cupping your cheek before you pulled away. Carmilla stared up at you with the strangest expression on her face. She looked at you as if it were the first time she had seen you. For a moment, the way she looked at you had managed to steal your breath away. You brushed aside her hair and nonchalantly caressed her cheek before standing up from the bed.

"Whatever Carm." you said in jest.

"Tell you what, I owe you a trip to town." she said lightheartedly.

You started to button up your top. "Maybe another day. I feel like doing absolutely nothing today. I think I'll just hang out in the library for today… you?"

She smiled sheepishly. "I might just join you…"

"Great then, I'll start looking through the books."

"And I'll go find some hot cocoa."

"Sounds like a plan." you said as an end to the discussion.

Then you left Carm to her own devices as you made your way to the library. With every step you took, you couldn't shake away the way your skin tingled. Nor could you stop thinking about the way Carmilla looked at you.

She had never looked at you that way before.

Chapter End Notes

Too much...?

Feel free to comment about pacing.
Chapter 13

You woke up to the sunlight shining right through the tiny slit in the curtains. The sudden brightness had woken you up and you winced when you opened your eyes. Once your eyes adjusted to the light contrasting with the darkness of the room, you realized the position you were in. Laura was currently nestled in your embrace and it was apparent that you had fallen asleep that way. This was nice. Waking up to Laura like this felt as natural as wearing your leather pants, and you wore those like a glove.

This wasn't the first time you had slept with Laura on the same bed. After all, the two of you had gone through too many sleepovers in the past. Somehow, it just mattered now.

You carefully looked down at her and was immediately assaulted with the pleasant scent of her hair. Maybe it was her shampoo but there was something familiar in the way she smelled. It made you feel all safe in the same way a child would feel whenever they hid in their mother's clothes. Naturally, what you felt for her was anything but maternal. In fact, you had no idea what you felt for her or what you were doing. You didn't know what you were or if this was even a relationship at all.

All you knew was that you could kiss Laura and feel like nothing you've ever felt before. That was one truth you were going to hold on. Your better judgement be damned.

Hell you didn't even know what to make of the whole fake dating situation anymore. It was ridiculously complicated and thinking about just made you feel even more frustrated so you did what you always did about confusing situations. You simply didn't think about it and tried to ignore it for as long as possible.

Not wanting to get out of bed, you held her even tighter. It was nice waking up to a warm body. It sure beat waking up alone. The fact that it was Laura made things all the better.

But then you heard her groan and you knew she was waking up. Finally, she moved her head and brought up her hazel eyes to your dark ones. She blinked once or twice before making a sloppy lopsided grin.

"Hey." She greeted.

"Hey."

She made no motion to break your embrace. "What time is it?" She asked, her voice still groggy.

You shrugged. "No idea."
She laughed through her nose and buried her head into your chest. "Right. Of course you don't know."

"We could stay like this for a while you know." You suggested.

"But the breakfast spread." She whined.

You sighed against her and began to absentmindedly stroke her soft hair. "I know right? This manor really knows its food."

She buried her head further in response. You were positive that she could hear your heartbeat. You also wondered if she could hear how fast it was going. It always seemed to be the case whenever Laura was involved. "The hot cocoa though."

You clung to her further. "I know, I would drink that everyday if I could."

Then Laura lifted her head and you found yourself face to face with those breathtaking eyes of her again. The very ones that could pierce right through you without great difficulty. You moved on instinct and started to stroke her cheek softly. The light streaming through the room was illuminating her face and you couldn't help but sigh. She was too gorgeous for her own good. Finally, you pressed a kiss on her forehead and smiled at her. "You know what cupcake? Breakfast sounds good."

Laura simply stared at you for what seemed like a minute. It was probably less than that but everything always seemed to slow down whenever she looked at you. Finally, she broke away from your arms and tried to get up from the bed. You withdrew yourself and settled for resting your head over your arm. You watched Laura make her way to the bathroom and quietly admired her every step. It was funny thinking how you never had these kinds of thought before and now they're all you ever think about it. At first, you thought it was that stupid kiss that started things. However, something told you that it ran far deeper than that.

You sighed once more.

Who would have imagined that you would end up in this situation with Laura of all people.

With Laura...

You quickly brought the blanket to your face and buried yourself in it. Why did the sound of that make you feel all weird and jumpy?

Pull it together, Karnstein. What are you? In high school?

The sound of running water was what pulled you from your thoughts. Evidently, Laura was in the middle of washing her face. You on the other hand had yet to pry yourself from the bed. Begrudgingly, you kicked the sheets off of you and managed to swing both legs onto the floor in a heavy manner. You quickly tied your hair into a loose messy bun and began to fish through your things for one of your hoodies. You had every intention of going back to sleep right after breakfast.

Although, knowing Laura. You doubted you would actually be able to sleep afterwards. She was probably going to drag you to the stables to see the horses. After all, she had been bugging ever since you arrived here. It was Thursday already and you both had yet to do anything substantial. All you've done was have hot cocoa and spend time reading in the library together. Well... that amongst other things. Aside from enjoying each other's company like always, there were those stolen kisses when no one was around. It was a very large manor with enough space for a hundred guests if it wanted to fit in that much. The two of you were definitely uninterrupted.
But you never let it go too far, much to Laura's dismay. You touched her, yes. You kissed her wherever you could and made her moan against you but you never went further than that. It frustrated her to no end but you couldn't bring yourself to do more. Not to Laura. She deserved something a little more than a quick fuck in the library corner. She deserved all those cheesy candles and cliched rose petals. She deserved to be worshiped.

So you tried to be worthy of all of that. Worthy of her to say the least. Your best friend believed in romance. She believed in flowers, and chocolates, and fairytales.

If that's what Laura wanted then that was exactly what you were going to give to her. She deserved no less. Especially from you of all people.

"Carm, did you want to wash your face or something?" Laura asked as her head popped out from the bathroom door. Her hair was in a neat ponytail.

You pulled one of your hoodies over your head. "Sure."

You rolled out of bed in a lazy maneuver and slowly walked to Laura. Upon bumping into her person as a result of her moving backwards, you simply smiled and grabbed her by the waist to steady her. Then she turned around to apologize and you simply smiled. You leaned down and claimed her lips. It was slow and unhurried. Just the way morning kisses should be. Laura swayed against you as her ass met the sink and she stayed there.

This. You could definitely get used to this.

Laura broke away from you with a sigh but your noses still touched. "No dallying Carm."

"Whatever cupcake."

"Mattie's going to make some backhanded comment about us being late." She reasoned.

You only smirked at her as you swooped back in for another kiss. "Mmhm..."

You felt her smile against your lips as she wrapped her arms around your neck. Yes, perfect. Somehow, something about this scene felt very right. Like a gear clicking into place. Then you bit her lip and she laughed. Her laughter was music to your ears.

"Stop biting."

"I can't help it. And besides, you like it." You replied.

"I'm sure I have an argument for that... somewhere." She retorted rather weakly.

You leaned in for one last kiss but you found Laura's fingers against your lips. You simply raised an eyebrow at her and she smiled apologetically. "Come on Carm. Seriously. You still have morning breath."

You grinned. "Aww, it doesn't smell that bad."

She tried to shove your face away with the palm of her hand. "Yes it does. You're lucky I like you now go gargle or something."

You released her in defeat and put your hands up to show that you weren't planning to do anything anymore. "Fine. You win Hollis now step aside. I need to slay this alleged morning breath of mine. Otherwise, I can't get a kiss from my wide-eyed maiden fair." You said with great gusto and much
dramatic flair.

She grew red all the way to her ears. If that wasn't adorable, you didn't know what was. "Flatterer."
She scoffed.

"It's not flattery if it's the truth, creampuff."

Laura shook her head and went back out into the room. Her tiny footsteps were quite audible from
where you were standing. She reminded you of a tiny giant with the way she was stomping around
in furious indignation. "You're impossible." She half-shouted.

"You've had twenty years of practice Hollis. I suggest you suck it up."

You quickly washed your face and brushed your teeth. The brushing your teeth part seemed very
counter intuitive as you were going to eat immediately after but you'd rather not argue with Laura.
Once you were through with it, you walked back into the room and found Laura staring out the
window. With a smile, you approached her lithely and peered over her shoulder. You knew she
registered your presence. How could she not when you were partially breathing down her neck,
literally.

"So what're you looking at?" You asked.

"It just seems so quiet out here. I feel like we're in a whole different country..." She replied.

"But it's nice out here. It's just us. All our commitments, all our responsibilities, and all of our realities
are back at Styria. It feels a bit like an escape don't you think?"

"True. But by next week, we'll be back to our proper lives. No more fairy tale adventures."

"Adventures where the knight steals the princess away from her betrothed?"

"Yes. Adventures like that. What have you been reading Carm? That sounds so cliched." She teased
you.

"I read a lot of things, now come on. You did not drag me out of bed only not to go after all." You
retorted.

She gave you a look before glancing at the digital clock on the side table. "It's only eight in the
morning."

You sighed and started walking towards the door. "It's as you said. If we show up late, god knows
what kind of comments we'll be subtly hearing."

Laura quickly shuffled after you and slipped her hand into yours without a second thought. It seemed
to be by reflex now. You grabbed the keys on the nearest table with your free hand and moved it into
the hallway. Your shoulders brushed against the the other and you reveled in your closeness as you
made your way down stairs to the garden. Sarah Jane found her own family dining room to be quite
stuffy so she opted to have breakfast in the garden outside, you agreed with her. It was nice having
breakfast outside in the mornings. The air was cool and it was usually pleasant. You were one for
simple things like these after all.

After a few minutes of walking around, you heard loud noises coming from the garden. There were
guests already there and true enough, Mattie and your mother were already there as well. This wasn't
too formal as everyone was still clearly in their pajamas. You both passed by SJ and Will for
formality's sake before sitting down with your family.
"Good morning." Laura greeted, all bright and chipper.

Your mother beamed at Laura and greeted her right back while Mattie seemed to be absorbed in the morning paper. "Morning sweetheart." Was your mother's greeting.

Honestly. Your mother always sounded monumentally happy whenever Laura was around. You actually thought, at some point before, that she wished she had Laura for a daughter instead of you. Sometimes you found yourself still wondering that. The one thing stopping you from being jealous of Laura was the fact that she was your best friend and that she didn't deserve your spite.

"I see that your friend Danny has made it to the news. It's not front page but it's a start." Mattie remarked aloud.

You quickly grabbed at the paper and skimmed through the article. Something about one of Danny's current case. She was with one of those pro bono law firms and her current case was a class action suit against a certain famous company with questionable ethics and unscrupulous business practices. It was currently the biggest case of her career and while she wasn't the only lawyer working the case, she was most certainly leading the charge. "Lawrence is a sucker for these things."

"Clearly. But she's doing good here. I would never side with that company. They appall me plus the plaintiffs are in the right here. That company was shady from the very beginning. One of the partners at my firm closed a deal for them once and he swore to never to do it again." Mattie replied matter-of-factly.

"That's Danny Lawrence for you. A tall ginger social justice defender." You stated sarcastically.

"And what are your plans for today Carmilla?" You heard your mother ask.

You shrugged. "If it were up to me, I would nap."

Your mother smiled wryly. "Well then... Laura, what are you up to today?"

"I was thinking of checking out the stables." She stated excitedly.

You shook your head and grinned. God, she was so predictable. Still, you realized that you were thinking of reaching out to her to kiss her cheek because she was being so damn cute. You didn't though. Not in front of your family members. "I knew you always wanted to be a princess with a pony." You teased her instead.

She narrowed her eyes at you but she was smiling. "Too bad I'm a lesbian."

You laughed. "You don't think I can be your prince?"

"Definitely not." Was her immediately answer.

"Don't be delusional Carm. Maybe if you started behaving like one, you could pass off for a prince." Mattie teased you from across the table.

"Maybe if you stopped cussing, that would make a difference." Your mother joked.

Laura snickered really hard and you glared at you. You grimaced deeply. "Fuck off Hollis."

Your mother sighed but she took no offense whatsoever to the sudden profanity. "Case in point."

There was a suddenly a huge commotion in the table with the bride-to-be in it. She seemed to be enthusiastically conversing with her friends or something to that effect. They were giggling rather
loudly and it was in a girly bridal way. Laura, being the ever curious cupcake she was, just had to check it out. She suddenly stood up just as your coffee had arrived without you asking. She grabbed your hand and you sighed, your coffee would have to wait. Laura dragged you over to the table with the bridesmaids and you steeled your nerves. These were the kind of women you avoided to the letter.

"You guys planning something?" Laura asked in a bright and chipper tone.

Sarah Jane beamed up at Laura. Maybe you missed something but since when did they become friends? Then again, it was just like her to make friends with everybody. She was always the center of attention in every crowd and you were more than happy to simply lurk behind her. "Hey Laura! We were just talking about going into town. Wanna come along?"

"Ooh! Beer, billiards, darts, and old jukeboxes?"

SJ grinned. "Absolutely."

Laura turned to you and you internally groaned. "Carm."

"I know... Of course we're going." You stated.

SJ laughed at the two of you. "It's funny. I'm the one getting married and yet, you two are the ones acting like you're already married. God I envy you both."

You scratched your cheek nervously. "If that's how you feel then Will's being an idiot."

"Well I'm marrying that idiot so that makes me the bigger fool. But hey, that's love." She replied.

Before you could answer, your attention was pulled away by another burst of laughter from the other end of the table. By some inexplicable reason, Laura had befriended the bridesmaids. Honestly, you leave her alone for one second and she brings back strays or in this case, makes new friends. You didn't know whether or not you should strangle her for it.

"I don't believe we've ever spoken like this before but we all know who you two are." The blonde one exclaimed.

"You guys really look like such a cute couple, how long have you two been together?" The brunette one jived in.

Laura laughed nervously. "Thank you and I guess we haven't been together too long, right babe?"

Did you hear correctly?

Did Laura Hollis just call you babe?

Oh god, you usually hated tacky endearments but you could warm up to this. There was just some possessive quality to it and it made you want to kiss her all over. Yes, you were definitely warming to it. Then you felt your heart squeeze in your chest and you didn't know how you would ever survive Laura.

Slowly, you dragged her by her hand to pull her towards you before you wrapped one possessive arm around her waist. You could feel the heat emanating from her clothed body and before you could help yourself, you were all too aware of her curves now. "Maybe a few months." You replied.

"But we've been best friends for forever." Laura added enthusiastically.
You heard the one with sandy brown hair sigh with envy. "Gosh, that must be nice. Dating your best friend I mean, you guys are so lucky."

The blond one nodded aggressively. "Plus you're both are really hot. Such an unfair couple too."

All of sudden, you felt Laura's demeanor change and you just had to wonder what brought that up. You glanced at her before raising your eyebrow. Laura seemed irked for some reason. Was she glaring? At who?

"I'm sure you ladies are busy doing something... important. I have to take Laura away now." You announced.

There were collective protests. Were the two of you that interesting as a couple? Or was it because you were both gay. You sighed internally. Damn heterosexuals. Regardless of their current fascinations, you managed to draw Laura away from the table. Her mood seemed to have turned sour. As you led her away, you nudged at her and smiled lightheartedly. "So... babe huh?"

Laura was pulled out of her mood. You knew this because she seemed embarrassed. "It was a slip of the tongue." She defended.

"I'm not making fun of you... It was unexpected."

Laura shrugged. "Well, I won't do it again."

"No!" You blurted.

She looked at you askance before you cleared your throat. "That is to say... I don't mind it."

Laura surprised you again by kissing you on the cheek. She jerked you down to do it so how could you not swoon. She was still surprising you even now, even though you knew her for so long there shouldn't even be any surprises anymore. There were only so many of you in the garden so naturally, the gesture did not go unnoticed but you didn't care.

"That's sweet Carm."

"I wasn't trying to be."

She laughed. "I know... That's why it's sweet."

You gave up trying to look cross and couldn't help but smile. You'd been doing that a lot lately and no doubt it was all because of Laura. Who would have thought? You settled for messing up her hair, thus ruining her pristine ponytail. She got mad at you and you relished at angry tiny Laura.

Your angry tiny Laura.

And on that note, you resumed breakfast.

"Kill me now."

Perry looked at you sympathetically as you drowned in your endless pile of paperwork, folders and binders. You did not go through law school only to wind up dead next to case files, subpoenas, and
court orders. It was almost noon and you had another court appearance scheduled for later this afternoon. While you were grateful for this case, as it could be the one to make or break your career as a lawyer, you also hated it with a passion. And because you were working pro bono for these poor employees, if there was a settlement to be bad by the end of this ongoing trial, you wouldn't get a cut of it. All you'd get would be your same lousy salary.

"You told us to tell you this honey." She started.

"I know, don't—"

"But you chose to be a lawyer. You don't get to complain." She stated matter-of-factly.

You groaned and leaned back into the couch. "I know. On a side note, they've only been gone for all of four days and it's already too quiet."

Perry sighed in agreement. "True. I actually woke up this morning expecting to hear Carmilla shredding on that electric guitar of hers. LaF is equally disoriented."

Your gaze went back down to the cold mug of coffee on the table. You drank it anyway and allowed the caffeine to give you an extra buzz. "Where is LaF anyway? They're gone pretty early."

"Yeah, LaF had some early morning lecture to teach." Perry explained.

You smiled halfheartedly. "At least someone's happy."

"With biology? Always." Perry stated with a smile.

You casually out your feet up on the couch and began to absentmindedly play with your ginger hair. Your eyes were simply staring into the white walls of Perry's apartment as you contemplated. Finally, you asked Perry something that had been on your mind for a while now. "Perr?"

"Yes?"

"How do you honestly feel about Laura and Carmilla."

"Truthfully? I don't know what to say." She replied.

You looked at Perry and found her to be as equally contemplative as you. "Me too."

"You can't deny that those two have chemistry. It's always been there for as long as we've known them."

"Yeah, those two are ready to combust at any given moment." You agreed.

"This fake dating thing is definitely not healthy though. If anything, it just enables them to avoid talking about real issues. If there's another thing we know about them, it's that they're surprisingly non-confrontational. They come to agreements but nothing actually gets settled."

"Plus with the way they were acting in the past few weeks, they scare me to be honest. For a while, it seemed like they were strangers sharing an apartment. Plus Carmilla was so irritable. I get that she has these newfound feelings for Laura but she's just so self destructive. I swear, all her problems are usually her fault." You ranted.

"I knew that something was going on between those two... But what feelings?"

You sighed long and hard. "It's a long story Perr but I'll tell you another time."
Before Perry could protest, your personal phone rang. Yes, you had two phones. At some point, it had become necessary. You quickly put the damned thing against your ear and customarily greeted whoever was on the other side. It was an unknown number but whatever, it could be something important.

"Attorney Lawrence speaking." You greeted.

"Hey! I'm so glad I was able to get in touch with you!" A man's voice exclaimed.

Your eyebrows scrunched together and you frowned. There was something alarmingly familiar about the voice. "Pardon? Who is this and how did you get this number?"

"Oh, I got it from Laura."

The voice was now eerily familiar and you suddenly had this bad feeling nestle in the pit of your stomach. "Okay? But who is this?"

"Whoops sorry. I should have introduced myself from the very start. It's me! Kirsch!"

Oh god.

Motherfucker.

Against all reason, you began to develop a migraine. Is this what they meant by war flashbacks because you were having horrible flashbacks. Seriously, this man was the epitome of everything you hated about fraternities and college life. He was that constant thorn on your side. "That's it. I'm hanging up."

"No! Don't hang up. I promise, I'm not here to stalk you. I'm here on an official capacity."

Well doesn't he sound all grown up now?

"Fine. What the hell do you want Kirsch?" You barked at the phone.

"Okay so listen. We had a full house yesterday but all of a sudden, some people from Sarah Jane's side of the family had to back out due to other obligations. We have an empty table and it would be a waste because we already counted the people so Laura suggested that we invite you guys. Don't worry, Will's cool with it."

"You want us to go fly there? Right now?"

"Nah, not right now. From what I hear, you have a case against that big corporation. You can fly in next week when the actual wedding happens." He replied, you could tell he was smiling. Something about his voice just told you that.

"How... considerate of you."

You had this strange inkling in your mind that the man you hadn't spoke to in almost five years was actually offended by your dismissive attitude. You chose to ignore your inkling because accepting it would mean that you actually hurt his muscle brain feelings. "Don't worry about the tickets and accommodations. We've got it covered. Just be at the airport when we tell you to and we'll take care of the rest."

"Thanks... We'll RSVP as soon as we're sure we can make it. Give my best to Laura and Carmilla."

"Of course. Hope to see you soon... and Lawrence?"
"Yeah?"

"Maybe we could be friends this time."

You blinked once before you answered. "Sure." Was all you could say.

Then the line went dead so you locked your phone. That was such a bizarre phone call. Perry was looking at you as if she were waiting. Well, she probably was. You slowly put your phone down and looked at Perry with an odd expression.

"Well Perr, how would you like to go to a wedding?"

"Whose?"

You smiled apologetically. "Why, SJ and Will's of course."

"Who was that on the phone?"

You frowned. "It was Kirsch."

Perry's face drastically changed to one of distaste. "Oh. That must've been painful for you."

"Oh. It was pleasant actually... Carmilla wasn't kidding when she said that he grew up into a functioning member of society. Of course, that still remains to be seen."

"Have you considered the fact that you're being a tad bit too prejudicial Danny? Your expectations of him might need a few adjustments, and maybe you should lighten up."

You raised an eyebrow. "I'm a lawyer Perr. I'm supposed to be prejudicial. It's why we're all so condescending and insufferable."

Perry shook her head at you. "Whatever. Let's work on settling our affairs first we can even consider going to the wedding." She stated firmly.

You picked up one of the many folders on the table and began to nonchalantly sift through the papers, skimming over the details. "Of course. I have a good feeling about the direction of this trial."

"Oh, I know you'll be just fine. There's just some kitchen drama that needs a... firmer hand."

"Perr?"

"Hmm?"

"You scare me when you talk like that."

She only smiled.

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You shivered when a sudden blast of cold air rushed through the open field. Being the ever so observant one, Carmilla immediately wrapped one arm around you and began to try and warm you up. Naturally, it didn't go so well as you were both cold now but it was the thought that counted in this instance. Still, you were convinced that you both weren't underdressed and that the wind was
just a freak occurrence. Carm simply held onto her leather jacket even tighter while you began to button up your coat. Your boots trudged on the uneven ground as you both approached the stables.

You were feeling rather excited actually.

As Carm had said, who the heck goes horseback riding in this day and age?

Even if she didn't want to admit it, Carmilla was clearly more excited than she should be. For one, she was complaining too much. She only did that to prove her point that she didn't want to be here. Unfortunately for her, you knew her too well so her shit wasn't going to fly.

"Will said this wasn't going to be far."

"And it isn't Carm. You just don't get enough exercise."

Carmilla sighed dramatically. "I get it Laura. The whole world gets it. You work out, we all get it. While I greatly appreciate the fact that you are such a gym nut, I for one am but a simple couch potato. Leave me be."

You laughed. "I only said one thing."

She shoved her finger toward your lips. "Shhh... Do you hear that?"

"Hear what?"

"Nothing. Listen to nothing. That's how much I give a fuck."

You jokingly pushed her forward and she made this funny strangled noise when you did. Carm was the kind of person who looked way cooler when she wasn't talking. If she were simply a statue, no doubt she would be a very beautiful and a very badass statue. Come on, that jawline of hers was definitely carved out of something divine. But the moment she opened her mouth, her image would drastically change. Most people found her charming but you knew her long enough to be unimpressed. She was simply good at putting on a show but you knew how lame her words actually were. Carm was lucky she was charismatic enough to pull off her bullshit.

"You are so full of shit Carm."

Her lips curved into a smile. "I know."

Over the next few minutes, you both walked quietly. It wasn't the bad kind of silence. If anything, it allowed you to simply enjoy each other's company. It was something your sorely missed. After all, that one kiss felt like it happened ages ago. It was after that kiss that your relationship with Carm went to hell. It felt horrible to say the least. All the dancing around, and not in the nice flirtatious way. You both were keeping secrets and in doing so, you both created a vast rift between the two of you. That was something you never wanted to happen to you ever again. You didn't know if you could survive something like that were it to happen a second time.

Finally, you both arrived at the stables and were greeted by the smell of horses. You had mixed feelings about this. While you were glad to finally be here, horses really smelled bad.

Without much fanfare, Carmilla pushed the doors open and you couldn't help but gasp. It was an honest to goodness stable with at least six strong–looking thoroughbreds and with stacks of hay strewn across the place. Right now, there were three stablehands moving back and forth between the horses. One of them noticed the two of you enter and quickly attended to you.
"Oh, Miss SJ said you both would be swinging by. It's nice to see house guests every once in while, not all of them like to slum it down with the horses." He greeted.

The man in question reminded you of Maxwell, the house butler. Just less stuffy and definitely a little younger but he had a similar demeanor.

"Well that's a waste." You replied.

"It really is ma'am. You can call me Albert. I'm the one in charge of the stables."

"Well then Albert, we would like to go riding," Carmilla stated.

"Of course ladies, it's why we're here." He replied with a warm grin. Then he turned around and called the attention of one of the other stablehands. "Hey you, get those two mares. Yes, those two."

Then he looked back at the two of you. "Any experience with horses?"

You shook your head while Carmilla said that she only had a little.

"Ah, mostly first timers. Never fear, those two horses are very good for beginners. They don't disobey you and are very well mannered. It's that big one over there that needs an expert hand."

You pointed to the large stallion with a dark shiny coat. He most certainly looked impressive and he gave off the impression of strength. "You mean that one?"

"Yes, well we call him Thor. Fast as a thunderclap but stubborn as a mule. But never mind him, he's getting old just like me. Anyway, follow me ladies." Albert said before leading you into the enclosed space.

The stablehand came out of the stables pulling the two horses by the reins. One of them was a delicate looking mare with a grey coat while the other one was brown coated with a mane that grew out a little too long. The stablehand had them both all saddled up. Carmilla then look a you and gestured to the grey one. "Well then, ladies first."

"Ha ha, very funny Carm."

"What can I say, I'm the soul of charm and wit."

"You give yourself too much credit, Karnstein."

Carmilla stuck her tongue out at you, a very mature move indeed. Then you approached the grey mare and Albert helped up onto the saddle. The first thing you noted was that it wasn't a comfortable as you thought. There was no way your ass was going to get through this riding thing alive. Then Albert began to give you brief instructions on how to handle a horse, most of which simply flew over your head. Still, Albert promised you that it would come naturally after some practice.

"What's her name though?" You asked him.

"This girl here is Leisl and the brown one is Margo. They're named after members of the old family tree."

"That's not a bad name Leisl." You told her as you stroked her neck softly.

Suddenly, Albert jumped in after you and he took hold of the reins. He made a strange noise and Leisl started to walk around. "Let me handle this for while so I can teach you how to steer her proper."
He taught you the basics and started to move around. He told you what you should and shouldn't do as well as what sort of movements would hurt the horses and what wouldn't. Finally, he jumped off and allowed to go on by yourself.

And he was right. After he let you take over the reins for, it wasn't too difficult getting her to go where you wanted. Riding was fairly instinctive and while your butt ached, there was something fulfilling about this. Just imagining yourself riding fast made you feel like it was christmas. Yes, it was that exciting. You noted that Carmilla had saddled herself on the brown mare without much help from Albert. You also noticed the way she handled the reins, it was clear that she hadn't done this in a very long time but there was clear practiced efficacy in her movements. She moved Margo towards you and gave you a strange look. Were you staring at her? And for how long?

"Am I princely enough yet?" She asked with a smirk.

"Not quite. When did you learn how to ride? I've known you since we were five and I don't recall you ever mentioning to me that you could ride." You asked.

Carmilla smiled a secretive smile as she jerked the reins, urging her brown mare to circle around yours. "I need to keep a few of my secrets, otherwise I'd lose my air of mystery won't I? Now come on Hollis, see if you can keep up with me."

Then Carmilla suddenly began to bring her horse to a trot. The enclosed area was actually pretty large so while you couldn't run around at top speed, you could still go pretty fast. She started to move ahead of you, following the the edges of the fence and going in a counterclockwise flow. The easy way she commanded her horse was surprisingly attractive. That and she was wearing her red flannel shirt along with that leather jacket so there was that too.

You sighed long and hard. Dammit, Karnstein.

You pulled in the reins and started to move towards her. Well, tried being the operative word. You still couldn't go as fast as her, all you could bring yourself to do was a simple trot.

"What the hell are you doing all the way back there Hollis?" Carmilla taunted at you from a few paces away.

"Shut up, I'm concentrating."

"Concentrating? You look constipated." She teased.

"Carm." You seethed.

She laughed even more, then she circled back to you with ease. "Here's how it works creampuff. Don't tug at her so hard, be more gentle." She said in this calm tone that managed to stop you from feeling so frustrated. Then you felt Carm put her hand on top of yours and there it was again. That strange yet wonderful jolt of electricity that always seemed to strike you whenever she was around. "Urge her forward like this. No, loosen your grip. She's a good mare, she won't let you fall." She cooed.

Instead of watching her hands, you ended up watching her face clandestinely. You noticed her impossibly long eyelashes and the sharp angles of her face. You observed the way her hair carried various shades of brown when the sunlight was shining on those ebony tresses. You could already feel your breathing quicken as she tried to teach you how to ride better. It was funny because you knew in the back of your head that Carm was far from being an expert horseback rider. You knew that you could have just asked Albert for help, it was his job after all. It's just that it was incredibly
cute of Carm to want to teach you herself so you allowed her.

In truth, your best friend was quite the sap.

Once she was through trying to help you ride better, you smiled at her. Carmilla was obviously puzzled with your expression so you decided to add to her confusion. You leaned out from your saddle and pressed a kiss against her cheek. This was a rare occasion because you had the pleasure of seeing a rosy shade flood her alabaster skin. Carmilla rarely blushed but when she did, the effect was devastating. "Thanks Carm."

She quickly tried to focus on something on something other than you. "No problem. Now come on, after me slowpoke."

Carmilla started moving ahead of you but unlike earlier, she slowed down her pace. She kept glancing behind her to check on you, to see whether or not you were able to keep up. True enough, Carm did make a few helpful points about getting the horse to go faster without pushing it too hard. Soon enough, you found yourself riding at the same pace at Carm albeit you knew that she slowed down for you. You appreciated the thought.

"Congratulations Hollis, you can officially ride a horse."

"Well yeah! But you still didn't tell me why you know how to ride."

Carm only smiled. She suddenly outstretched her hand towards you as she began to slow down to a stop, you followed suit. You took a hold of her hand, unsure of what she was planning to do. With no warning whatsoever, she jerked you towards her and pressed a kiss to your lips. You immediately felt like you were going to fall of your horse, that was how lightheaded she made you feel. She made you feel like you were slowly losing your bearings. Then Carmilla pulled away and you swayed when she did.

She smirked and you couldn't help but swoon.

"Does it matter?"

Then she circled back to the stable and hopped off the saddle in one smooth gesture. You were left in a daze for a mine by before you followed after her.

You couldn't get off the saddle as smoothly as Carmilla did. You also expected Albert to help you but in another uncharacteristic move, Carm was the who helped you. It was very chivalrous and you couldn't deny that you were incredibly more attracted to her in that moment. When both your feet were on one side of the saddle, Carmilla suddenly placed her hands on your hips. Then with a surprising amount of strength, she was able to lift you down without so much as breaking a sweat.

"Well that went better than expected. Damn, you're heavy Hollis."

You laughed and Carm affectionately stroked your cheek in response. "That was dangerous Carm."

"I know. But was that princely enough?"

You sighed before a careless grin surfaced on your face.

"It was." You answered.

Satisfied with your answer, she took your hand and dragged you away.
"Then it was worth it." She replied back.

"Over here you guys!"

You turned your head towards Sarah Jane's direction and nudged at Carmilla. Her hand tightened in yours, indicating her obvious discomfort. Clearly she didn't want to be surrounded by the bridesmaids who were so very fascinated in your relationship with Carm. You on the other hand had managed to befriend most of them. Most, being the operative word. If there was anyone who irked you, it was the blonde one. You recalled her name being a Heather but you didn't care enough to check. There was something in her smile that just filled your veins with venom.

You both had just arrived at the local bar and it was exactly how you imagined it to be. It was off the side of the road and it was loud. Upon entering, there were your usual bunch of locals playing pool in the corner. The guys playing darts took a moment to watch the both of you move towards the innermost part of the bar. It was around then when Carmilla did that possessive handholding she seemed to do on reflex. A few patrons eyed the both of you but eventually paid you no mind. Coincidentally, Lynyrd Skynyrd's Sweet Home Alabama was playing in the background and it added to your growing amusement.

But that was much earlier.

That was way before you laid your eyes on Heather. Somehow, you could feel your blood boiling and you didn't understand why she irked you so. Was it that stupid smirk of hers? Or was it because she looked at Carmilla like she was a canapé. That was definitely it. The look in her eye was so predatory you wanted to vomit. Well whatever. She definitely wasn't Carmilla's type anyway. Not by a long shot.

"Are you alright sweetheart?"

Carmilla's voice pull you out of your murderous thoughts and you had to blink twice before registering her question. "Yes, I'm fine. Why do you ask?"

She cleared her throat. "You look like someone just stole your hot cocoa. That's usually... bad."

"It's nothing Carm."

"Cupcake." She warned.

"What?"

Carmilla tried to look at your sternly. "I know when you're lying. Give me some credit for having had known you for twenty years. I'm not your best friend for nothing. Plus, you made it explicitly clear that we shouldn't have secrets." She said in a rather sincere time before she recoiled from her own words. Then she looked cross. "Not that I care for your theatrics. It just bothers me a little."

You tried to stay mad. Not at Carm but mad in general. You wanted to keep seething but when she was pouting and making a face, it was impossible to stay angry. Finally, you gave in and managed a small smile. Carm eased up at the sight of you. "It's nothing to worry about. Honest."

"Okay..."
"Carm, seriously. Have a little faith in me."

She sighed. "Always. But something's not right with you."

Your glanced briefly at the bridesmaid called Heather and observed the flutter of her fake eyelashes as well as the manufactured shine of her lips. The blondness of her hair also seemed rather unnatural. Then you looked back at Carm and she was still eyeing you suspiciously. "Look, let's just have fun okay?"

Carmilla shrugged. "In that case, care to have a shot to loosen you up? You're kind of tightly wound right now."

"Please."

After gesturing to SJ that you were going to swing by the bar first, Carm dragged you for some much needed liquid courage. She immediately ordered two shots of tequila without batting an eyelash and the lumberjack bartender poured in two shots without fanfare. It was something you liked. After all, there was a fifty-fifty chance that small towns like these were of the conservative variety. Luckily, this town was the kind that didn't really give a crap. He passed on a small plate of salt with lemon slices. Without further ado, you and Carm clinked your glasses, licked your salted palms, and allowed the nice slick warmth of the Tequila run down your throats. Then you both sucked on the lemon at the same time and sighed immediately after.

"Whoo... I needed that." You groaned.

Carmilla raised an eyebrow at you. "Shall we join the peanut gallery?" She added carefully.

"Yeah, I'm okay now."

"If you say so."

Instead of taking your hand, Carmilla had placed her hand around your waist instead. She steered you towards the table and you both were greeted by the eager bride and her bridesmaids. There were only seven of them in total, the bride included. There was Sarah Jane of course, her maid of honor, and her five bridesmaids. Her right hand lady was a petite girl of Asian features, her name was Natalie. Then there was Heather, the annoying blonde. The brunette was Jamie, the sandy brown one was Sandra, the brunette with deer highlights in her hair was Amy, and the one with the better blonde hair was Sam.

Not that you expected Carm to remember them all in one go. Her disinterest was usually enough for her to automatically not remember anything.

"Hello ladies, how fares the evening?" You greeted.

Sarah Jane smiled amicably. "We just got started actually. It's ladies night tonight and the bar here usually hosts karaoke sessions if you're down for that."

"Maybe not me but you guys should hear Carm sing." You replied enthusiastically.

Carmilla suddenly looked rather sheepish and settled for a polite smile. "No, you guys should enjoy. Don't mind me."

"You don't understand SJ. Carm almost sounds like Amy Winehouse."

SJ grinned. "When you put it that way, you have to do one song Carmilla."
She sighed in resignation and pulled you closer to her. "No escape then. Thanks a bunch Laura."

You winked at her and watched her fidget. It was only recently that you had started to notice the effect you had on her. Then Sarah Jane offered you guys a spot in their rather large booth and you both sat down consequently. You regretted sitting down first because now, you had to deal with seeing Heather from across Carmilla. God help your soul. Luckily, you were sitting next to Jamie and you got along with her. After all, how couldn't you when you were both avid fans of Doctor Who?

"So you were avoiding our questions early. Be honest with us you guys, tell us details. How did you guys meet anyway?" Sarah Jane asked, there was a fond twinkle in her eye. What made you want to tell her was that she genuinely not wanted to know. Not out of cheap curiosity but of sincere interest.

Carmilla smiled wryly and leaned back. She was sporting another leather look except this time, her jacket was replaced with her vest. She looked incredibly dashing. "At the park, when we were five years old actually..."

You immediately recalled that vivid sunset you watched that day. You didn't remember much from your childhood but the day you met Carmilla was seared into your mind like an imprint. "We were both fascinated by the sunset. So we noticed that we both liked it and we became friends ever since."

"Laura's the friendly one. She literally makes friends with everybody."

You laughed. "True, but Carm was always the rebel. She was a rule breaker and a heartbreaker. She's left quite a bloodbath."

"So you were best friends first?" Natalie clarified.

Carm nodded. "Yeah. To be honest, I never imagine this would happen."

"Why not?" Sarah Jane asked.

Excellent question. Why did this never occur to you both? How did you miss this explosive chemistry you had with Carmilla. There was enough heat between you both that it was almost palpable to other people. How did that fly right under your noses?

You both pondered over the question.

"I... don't know actually. I just never had reason to think of Laura in any other way before. She was always there for me. She was my family when my real one was being a pain in the ass. I never thought of her differently... But when I did— nah, it's nothing."

You looked at Carm and narrowed your eyes at her. "What do you mean? Continue."

Carmilla avoided your gaze but she kept talking. "I only realized now that I've always thought of you differently. I just buried it down so I wouldn't have to feel it."

Your words caught up in your throat and you found yourself speechless. Your chest tightened almost painfully and you wanted nothing more than to pull her close to you. Breathing suddenly became harder to do. Before you could even find your voice, Jamie had interrupted. Something you were incredibly grateful for because the conversation had turned so serious in so short a time, you didn't know what to do.

"It happens. But what's important is that you have each other now." She said.
Carmilla grinned and it was mesmerizing. Every smile of hers was like a rare gem, it was always worth savoring. "True."

"But when did you both start dating though?" Heather's voice cut in and you wanted to snap something in half. Even her voice was annoying.

"A few months ago." You replied rather briefly.

"Oh."

Carmilla eyed you strangely before wrapping her arm around your shoulder. While it did have its intended effect, meaning that you calmed down, it also did more. For one thing, you enjoyed it more than you should have. "It was a surprise to say the least."

"Now that is an understatement." You remarked.

"Definitely an understatement. But what happened is between me and Laura. The important bit is that my best friend is now my girlfriend and somehow... it sounds right saying that." Carmilla said with a soft smile, her hard edges had slipped away sometime earlier. To hear her say that however, it had the strangest effect on you. It made your chest ache in this odd bittersweet sensation mixed in with... fear?

There was a collective sigh from your willing audience as you both wrapped it up. You shamelessly put your head on her shoulder briefly. "You're too sappy."

Carmilla frowned. "Am not."

You only laughed off her protest and immediately looked to SJ. "Enough about us. We never really got it out of Will so what's your story?"

"Oh yeah, you should totally tell it." Heather insisted and you just wanted to slap her from across Carm. Her voice invoked such irritation from you. She was starting to become you latest pet peeve.

Sarah Jane dove right into the story and while you did pay attention, you only gave half of it away. You were sure that it was going to be romantic and thought you tried your hardest to really listen, you couldn't. Right in the corner of your eye, you could see Heather inching closer and closer to Carm. You might have found it acceptable if only she didn't have space on her side of the booth but that was far from the truth. She had plenty of space to sit in, she simply chose to stick to Carm with the adhesiveness of sticky tack.

Her breasts were lightly pressed against Carm's arm and Carm herself didn't seem to notice. Rather, her hand had moved up from your arm and had begun to play with your hair. It was a habit that Carmilla found herself doing ever since you two started this whole fake dating thing. While you found relief in the fact that your best friend didn't seem to care, you still felt your nerves fill up with ice. How brazen could she be? Especially when she was wearing such a low cut shirt accompanied with all those sultry glances, you knew exactly what she was trying to do.

Then SJ joked about something so Heather threw her head up and laughed rather obnoxiously. Carm had no choice but to turn her head at the volume of her voice and she succeeded in finally getting Carm's attention. Luckily, you recognized the look in your best friend's face. She found Heather's shrill laugh to be quite distasteful and went back to focusing on SJ's story.

You'd think the harlot would give up right?

Oh no. She had the tenacity of a cockroach. In fact, she might as well have been a cockroach in
heels. Plus, she just happened to be the lone bisexual of this happy company of bridesmaids. Honestly, you'd think she would have more class than this.

Fine, you got it. Carm was definitely a ten.

You knew that already. You knew that Carmilla was easily one of the most attractive people you knew. She had perfectly angular features and a jawline carved by possibly the gods themselves. She also had these wonderfully expressive eyes that told you more of her character than her words would ever tell you. Then her smile. God, her smile. Her smile was what people would cross the desert for. Plus with her personality, how could you go wrong with her? Carm was fiercely loyal even though she pretends to be otherwise. She could also be very sweet if she wanted to be but more importantly, she was always there for you.

You must've done something good in your past life to deserve someone like her.

And here was Heather, trying to steal Carm away.

Well.

"Hey, do you think you could pass me the salt." She crooned at Carmilla, the sound of her voice made you cringe.

Without much fanfare or apparent interest, Carmilla stretched out to pass the salt to Heather who consequently pretended to add salt to her cold fries. You noticed that whatever food they had earlier had gone cold by the time you and Carm arrived. In plain words, this was a new low for Heather.

"But enough about me. After all, this whole thing is about me. So Carmilla, Laura, what do you two do?"

Carmilla shrugged nonchalantly. "I'm a music producer. Basically I sit in recording studios all day and click random buttons." She replied.

"Don't listen to her. She's downplaying her talents. Carm is in fact very good at her job and can shred on an electric guitar without breaking a nail."

"Please. This girl over here's a news anchor on the eight am news." Carmilla scoffed.

You narrowed your eyes at her. "You and I both know it's not that big of a deal."

"No no, that is a pretty big deal. I've got a friend who works in a news station back in the UK, and she said it was really hard to get a news anchor position right off the bat." Jamie, the brunette who liked Doctor Who, butted in.

Carmilla gave you a triumphant look.

You shoved at her. "Don't gloat."

"I'm not. Now you have people other than me telling you that your achievements matter." She replied.

"And I'm telling them yours. At least tell them you've had offers from three major record labels. Even the top dogs recognize that you clean up and arrange music pretty well." You insisted.

Carmilla sighed before one of those magical smile of hers graced her face. "Fine. We're both good at our jobs. Happy now?"
You nodded enthusiastically. "Very."

"So know anyone famous?" Heather asked and her interjection was most unwelcome.

"Uhh... Yeah. There's this band that's signed with us that recently made it into the charts. Have you heard of Metro Vinyl?" Carmilla replied matter-of-factly.

"You produce Metro Vinyl? I love their songs!" Amy, the other brunette who had been silent thus far, enthused.

Carmilla smiled with a hint of pride. "Yeah?"

"So like, you met Janis Cavanaugh?" Amy continued.

Carm grinned. "Yeah, I guess we're friends." She stated before making eye contact with you. You both laughed at the same time and left everyone to ponder over your inside joke. Your friendship with Janis was very special indeed.

Amy swooned and sighed. "You guys are so lucky... Man, I would give anything to meet her. I mean, I would go gay for her if you catch my drift? Plus her voice. It's like damn."

"Nothing wrong with acknowledging the fact that some women are beautiful." Carm replied with one of her devilish smirks as she glanced right at you.

You playfully hit her on the leg. "Well, we could hook you up with Metro Vinyl. Right Carm?"

"Probably... They're on a break right now but they'll be coming back to the studio soon to add a few more songs for the deluxe edition of their album. Then they intend to record additional songs for an EP next year." Carm stated right at the top of her head.

"Janis would be totally up for it." You stated.

"Yeah, she probably would be up for it." Carm agreed with you.

"Then it's settled. If you ever find yourself in Styria, give us a call." Laura said with finality.

Amy grinned wide. "Wow, you guys are too nice."

"Yeah, you're so kind." Heather added but you knew it was addressed to Carm rather than you both. Was there any legal way to strangle someone?

Finally, you watched her hand casually slide up to Carmilla's thigh.

There was no other way to describe it but somehow, you snapped. You didn't understand why it bothered you so much. Why you were here seething in your seat like the world's greatest injustice had been done to you. With the oddest, most unsettling feeling ever and you wanted it to go away. It also didn't help that Carmilla didn't push her away. Your best friend was no idiot. There was no way she was blind to all of those advances. But clearly she did nothing about it.

Without another word, you excuse yourself from the table and walked to the bar by yourself.

Fine. Whatever. You didn't care if Carm didn't want to do anything about it. You didn't care if she welcomed those oh so very subtle advances. It was none of your business. After all, you weren't really dating anyway. You had no real attachments.

You asked the bartender for another shot of something a little harder then Tequila and he quickly
accommodated you. He must've poured you a shot of bourbon or something because downing it sent an unpleasant burn down your throat. You weren't a fan of whisky, not like Carmilla was. After you were through, the lumberjack bartender asked you if you wanted a chaser or something to put off the shot, but you refused him. Also, you knew you couldn't handle alcohol all the well so it was more then enough to set you on edge.

Then you felt a hand on your shoulder so you quickly turned around. You were now met with Carmilla's expressive dark eyes and you couldn't help but feel your heart quicken. You couldn't help the way you reacted to her, it was instinctual to the most basic level. "Hey."

"Hey."

Suddenly the light dimmed and one of the other bartenders announced that it was ladies karaoke night. There was a lot of cheering but mostly, you heard all the ladies cheering. There was a sudden spotlight on the tiny stage near the front.

"Laura... What the hell is wrong with you tonight?" Carmilla barked amidst the noise.

"Nothing's wrong." You gritted your teeth.

Carmilla's eyebrows furrowed. "Bullshit. I just watched you down a shot of bourbon. Don't tell me nothing's wrong."

"I can do whatever I damn please."

Carmilla looked even more concerned. Her hand slid down to your arm and she held you there, her touch was light and gentle. "Laura... Please. Tell me what's wrong."

"Carm, it's just that—"

Before you could say anything else, Heather showed up again accompanied by the maid of honor and your fellow Whovian Jamie. They grabbed Carm by the arms and started to drag her away. The entire scene was quite comical. In fact, you would have laughed if you weren't in such a foul temper.

"Come on, it's karaoke night!" Heather exclaimed.

You ended up swearing aloud and started glaring daggers into Heather's back. However, you couldn't exactly drag Carm back with guns blazing and all. You didn't want to come across as that kind of girlfriend. Even if you were dating Carm, there was no way you would ever actually do that. So instead, you resigned yourself to watching from the distance. Well, that and maybe another shot of Tequila again. Bourbon was nasty stuff, you would never go near it. Not even with a ten-foot pole.

Heather was being excessively touchy with Carm and your best friend in question didn't seem to mind. Finally, the got Carmilla in front of the spotlight and in front of the mic. After looking rather cross, She eventually moved towards the mic and pointed towards the guitar in the corner. "Umm... I know it's karaoke night but I would feel more comfortable playing the guitar. Is that cool?"

Someone from the management gave her the thumbs up before sending someone to help her plug it to the speakers. Once she had the acoustic guitar slung over her shoulder, she tested out the strings. Plucking at them with practiced ease. She noted that one of the strings was slightly off tune so she fixed that. After strumming a few more chords, Carm was satisfied with the sound.

She looked directly at first before looking back down to her guitar.
"Alright folks. If you hate my performance, you can blame that table over there. But before that, let's congratulate one of them. She's getting married to my little brother tomorrow." Carmilla said with effortless charm.

Applause broke out around from the women of the room and there may have been some supportive whistles.

"Alright. Here's Lost Stars... Laura, I know how much you like this song so this one's for you." She stated clearly and with great sincerity.

There it was again, that sharp pang that threatened to collapse your chest if you weren't careful.

The first few notes of the song rang out and when Carmilla started to sing, the whole bar was silent. If people weren't paying attention then, well they were paying attention now. Her voice was all deep and smooth. It evoked all sort of feelings in everyone listening to her right now. Plus with her masterful playing, her rendition of Lost Stars was nothing short of evocative. It was raw, and it was powerful, and it struck a chord in you.

The moment she hit the chorus, everyone was starting to clap altogether now.

"And God, tell us the reason youth is wasted on the young, it's hunting season and this lamb is on the run, searching for meaning. Are we all lost stars, trying to light up the dark."

Yeah, that was your girlfriend up there and despite your anger that had yet to dissipate, you still felt proud of her.

Wait what...? No. That was your best friend up there not your—

"God she looks hot up there. Don't you think?"

You glanced to your right. Lo and behold, it was Heather looking rather pleased with herself. Meanwhile, you crossed your arms. The alcohol was finally getting to you because you were starting to see red. "Of course she is. She's my girlfriend."

Heather kept her smile but it most certainly did not reach her eyes. "But for how long I wonder."

What a bitch, you thought vehemently.

"Look, I don't know what this is about okay. Whatever it is, just leave me out of it and leave her out of it too." You snarled.

"You can play innocent all you like but how long do you think you can keep her?"

"You're lucky I'm not Carm."

"Why?"

"If I were Carm, I would have sent you packing. Unlike her, I'm too nice so don't test my patience Heather."

Carmilla's song had ended by the time you and Heather were some glaring at each other into oblivion. Your best friend ignored the cries for an encore but she was relishing the applause. You knew she secretly like the attention. After all, she spent most of her working days behind the booth instead of being in it. It was nice for her to perform for a change. She found you in the back immediately after you stopped glowering at Heather and raised an eyebrow.
"Is everything okay here?" Carm asked.

Heather batted her eyelashes at Carm and you want to throttle her. You could probably throttle her though, for real. You worked out, plus you knew Krav Maga. In a literal fight, the bitch had no chance.

"Laura and I were just getting along." Heather announced.

Carm looked at you and gave you a look of disbelief. You sighed and immediately grabbed her by the hand. You yanked her down and kissed her briefly, mostly to infuriate certain Individuals, but partly because you simply felt like it. Carm got into the kiss pretty fast but she kept it brief because you had an audience.

"Hey babe, you did great out there." You heard yourself say.

Carmilla grinned at you. "I did huh? Maybe I should give you more private performances."

You licked your lips at her and watched her eyes grow dark. Then you turned back at Heather who was currently turning red. Then your hand moved to the small of Carmilla's back and you held her there. "Anyhow. It was nice chatting with you Heather but we need to be elsewhere. Right now. Give my regards to SJ."

You pulled Carmilla away and dragged her to the restroom. It was empty right now because everyone was watching karaoke night. You weren't quite sure what you were doing either. Your body felt incredibly light and your head didn't feel quite right. Plus, you just felt really hot right now. All you wanted to do was do what you'd been wanting to do for a long time now. You wanted to just take Carm away and just have your way with her.

Amidst your spinning thoughts, when you delved into the very core of them right now, all you wanted was to have crazy hot sex with her.

Was that too much to ask?

"Where are you taking me?"

You didn't answer her until you pulled her into the restroom and locked the door. Carmilla raised an eyebrow at you and before she could say another word, you had pushed her against the nearest wall.

"Woah, easy there. Laura? Are you okay? Because you look really red right now. Did you drink too much—"

You put a finger to her lips and that silenced her. "Just shut up for a sec."

Then you claimed her lips without a care in the world. She responded without a second thought and before you knew it, you both had been kissing each other desperately. This whole evening had been getting you all hot and bothered. But what really set you off was seeing her with that bitch Heather. Somehow, you felt like you should mark Carm for extra measure. When you both broke apart for air, Carmilla stopped you briefly. "Laura, I can tell that you're drunk."

"Just tipsy." you replied as you seized her by the waist to steady her before you kissed her again.

You rolled your hips into hers and heard the sound of her glorious moan. Just the sound of her voice was enough to get you drunk on her. Then you felt her hands cup your face to hold you there as Carm kissed you hard. Maybe it was the heady substance coursing through your veins, and maybe it was your inability to form any intelligible thoughts, but you wanted Carm right now more than
anything you've ever wanted in your life. You tore your mouth from hers only to trail wet open mouthed kisses down her creamy neck, leaving marks as you went by. You heard her gasp the moment you bit down on her pulse and that just only served to arouse you all the more. Your nether regions throb with purpose as you relished in the way mewled against the wall. You felt her grip your hair as you proceeded to button down her red flannel shirt. That very shirt looked too good on her but right now, you wanted to see her out of it.

You kissed her exposed skin and when Carmilla dared to do the same for you, your dominant hand seized her wrist. Carm was always the domineering one, right now, you wanted her at your mercy. You wanted her to be panting and moaning because of you and your touches. You put a knee to her groin as you pinned her wrist to the wall above her. You grabbed the other one too and without her hands, Carm was completely at your mercy. With your free hand, you began to touch her skin ever so lightly in long strokes. Teasing her and coaxing her into submission.

"God Laura…" she said in nothing more than a whisper.

Never in your life had she ever looked this vulnerable. Her soft skin was flushed, her lips were parted, and she was panting hard. You started back up at her neck but your sucked on her as slowly as humanely possible.

"Why don't you ever go this far Carm…?" you breathed against her.

"Because—"

You stopped your ministrations. "Because what?"

Carmilla groaned. "Because it's you. I can't just do that to you."

You grimaced and released her. Carmilla began to button her shirt back up but she kept her heated gaze on you. You knew she wanted to, you could feel it in your bones and in the heat of her skin. But why? Why did she never go further?

"Why? We both want each other so what's the hold up. I've never wanted anyone else this badly in my life."

"Laura, you drank too much. You don't know what you're saying."

"Not that much Carm. Just answer the question, Jesus Christ."

Carmilla looked conflicted but then she sighed. She looked you dead in the eyes and inhaled deeply. "You're not just another conquest for me. I can't just have sex with you and be done with it... You're too good for that. You're Laura. You're my best friend and you deserve more than having a quick fuck in the restroom of a bar. You need more than I can offer you right now."

"Bullshit."

"Laura—"

"You and I both know that's bullshit Carm. Just admit that you're scared. Because I'm scared as hell too... You're not the only one Carm so I'm telling you right now, you won't lose me. I won't run from you. I won't leave you in the morning. When you wake up tomorrow, I'll be there. So please... I need you. More than you can possibly imagine."

Carmilla laughed caustically. "God, you have no idea how much I want you."
"Then stop holding yourself back."

"Carm... We're two grown consenting adults. I'm your best friend yes, but I also like you more than I should. If we're going to be scared, we might as well be scared together. And for the love of god Carm, I have never been so sexually frustrated in my life so help me out here why don't you?"

Carmilla burst into laughter before she cupped your face with her warm hands. She smiled at you and gave you a breathtaking kiss that made your knees all weak. "You think you're sexually frustrated? Oh honey, you have no idea."

"So what do say? Let's get out of here." You whispered softly.

She smiled.

"Okay... You win Laura. You win."

"Race you?"

She shook her head.

"Whatever cupcake."

Then you led her by the hand.

The entire ride back to the manor was nothing short of excruciating and torturous. You were caught between two conflicting emotions and slowly losing a battle you were fighting with yourself. What did the battle entail you ask?

The first being: this is horrible idea, Karnstein.

The second being: God, why is Laura so hot and may I please take off her clothes right this instant.

You just don't do that. It wasn't fair. Normal people don't pull their non-platonic best friends into public restrooms and proceed to kissing the ever living daylights of them. Nor do they start kissing you in a way that would make most people start begging. More importantly, you had never been so turned on in your life. If Laura had taken the time to shove her hands inside your pants, she would know that too. That was precisely why the car ride back was literally the car ride of hell.

By the time you both got dropped off, you really couldn't take it anymore. You both took one good look at each other before you were both kissing each other like hormonal teenagers on prom night. Your hands were everywhere as you kissed her on the manor steps. What brought you back was the sound of the doors slamming shut from within the mansion. You laughed at each other before letting yourselves in. Then Laura pinned you against the main door and she kissed you purposefully.

"What time is it anyway?" You asked in between kisses.

"Midnight? Who cares." She replied quickly.

You stopped her briefly. "But what if my mother drops in on us."
Laura blinked at you once before smiling. "We're technically dating. It's okay Carm."

Then Laura intertwined her hands with yours and led you up the large staircase. You followed after her like a lost lamb, your heart beating faster than your own footsteps. The manor was dark and quiet now. It was silent enough that you could hear your own heart beating. Before you knew it, you had Laura pinned against the nearest wall. Your lips sought hers vehemently and somehow, the air had changed the moment you crossed the threshold. You found yourself being slowly consumed with the sensations of her. The only sound registering were her breathy sighs and moans.

You vaguely recalled your lips grazing that sensitive part of her neck making her bite her lip to stifle a moan. Then you merely yanked her top off. In fact, you couldn't even remember when you got her jacket off but it was apparent that it was somewhere on the floor. Then with another sharp yank, you managed to unhook her bra from behind her. When did your hand even go there. She was rocking against you, her breasts pressed against yours, and her pelvis matching your every movement. Then you felt her tug at your shirt so you let her unbutton down that down. All the while, you were watching her do it. You watched the way her bright hazel eyes grew dark in this tantalizing way.

Laura was a woman on a mission and frankly, so were you.

She tossed your flannel shirt aside as her bra straps fell onto her arms, the cups barely covering her breasts. Her hands were in your hair and you had her pulled against you as humanely close as possible. Then her hands slid down from your hair and raked down your back.

"Off." You heard her whisper in between your heady kisses. Then your bra slipped down. Without a second thought, you tossed that article of clothing away to some corner of the room.

Then your held her face simply to gaze into her eyes and for a moment, the only sound in the room was your collective breathing. There was something in the way she looked at you that shook you at the core. Then you kissed her as fiercely as could before murmuring something against her lips. "Oh Laura... What are we doing?"

Her reply was to pull you towards the bed. She slipped off her bra as she went by and sat on the very edge of the bed. Then she pulled you by your hands and then wrapped her arms around your waist. She started by kissing you from your navel and you inhaled sharply the moment you felt her tongue gently glide across your heated skin. At this point, everything she did made your skin burn. You were increasingly finding it harder to breathe the higher she went and then finally, she tugged you forward and you fell on top of her. In your moment of confusion, Laura flipped you over and straddled your thighs. Her eyes glazed over you before she bent over and sucked at your breasts.

You unleashed a long drawn out moan the moment you felt her tongue draw strange patterns over your engorged nipple. Her other hand was busy massaging the other breasts and this was too much for you. You could feel yourself grow wetter by the second and even keeping a solid train of thought was becoming a challenge. It was easier to just surrender yourself and allow yourself to simply just feel. Then she left your breasts briefly only to pull you into a heated kiss. Your tongues clashed deliciously before Laura's hands were feeling you up and touching you everywhere. Right from your stomach and back up to your breasts.

But then you decided that Laura was moving far too slow for your own liking.

So you caught her by surprise and flipped her over. She yelped when you did and you grinned at her surprise. Then you immediately went for her nipples, already so hard. You rolled your thumb over one of them and flicked it playfully causing Laura to writhe beneath your touch. Then you ran your tongue across her nipple and Laura gasped hard. With your other hand, you had begun to unbutton her jeans. In one smooth maneuver, you zipped it down and Laura helped you yank the damn thing
Then you started to move lower and lower, you began to suck on the skin of her abdomen causing her breathing to grow harsh.

Then your hand immediately rubbed against her panties and you felt how wet she already was through the thin fabric. You grinned and leaned down to her ear. "Oh? What do we have here Hollis?"

You kneaded your palm against her cunt and listened to her sharp cries. "Are you wet already?" You continued as your slowly sucked on the shell of her ear. "Is this because of me?"

You made one long stroke across her damp panties causing her to whimper. Then you continued to move your palm back and forth, feeling her wet cunt. Then you pulled the band of her panties and moved over the skin around her. With the way she squirmed, you knew she wanted you to push your finger right at her clit. You were so close after all. Then without further ado, you slowly peeled her panties off of her. She was so wet, the fabric may as well have been meshed to her skin. You heard her pant in anticipation.

You looked her right in the eye as your threw her panties aside. Her eyes briefly followed the direction of her undergarments before holding your gaze one more. She licked her lips casually, god she was such a sight. You never imagined you would ever see Laura Hollis this way. The sight of her was better than any fantasy you could ever hope to imagine.

"Sweetheart, spread your legs for me."

And she did without much resistance. Despite how you had longed to do this, it wasn't exactly as you imagined it would be. You were expecting something partly romantic but this? This was far from it. You were anything but gentle. You thrusted two fingers inside of her and began to pump them in and out slowly. The sound of her heightened breathing and unbridled moaning made you drunk on her. She was incredibly wet and your thumb was busy stroking her clit then when Laura began to moan wantonly, you almost lost it. Then your free hand began to massage her breasts as she arched her back, meeting your hard thrusts.

Kissed her the skin above her as you continued your torturously slow thrusts. Then finally, you kissed her on her clit before you sucked on it completely. Laura made this magnificent moan only a woman experiencing too much of a good thing could make. Her hand flew to your head and the other was gripping the sheets.

"Oh fuck, Carm that feels so good."

She gasped long and hard. When her breaths became uneven, you knew Laura was getting there. To be honest, you were so aroused right now you couldn't fathom being fucked by Laura. The idea of her fingers inside, pulling your closer and closer to submission. Just thinking about it was making you even more painfully aroused. You hummed at the thought as your breasts and your cunt tingled in delight.

"God Carm, I'm so close. Yes, right there, right there." She cried out. Shifting your body, you began to move faster inside of her. You curled your fingers and sucked on her harder. Her moans grew louder and louder and you could hearing your name resound over and over again in broken syllables. Then you felt her hand wrap around your hair as she tugged hard. She was definitely getting there. You knew it as you fucked her harder and harder.

Then Laura collapsed beneath you. You felt her grow limp and boneless as you made this long drawn out moan. Her jaw grew slack and her lips parted as she arched her back even further. The way she pulled at your hair nearly hurt your scalp by you paid it no mind. You were so lost in the
sensations of her. Then you felt her come on your hand until you slowly stopped. You pulled out your fingers and watched Laura breathing as if she had just run a marathon. Her cheeks were tremendously flushed but she finally released her grip on you. When you lifted your head up, her eyes were closed shut.

Then ever so slowly, she opened her eyes. Her gaze was all hazy and she only gained clarity when she found you. When she finally found herself again, you smirked at her devilishly. You brought your fingers to your lips and licked off each and every digit as slowly as possible. You kept looking at her as you did it and somehow, she only looked more aroused. Finally, Laura surged forward and pulled you towards her. She kissed you hard and you allowed her to win over you. It was amazing because you felt like you were so close to coming already and she hadn't touched you all that much.

Her hands slid down from your breasts. Her fingers were dancing on your skin and finally, she neared the part you ached the most. You needed her. You needed her badly. She slid her hand along your thigh.

"Dammit Laura, stop teasing. I want you inside me, right now."

You heard her snicker. "You're bossy."

Before you could make a retort, she stroked your cunt. You groaned aloud because at this point, you were so sensitive. You felt her breathe graze your ear before she whispered in this low sultry voice. "I'm not the only one who's frustrated, I see."

No doubt she could feel you all wet and throbbing. She stroked your clit in tiny circles and you threw your head back onto the bed. Your body felt so hot right now and you wanted nothing more than for Laura to plunge her fingers inside of you and to fuck you five ways from Sunday. "Laura, please." You begged.

Without another word, she plunged her fingers long and deep. You nearly groaned at the feeling and you suddenly gripped the closet pillow. Oh god, that felt too good. Hell, it felt amazing. You could feel everything pulsing throughout your whole body. True enough, she didn't tease you. You also didn't last long because you could already feel your orgasm nearing you.

"More" you whimpered. You no longer had control over your own words. Hell, you had no idea about what you've been saying anymore. She rammed her fingers into your aching center before she stole your lips for a hungry devouring kiss. You mewed into her mouth as Laura brought you closer and closer to the edge. Then your orgasm came over you in a wild heady rush. You bit your lip hard and drew blood, trying not to scream. Instead, you were a heated mess of moans and noises. Laura was relentless as she continued to keep pumping her fingers in and out, riding out your orgasm. You climbed to insurmountable heights and you knew with absolute certainty that nothing else on this earth could come so close. Nothing else would feel this good.

Then finally, all you could do was breathe harshly. Laura's fingers were still inside you as she breathed as hard as you did. Then slowly, she brought her fingers back out and sighed against you. Your naked bodies were right next to each other and for a moment, no words were spoken. Laura then leaned towards you and kissed your shoulder. Sweat beaded the side of your face and when you glanced at her, it appeared that she was in a similar state.

"Holy shit." Laura laughed.

You laughed as well. "No kidding."

You leaned on your side and propped up your head with your palm. Your free hand was slowly
moving up and down her arm casually. "All these years. Who would have thought we'd have such fantastic mind blowing sex. Talk about a waste." You continued.

"Would you laugh if I said it was literally the best sex I ever had?"

You tried not but you ended up snickering.

"Hey." She took offense.

You smiled at her warmly. "Calm down cupcake. I'm laughing because you're too cute. You're not alone in this regard... That was amazing. I've never had sex like that."

Laura stared at your with her honest eyes and she had this most adorable expression on her face. Clearly she had the whole postcoital glow most novels wrote about. She kissed you once more and you indulged her for a while. Then she rested her forehead. "You and I... we're good together."

"How improbable."

"I know... but I'd like to believe that we work somehow." She replied.

Shaking your head, you clung onto her. As you held her close to you, you pulled the sheets over your naked bodies and kissed her on the forehead. "I dunno about you but I could use some shuteye. Apparently, good sex just drains you, you know?"

Laura smiled.

"I know the feeling."

Then she wrapped her arms around your waist. Soon after, you both fell into a blissful sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Sidenote: my Christmas break is coming up. I expect to have a lot more free time on my hands and I hope I get to update regularly again.
Dear Readers,

I hate that I am gracing your notifications with this letter and not a with a new chapter. You've all been so patient and so very accommodating that the longer I let this story sit, the more I feel like I'm letting you all down. So at least, I think I owe you guys an explanation on what's been going on with me, why it's affecting this story, and I will also talk about the future of this story. So buckle up guys, I will be completely honest.

Carmilla as a show, and Hollstein of course, mean a lot to me. Carmilla was there when I was questioning, it was there when I came out, and when it ended it felt like the end of an era. So maybe the Carmilla ending in its entirety had some part to play but to begin with my biggest reason as to why I stopped writing this story and writing altogether, I was burned out. Very burned out. I kept writing and writing and nothing worked. I honestly have no idea how to continue from where I last ended. I have no clue where to go from there and I let it sit for so long because of it. Another reason was that life was way too overwhelming. I got busier and for personal reasons, the entirety of 2017 was not good for me. It was a very unhealthy year from me and writing this story just happened to coincide with this big relationship thing that happened last year. Suffice to say, it was not a very good thing. It was, in fact, a very bad thing. Romance was kind of ruined for me last year. Yeaaaaaah.... So I can't help but associate writing this story with what happened, it sucks immensely because I love this story. I wrote it because I love Fake Dating AU's but felt that not a lot of people really pushed the trope to its full potential, I wanted to try and explore what you could do within that trope. So in the very least, I don't hate the fic. In fact, it's something close to my heart. Finally, to answer the biggest question: If I intend to continue? Honest answer is that I want to continue, I really want to. Realistically, I'm not sure if I will ever feel like continuing. What I want to happen is very different from what I'm willing to do, and I'm not sure if I'm still willing.

I really hate leaving this on an open hiatus. I of all people hate reading fics that will never finish, that's a feeling I sympathize with. I also hate to disappoint all of you. I will definitely write more in the future, writing is what I love to do, just not this one. Until I'm 120% sure I'm not gonna try and sit down to finish it, it will remain in an open hiatus. If I decide that I'm done with it forever, I will write a whole chapter summary of what happens next. It'll just be a general narration of events, not a proper chapter.

So that's where we're at right now. Thanks for reading this far. I hope to come back for this little story one day.

Sincerely, Moira

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